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# Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being: What Works Toolkit

## Circle Solutions

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Public Health Wales | Date of Review: 2021

This summary is part of a series produced for the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being What Works Toolkit. They are intended to help schools make informed decisions when choosing interventions to improve and promote mental well-being. The interventions reviewed are not endorsed by Welsh Government or Public Health Wales.

Public Health Wales, on behalf of Welsh Government, have examined the best available evidence for interventions to find out if they are effective in improving mental and or emotional well-being outcomes in learners or staff, when delivered in a school setting.

Further information about the methodology and how using evidence can support decision-making is presented as supplementary information.

### Circle Solutions

The aim is to support children and young people to develop skills which support well-being through building a sense of belonging and connectedness and establishing understanding and acceptance of others. These are seen as important steps to build resilience and increase emotional well-being.

It includes a wide range of paired, small group and circle activities, with many presented as games.

Circle Solutions was developed by a Psychologist called Sue Roffey.

Further information about the programme is available through Growing Great Schools™

<https://www.growinggreatschoolsworldwide.com/csn/circle-principles/>

## Evidence rating:

Public Health Wales reviewed the best available evidence of effectiveness for this intervention in Autumn 2021. An expert panel concluded that there is **no research evidence on the effectiveness of Circle Solutions**.

Further information about how consensus on this evidence rating was reached is available within supplementary information.

## Implications for practice:

The teaching and learning strategies involved in delivering Circle Solutions, including the 'circle time' concept, are already used in many schools across Wales, at no cost.

There is no published evidence that enabled the expert panel to reach a conclusion on whether this intervention achieves the outcomes intended. It was not possible to verify the extent to which the underpinning theories claimed by developers are applied appropriately in delivering the intervention. If already using this intervention, schools should think about how they might assess the impacts for participants and the wider school community.

## Aspect(s) of well-being it intends to support:

Circle solutions facilitates understanding of emotions and their triggers. It intends to support the development of self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness and relationship management, which are all important to protecting and promoting individual mental well-being.

[Find out more about mental well-being and the things that influence it here.](#)<sup>1</sup>

## Mechanism of action:

The developer states that Circle Solutions is based on; examining relationships within the school and in the local community, creating a school environment where learners understand each other's needs and studying the strengths that enable learners and schools to thrive. By focussing on how the social environment, thoughts, feelings and actions influence each other, the intervention aims to help learners to develop emotional intelligence.

The approach is based on the principles of ASPIRE (Agency, Safety and Choice, Positivity, Inclusion, Respect and Equity). The principles act as a guide for delivery and the developers believe they interact to promote optimal relationships with colleagues and learners.

<sup>1</sup> <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/promoting-individual-and-community-wellbeing/>

## Intended recipients:



**Universal** (for everyone)

The intervention is suitable for all children and young people. It is usually delivered to a whole class/group of learners.

## Age range: 4-16 years



**Student**

## Resource requirement:



**Delivered by the school**

- Sessions delivered in term/curriculum time.  
15-20 minutes for younger learners and 30-40 minutes for older learners.
- Circle Solutions is not a set programme. The content is flexible and can be delivered in a way that will be most useful for the needs and development of the group.
- To deliver schools must access online individual facilitator training from a licensed provider.
- Introductory training course and 'train the trainer' course costs £520 per person. Discounted to £750 for 2 people or £1000 for 3 people who are from the same school.
- Storybooks and activity cards for use during intervention delivery can be purchased from the developers for £10.00-£20.00 per item. <sup>2</sup>

## Language:

Training materials are only provided in English and the provider has not previously allowed resources to be translated into Welsh.

<sup>2</sup> All estimate costs dated 2021

# Supplementary Information

In March 2021 Welsh Government published the **‘Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Mental and Emotional Well-being’**, with the objective of supporting schools to meet the mental health and well-being needs of their students and staff (Education Wales, 2021). One of the ten key requirements and actions documented in this framework was that schools should ensure they only implemented well-being interventions with a ‘sound or innovative and developing evidence base’. The What Works Toolkit aims to provide a summary of the evidence of effectiveness to help schools make informed decisions when choosing interventions.

## Methodology

- Information was gathered about the intervention from documentary sources or through direct contact with the provider/developer.
- A review of the best available evidence found in the published literature was undertaken.
- A multidisciplinary panel of experts from health, academia and education agreed on the evidence of effectiveness and an evidence rating statement to support it.
- To reach consensus on an evidence rating, the outcomes considered are those that the intervention intends to improve. Mental and emotional well-being outcomes can include self-confidence or self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and relationship skills, as well as more clinical outcomes such as anxiety. The evidence ratings used in the review were:

Rating	Evidence
++	There is good evidence from reliable studies that this intervention is likely to have a positive effect on health and well-being.
+	There is some evidence from studies that this intervention is likely to have a positive effect on health and well-being but this is not conclusive.
+/-	There is some evidence from studies that this intervention may have a positive effect on health and well-being but further research is needed.
0	There is no research evidence on the effectiveness of this intervention or, what is available has significant methodological weaknesses preventing conclusions on effectiveness to be drawn.
-/+	There is some evidence from studies that this intervention may be ineffective in improving health and well-being outcomes but further research is needed.
-	There is some evidence from studies that this intervention is likely to be ineffective at improving health and well-being outcomes but this is not conclusive.
--	There is good evidence from reliable studies that this intervention is likely to be ineffective at improving health and well-being outcomes.

- A full technical report with detailed information on the methods, findings, conclusions and recommendations is available upon request. Please email: [hi-programme.support@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:hi-programme.support@wales.nhs.uk)

## Understanding mental health and well-being

Public Health Wales has developed a [Conceptual Framework for Mental Well-being](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/promoting-individual-and-community-wellbeing/)<sup>3</sup>. This demonstrates the relationship between mental well-being and other health determinants as well as describing areas for action to promote and protect well-being. The framework presents the building blocks of individual mental well-being, how we think; how we understand our feelings and those of others; how we form relationships; how we understand and make sense of life experiences and how we see our place in the world.

It also recognises the importance of community mental well-being which arises from the connections, networks, and sense of belonging within a community; the shared identity and experience that comes from place, and from how power is experienced and shared.

The [‘Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being’](https://gov.wales/framework-embedding-whole-school-approach-emotional-and-mental-wellbeing)<sup>4</sup> covers a pathway from prevention and promotion of good mental well-being to treatment of mental ill health. It is important that when considering interventions schools can understand where on the pathway an intervention is trying to act, and what aspects of mental well-being an intervention aims to improve.

## Understanding and using evidence

There are many different types of evidence. It can come from formal research and evaluation, expert opinion, or lay knowledge and experience.

Certain types of research are more helpful than others in understanding whether an intervention or programme actually makes a difference. Usually, to answer that question fully, you need to compare those pupils, classes or schools who received a programme with those that did not. Other forms of evidence are really important to understand whether people found the programme helpful; whether it was easy to deliver or use.

The number of studies which have been carried out and the number of participants involved in a study are also important. We would have more confidence in a study on hundreds of people than one on 20 or 30 for example. The quality of the research, and how well it was carried out, are also important. We can be much more confident that the findings of a good quality study are true rather than by chance than we can poor quality studies.

Using evidence to understand whether an activity is achieving the aims it set out to helps to make the best use of available resources. Basing decisions on published evidence supports credibility and gives schools confidence in the approaches taken.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/promoting-individual-and-community-wellbeing/>

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