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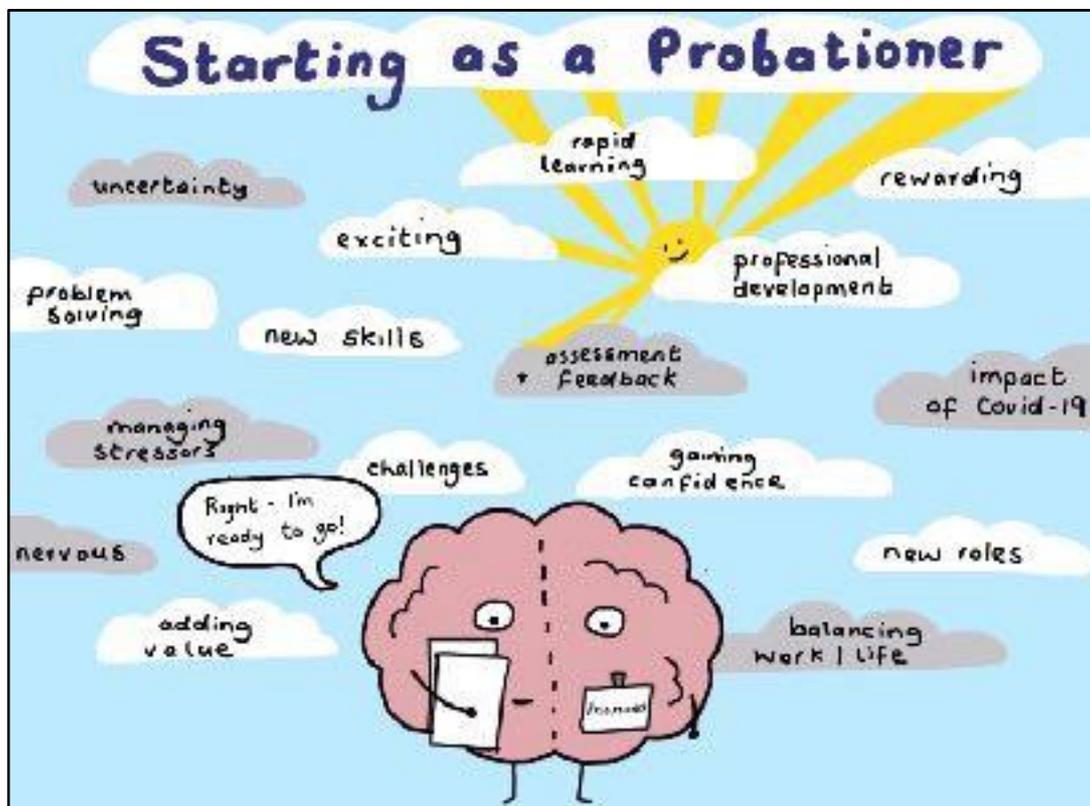
# PREPARING FOR YOUR PROBATION

DR EMMA HEPBURN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

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## BECOMING A PROBATIONER IN SCOTLAND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Becoming a probationer teacher at any time requires learning new skills, meeting new people, self-reflection, adaptation, development and accepting feedback. This is an opportunity for learning, collaboration, making connections and developing as a professional. You may be looking forward and feeling excited about your new role although it is normal to feel nervous and overwhelmed by information as you commence in a new situation. You may also experience a range of other feelings, both positive and negative, at different times including anxiety, stress, self-doubt and feeling deskilled as the demands of your role increase.

There are additional specific challenges at the current time due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on schools and the teaching profession. As this is an ever-evolving situation, there is greater uncertainty. As a result, plans can change quickly and evolve in response to the changing situation. This can feel unsettling and require greater flexibility and cognitive resources to manage. You will have had less opportunities for learning than usual to prepare you for your role as a probationer teacher, which may cause some concerns or anxiety and you may feel unprepared. You have had to manage and deal with the premature and unexpected ending of your Initial Teacher Education (ITE) experience. Many people are also dealing with additional stress in their own personal life both related to COVID-19 and the impact of this on our lives in general. Your role as a teacher and the environment and system you will be working in may look different to the role you had anticipated and you may not know what to expect. You may also be moving to a new area and having to manage and adjust to this change, which is more difficult due to the impact of COVID-19.

This is a new and evolving situation for everyone, which can bring people together to work towards a shared aim to manage the changes and adaptations. These changes, as result of COVID-19, can create greater stress and can require greater flexibility, energy, adaptability and cognitive resources to manage. This document aims to support you as you start your role as a probationary teacher during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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## VALUES AND REASONS FOR BECOMING A TEACHER

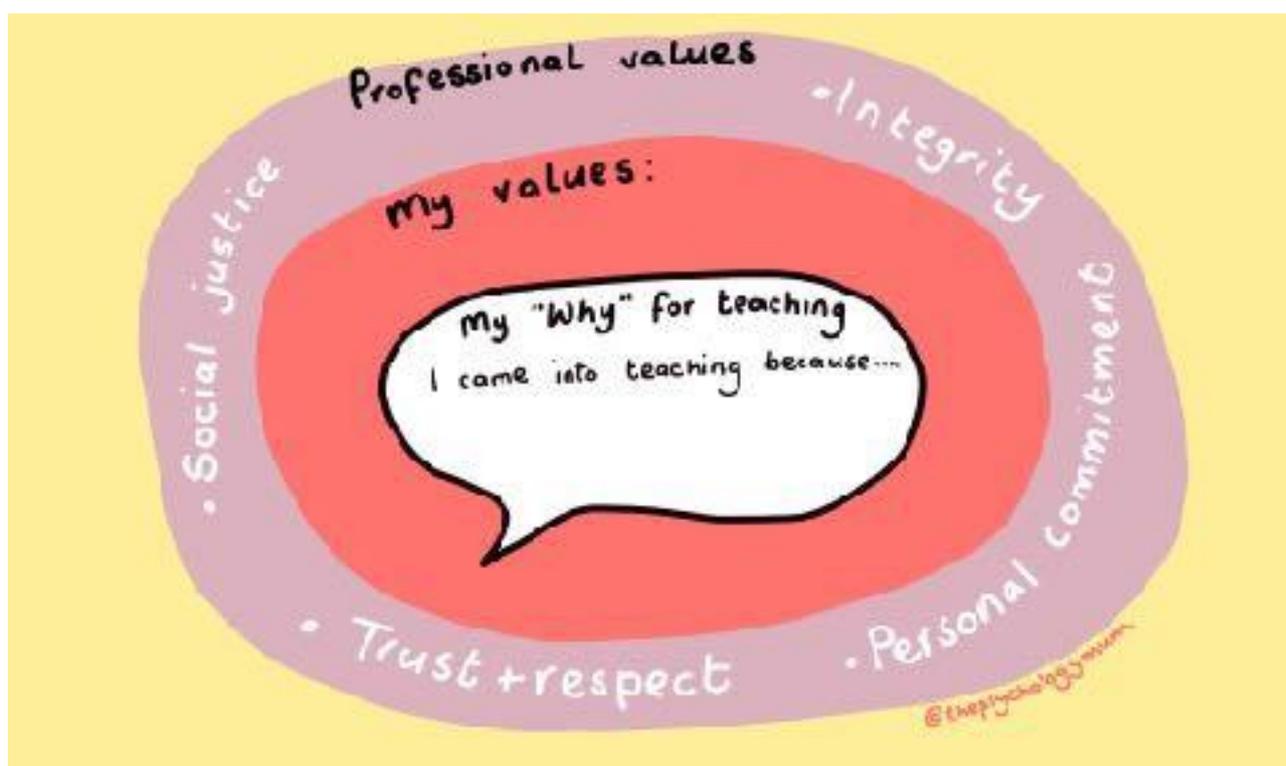
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There are many important reasons that people become teachers. However, in the day-to-day business of everyday life, we often forget the valuable reasons why we are doing what we do. Reminding yourself and holding in mind your “why” for teaching can help ensure this remains at the core of your work. It can help serve as a reminder of your value and purpose in your role. Moreover, it can help you identify and remember achievements and work that demonstrates your “why” and identify future plans that can help you further achieve your “why”. Overall, holding onto your “why” for teaching and working to achieve this can improve overall job satisfaction, help you work towards a joint purpose with your team and can help you sustain motivation through challenging times.

Your values are what is important to you. Being aware of your values and behaving in line with them has been shown to have a positive impact on wellbeing. Your values can also help you through difficult times by connecting with what is meaningful to you and helping you make decisions that are in line with your values. Values can be anything that is important to you. Common values that people identify are often around contribution to society, caring and connection with activities and people that are important to them. However, your values are anything that is meaningful to you and can include things such as adventure, learning, health, family, the environment etc. Once you have identified your values you can use this in your teaching career and life to build activities and take actions that are consistent with these values.

The values of teaching are also important to hold in mind to enable you to reflect on and develop your practice in line with these. Teacher professionalism and teacher identity are underpinned by professional values, which are at the heart of the GTCS Professional Standards. These professional values include: social justice; integrity; trust and respect; and personal commitment. These are reflected across all of the professional standards and are fundamental to all registered teachers regardless of post.

**This diagram aims to help you identify your reason for teaching and your personal values:**



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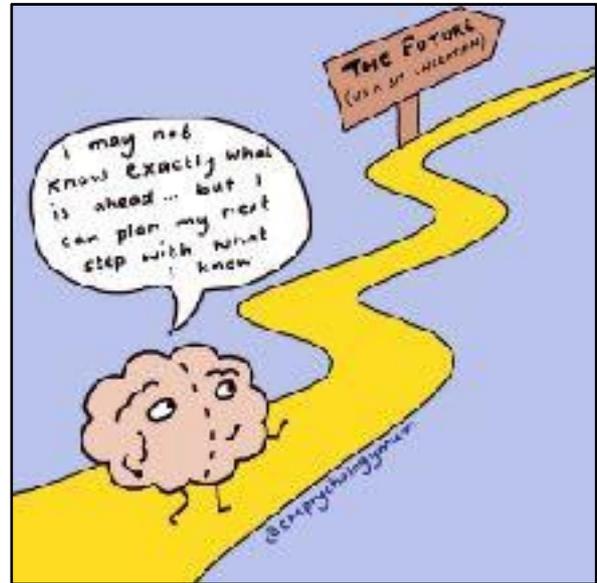
# CHANGING LANDSCAPES AND CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

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## The Impact of Uncertainty

At the current time as a country we are responding to a changing situation, and personal and workplace plans can change week to week depending on progress made managing the virus, the emerging evidence and advice and guidelines. This can create higher levels of uncertainty and can make it difficult to know what to expect.

As humans, we like a degree of certainty. Our brains are perpetually anticipating and predicting what will happen next, in both the short and longer term, so that we can feel prepared and know what to expect. We are also guided by these expectations to make plans which we anticipate will work best in the scenarios that we predict. Uncertainty can create anxiety, as we are left unsure about what to expect and how to best prepare for it.



## Uncertainty and Expectations

The uncertainty at the current time means it might be difficult to know what to expect both of yourself and the situation you will be in as a probationer teacher from August 2020. This uncertainty can be unsettling, as it is difficult to envisage and anticipate what will happen next and therefore it can be difficult to plan for this situation, which can leave us feeling unprepared.

Uncertainty can also lead us to fill the gaps in our knowledge with incorrect predictions or information. This may create unrealistic expectations, which can create pressure when these expectations aren't met. Realistic expectations result in more positive outcomes for individuals across a range of settings. If we are realistic about what we can expect, we are less likely to feel disappointed or stressed by the emerging scenario or find changes difficult to respond to. When our expectations are not met, we are more likely to experience more difficult emotions and increased levels of stress. At the current time, we are all responding to an evolving and uncertain situation and the future path for everybody has a degree of uncertainty. The term "the new normal" is used frequently. Yet, at this point, we are still in a process of understanding what this will mean and much of this will only become clear as the situation evolves, with "the new normal" changing again as and when we move towards less social distancing. Creating fixed and/or unrealistic expectations of what to expect can mean that we are not prepared to respond flexibly, and problem solve in response to an evolving situation, as is required at the current time.

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## Planning and preparing for Uncertainty

When it is unclear what we can expect it is important to hold this uncertainty in mind when planning and preparing. Uncertain expectations require flexibility so you can adapt and change plans in response to the changing situation. While we can gather the facts as much as possible so that we can plan for what we know, we must also prepare ourselves that the situation may change and we may need to adapt our plans and our expectations in line with this. However, tolerating uncertainty can be difficult and may feel uncomfortable.

It can be helpful to define what the known factors are and what you can anticipate and plan for. It is also helpful to define what is in your control that you can prepare for and focus on the practical next steps you can take instead of looking too far ahead into an unpredictable future. This may include informing yourself about what is expected of you as a probationer and the guidelines or school plans around the current situation. You may also want to be clear about the school system structures, support structures and where you can access information when required. You may find it helpful to contact your school for further information.

However, not all aspects can be planned for or anticipated due to the shifting landscape. It is therefore important to hold uncertainty in your expectations and know that there may be changes and you may need to be flexible and shift your plans in response. Having this realistic expectation means you will be more able to shift your plans and expectations in response to the evolving situation and identify and problem solve accordingly. Being tied to outdated or unrealistic expectations can create a barrier for doing this and reduce flexibility when you need to respond to changes. Expecting changes and being prepared for uncertainty helps us plan for what we can and prepare ourselves to be flexible and problem solve when we can't. Preparing yourself by thinking how you can respond to new and changing situations can be helpful in itself.

## Responding to Uncertainty

We are all dealing with greater levels of uncertainty right now and this can lead to us asking questions in an attempt to create certainty. This can be helpful as it can help us fill our own gaps in knowledge with information and work out what nobody knows. However, sometimes there may be no answer to the question, as this knowledge doesn't exist. You may also receive questions from other people who are experiencing uncertainty and you may not have the answers to these questions. Sometimes this may be because you don't know the answer or because the answers doesn't exist, or a decision hasn't been reached yet. This is more likely to happen due to the nature of the current situation. This can feel difficult because we like to respond to questions with answers and certainty. However, it is important to acknowledge that you don't know and to not feel the need to fill gaps when you don't have the information to answer these questions. It can be helpful to think about how to respond to these questions with uncertain answers, or how you can seek support to manage these when they do occur

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# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF DURING YOUR PROBATIONARY YEAR

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Looking after yourself as probationer teacher is imperative to enable you to carry out your role well. In addition, the nature of the current situation may create more stress for you both in your personal and professional life. However, there is also likely to be greater levels of stress in the system and experienced by other people, including staff and parents, which may impact on you. Looking after yourself in this situation becomes even more important. You can find additional information on looking after your mental health in the document [Looking after your mental wellbeing during the school holidays \(and beyond\) during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) on the [Health and Wellbeing Hub](#).

## Recognising how you are feeling

Emotions are an integral part of our brain and body's functioning. The evidence suggests that if we acknowledge and understand our emotions then we are more able to deal with stressors and this is beneficial for our mental and physical health. Ignoring, pushing away or invalidating our emotions actually increases physiological stress. Our emotions can also act as indicators of our needs - a bit like an emotional barometer that indicates what we need to do to manage pressure. There are a range of emotions you will have through your journey as a probationer, and the current situation around the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to create further stressors and emotions.

Everybody's brain, body and experiences are different and therefore everybody's emotional response are unique to them. There is no specific way you should feel, and sometimes you can feel a range of conflicting emotions at the same time. Taking time to reflect and notice how you feel and thinking how to best respond to your emotions can be a helpful part of looking after yourself during your probationary year.

Taking time to regularly check in with yourself and notice how you are feeling can help with this. You can do this both on a daily basis and when you feel strong emotions.

**These questions are aimed to help you notice how you are feeling and think about how to respond to this:**

How am I feeling?

What is impacting on how I am feeling?

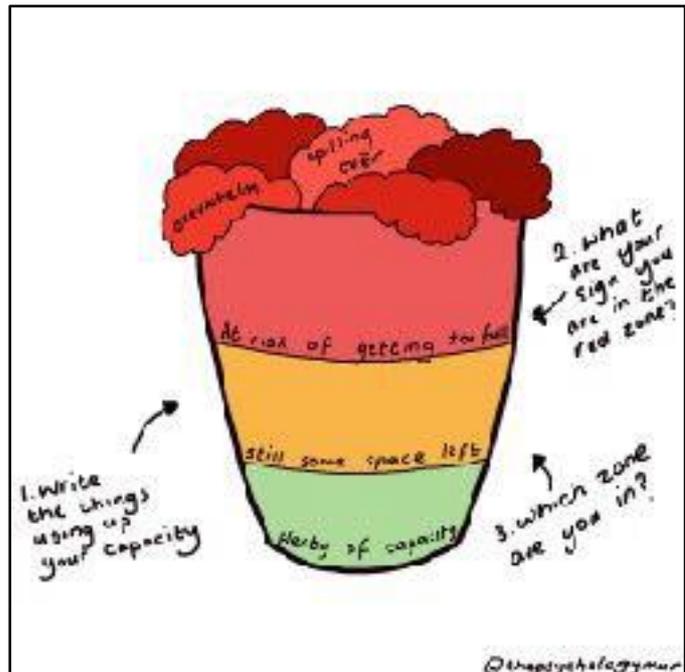
What does this feeling tell me about my needs?

How can I respond helpfully to the feeling?

## Managing your capacity and overwhelm

We all have limited emotional capacity and at times of uncertainty and higher background stress our capacity can be used up quickly, so you reach the point of “overwhelm” before you notice it. The capacity cup (right) can be used to recognise how full your capacity currently is, and what the signs are that you are in the amber or red zone and need to take action before your cup overflows. Sometimes stressors can gradually build so that we reach the point of overwhelm without noticing it. It is important to manage your stress levels, as long-term stress can be detrimental to both your mental and physical health, your day-to-day functioning and job performance.

It can be helpful to use the cup to monitor your capacity so that you can think about how to manage stress proactively. Knowing the signs of the red zone can help you notice when this is happening. If you notice you are reaching the top, then it is important to take action to manage your capacity. You can do this in a number of ways:



1. Try to work out what is contributing to your feelings of overwhelm - is there anything you can cut out or that can wait until another time? Talking through this with someone else can often be helpful to make sense of what's going on and think of ways forward.
2. Try to problem solve or find solutions to the things in your cup that are causing stress. You may want to use your support network to help you do this. Using your support network may be particularly helpful if you have already reached the point of overwhelm. Try to build trusting relationships in school so you can talk safely and honestly. When you are feeling overwhelmed it can be difficult to think clearly or plan and problem solve solutions. Using somebody else's brain space to help you think through this can help you come up with different solutions to those you might think of yourself.
3. If you don't have very much capacity left, try not to take on too much extra, as this will put you at danger of overflowing. In work situations, particularly at an early career stage, this may be difficult as you want to demonstrate your skills and/or gain as much experience as possible. You might be worried about how you are progressing in your practice and how other people generally perceive you. If this is the case, discuss how to manage it with your supporter. Also, try to prioritise key things that help manage and reduce how much is in your cup, including prioritising rest and sleep.
4. Be kind to yourself and try to find ways to relax that will help you reduce stress. If you notice your cup spilling over, breathing exercises can be a quick way to manage your capacity in the here and now. Longer term it is important to prioritise activities and strategies that help you cope, feel good, rest and recuperate.

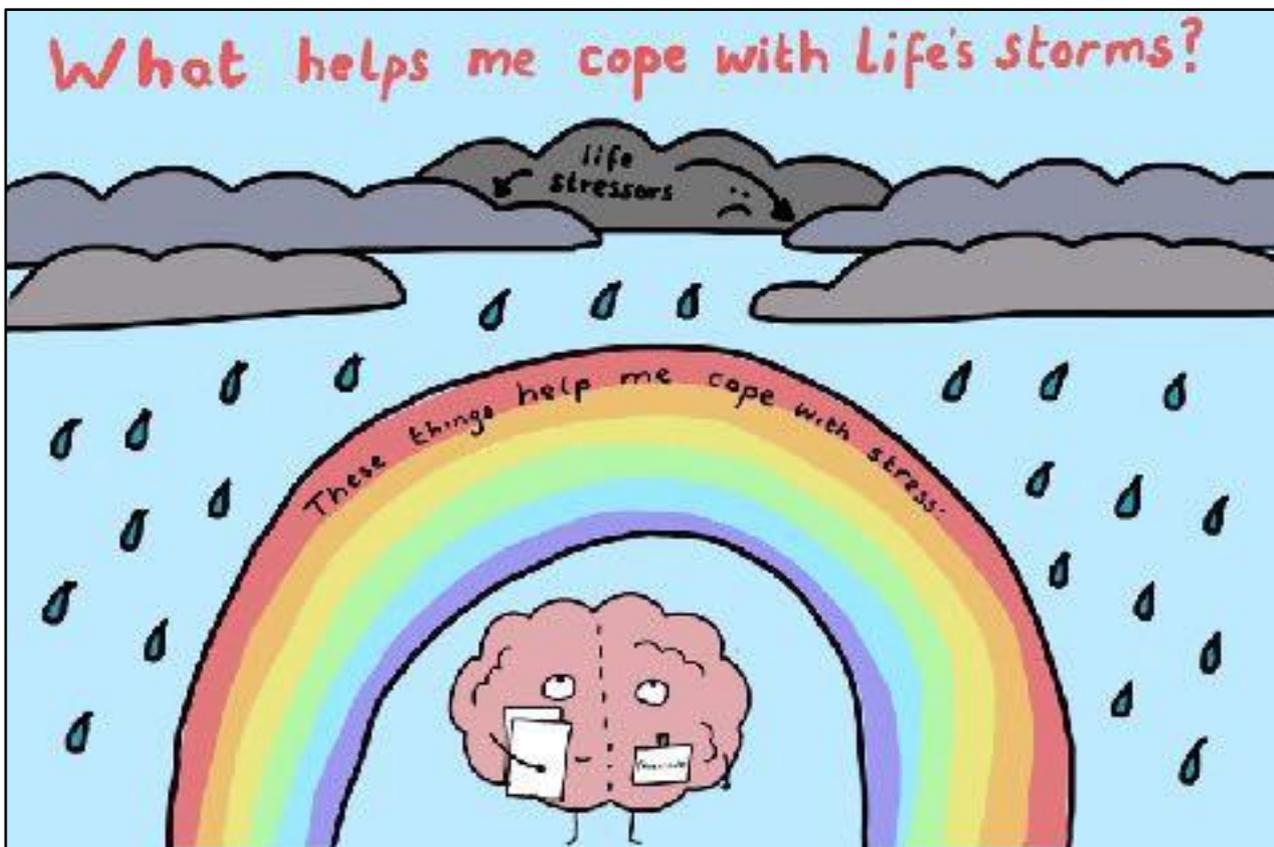
## Using your coping skills effectively

Stress is an inevitable part of life. What you find stressful will be individual to you and dependent on your experiences, beliefs and your own circumstances. An important part of professional development is learning skills to manage stress. Due to the impact of COVID-19, there is greater potential for stress in both the general environment and in work, both at a system and individual level. Due to this, it is even more important to recognise and find ways to manage stress.

We all have coping strategies that we use to manage stress. This might include meeting friends, talking things through, exercise, or activities/ hobbies we enjoy. However, the impact of COVID-19 may make it more difficult to access or use these coping strategies. In this situation, it can be helpful to think about the benefits you gained from these coping strategies and adapt your coping strategies or find new ways so you can continue to gain these benefits. For example, if you enjoy meeting friends after work, you could find ways to continue this virtually.

Many of the activities that help us relax and cope can also tip over into becoming unhelpful in particular circumstances. This may be more likely to happen during the current situation, as there is greater stress, less distraction and it is a new situation, which we are learning to manage the best we can. Some examples of coping strategies, which can become unhelpful include social media use, caffeine, alcohol and even video games or watching TV. Try to notice if you are using your normal coping/relaxation strategies more than usual and how they make you feel. Think about whether they are having an overall positive or negative impact on your life and how you feel, and whether they have tipped over into becoming unhelpful for you.

**This exercise aims to help you recognise your life stressors and identify your helpful coping strategies:**



## Noticing how you speak to yourself

We nearly all have inner dialogues going on in our minds. It's important to be aware of this inner dialogue and notice when it becomes harsh, unfair and critical to yourself. When we are critical and nasty to ourselves, our brain views this as threat and it can create unpleasant emotional and physical sensations, increasing our stress levels and filling our capacity cup.

Conversely, speaking to ourselves with compassion triggers other body systems, which help us relax and reduce our stress and increase our capacity. This is not about being unrealistically positive to yourself, it's about being compassionate and understanding to yourself, even when things don't go as planned.

However, this isn't always easy as our judgements about ourselves are difficult to separate from our subjective experience and our emotional reactions. We often find it hard to view our experiences with the same objectivity we apply to other people. In addition, if these patterns of thoughts have been present for a long time, then it can be hard and effortful to shift away and develop other ways of speaking to yourself. However, this skill is worth taking the time to develop because of the positive impact it can have on your health and emotional wellbeing short and long term.

**This exercise aims to help you notice your inner dialogue and develop a kinder and fairer inner dialogue:**



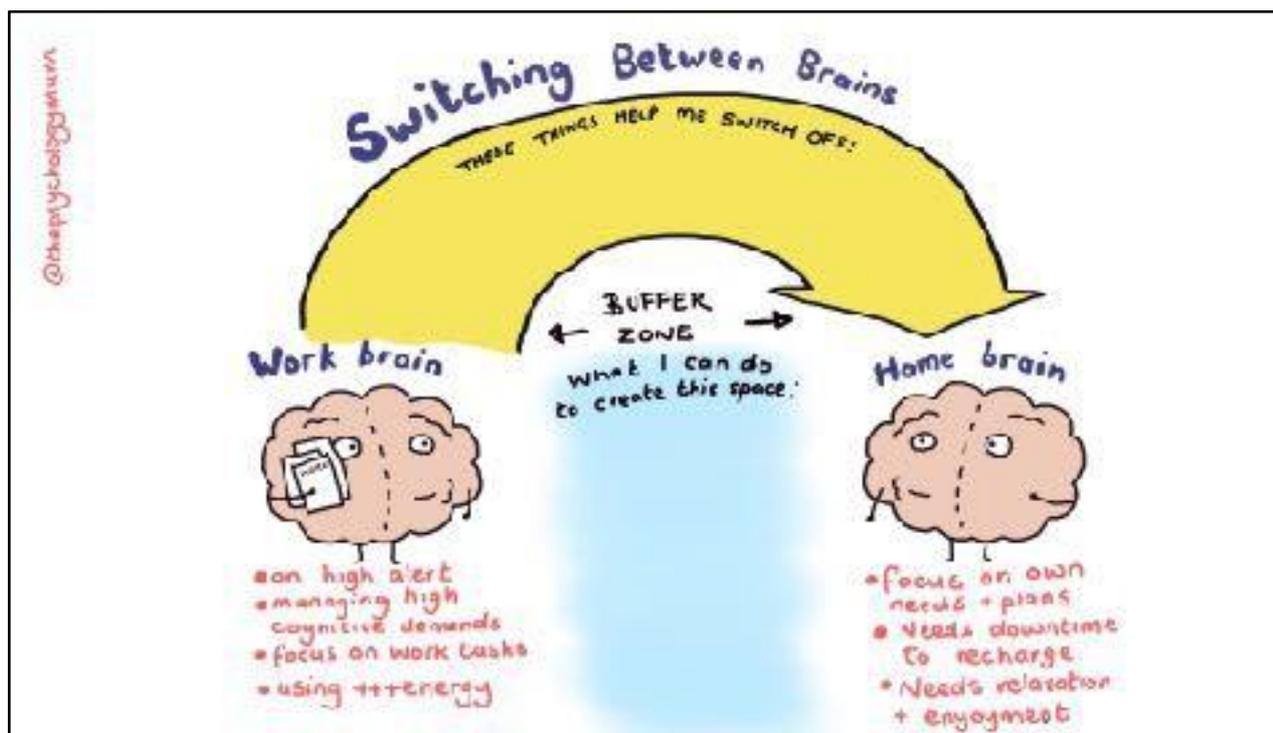
## Switching off from work

Creating clear boundaries between work and home and designated time when you can relax and do not have to think about work is beneficial to your wellbeing. Downtime and rest are necessary for our body, brains and emotional wellbeing. However, this can be more of a challenge with the situation around COVID-19 when some work may have to be done from home and our home lives become busy too. We may not be able to do the activities that normally help us relax, such as sport or meeting friends.

The ability to switch off from work and have downtime is crucial for your wellbeing, however, this may also be a skill that you have to learn. Think about how you can ring fence your own time and make sure you are able to create a boundary between your work and home life and switch off. There are a number of practical steps such as not checking your emails/work content at certain times, creating specific areas in your house that you work from and switching off or muting notifications during your downtime. If you find yourself thinking about or worrying about work, write these things down or send them to yourself by email, so you can empty them out of your mind and deal with them when you are back in work time. Ensure you have breaks if you are working from home and make sure you have time to relax and switch off every day, if you can. Switching off and having downtime are not luxuries, they are important skills to learn early in your career so you can be more rested and refreshed for when you do work, becoming more effective and satisfied long term in your role and personal life.

Some people like to create a buffer or space between their work and home life to help them process their day and be able to switch their attention to their personal life. This can sometimes happen naturally on a walk or commute home. You may want to create one that works for you, for example, by having a cup of tea and thinking period once you have finished work. As part of this buffer period, or as you finish work, it can also be helpful to check-in with yourself. Using the questions in the box on page 4 can help with this. You could even just ask, "Am I okay?" and, if the answer is no, ask, "How can I make sure I am okay?". This check-in can help you think about any issues that are still impacting on you and how you will resolve them so you don't have to spend your mental energy thinking about them once at home or in your own time. It can also guide how you spend your time so that you are responding to your needs to look after your wellbeing.

**This exercise aims to help you plan how to switch off from work and create a buffer zone:**



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## Prioritising your needs

When we are busy, our own basic needs can be forgotten in the midst of our busy lives. As we plan and work through our busy to do lists, our own needs often pushed to the bottom of the list. These are even more likely to slip at times of high stress. This can have a negative impact on both our mental and physical health. Ensure you prioritise and meet your own needs throughout your probationary year: Drink and eat regularly to sustain your energy levels; take breaks and rest; find ways to relax that work for you - everybody is different, some people find meditation/mindfulness relaxing while other people find active activities more relaxing: Prioritise your sleep; maintain social contact with people who are important to you; exercise and move your body regularly. Meeting these needs is important for maintaining your resilience during this busy period and sustaining your health and emotional wellbeing in both the short and longer term. Also, this will help you to function much better in your day-to-day life.

Instead of fitting them in when you have spare time, prioritising your needs by pre-planning for them can help you ensure they happen. For example, you might want to schedule in downtime in your diary, plan when you will exercise, pre-plan meals or prepare bottles of water to bring to work. This way you are ensuring you are meeting your needs instead of putting them to the bottom of the list where they are likely to be forgotten, or only fitting them in when space becomes available. Building good habits to look after your wellbeing at this stage will be beneficial to you throughout your career.

## Planning relaxation and enjoyment

We also tend to fit in activities we enjoy and that help us relax when time becomes available. On the other hand, we can see this as a luxury that can be side-lined as not essential, or only used as a reward. However, experiencing positive emotions is an important part of looking after your emotional wellbeing. Experiencing these emotions helps regulate your stress response. Having activities to look forward to and anticipate creates positive emotions in our day-to-day life. Ensure you have regular activities planned that you enjoy and help you relax. The more small moments you can intersperse throughout your days and weeks, the better.

## Noticing changes in your mental health

Just like physical health, everybody has mental health that needs to be looked after. Mental health fluctuates throughout our life, and everyone has dips in their mental health. Mental health issues can affect anyone and it is important to be aware of when your mental health changes and starts to impact negatively on your life. Signs of this can include changes in how you feel which impact on your functioning; feeling hopeless; feeling unable to take part in your normal activities or seeing people; changes in your sleep, appetite, or energy levels; feeling like you want to hurt yourself or suicidal thoughts. It is also important to be aware when your mental health is affecting your professional role and to raise this through the appropriate channels. What mental health difficulties look like will differ for everyone. It is important to learn to notice your signs that indicate how you feel is having a detrimental impact on your life. Just like physical health, there are a range of evidence-based treatments available to manage mental health difficulties, including medicine and a range of psychological treatments. There is no shame in seeking help for your mental health: it is a health concern just like any other. Your GP is the best person to speak to about suitable treatments that are available in your local area.

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## Further sources of support for mental health

**Breathing Space Scotland** is a free and confidential phone and web-based service for people in Scotland experiencing mental health concerns. They provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice and information. [breathingspace.scot](https://breathingspace.scot) **0800 83 85 87**

**Shout** provides support in a crisis via text message. [giveusashout.org](https://giveusashout.org) Text **SHOUT** to **85258**

**Samaritans** 24 hour support line for anyone struggling to cope. [samaritans.org](https://samaritans.org) **116 123**

**Mind** is a charity that provides information and advice about mental health [mind.org.uk](https://mind.org.uk)

**Scotland's 24-hour Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline** [safer.scot](https://safer.scot)  
**0800 027 1234**

## Apps



**Headspace** aims to help you learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You can gain access to hundreds of meditations on topics including stress, anxiety and sleep, as well as short meditation on the go.



**Calm** provides guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.



**The breathing app** simple visual breathing exercises.



**Sleepio** CBT sleep programme for insomnia.

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## CHALLENGES DURING YOUR PROBATIONARY YEAR

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### Feeling unprepared

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic your teaching qualification ended before expected. This premature ending may result in you feeling unprepared and that you don't have enough training or experience to start your role. You may also worry that other staff or parents hold this perception of you. However it is important to recognise that learning continues throughout your professional career and that your probationer year is another opportunity to continue learning. Passing your teaching qualification means you have been deemed to be at the necessary standard to commence your probationary year. Although it is an unusual situation, all probationary teachers are in the same position and this has been recognised by GTC Scotland. As a result, schools and the profession are responding to identify and provide additional support you may require to help you on your learning and professional journey when required (see the support section).

This section covers a range of experiences and challenges which are common at an early stage in your career. Some of these feelings may be exacerbated if you feel worried about being unprepared or entering the profession before you feel ready. Not all of these challenges will apply to everyone as our own personal experiences, background, beliefs and the environment we are in will impact on how we respond in any particular situation.

### Discomfort when stepping outside your comfort zone

It is normal at this stage to feel overwhelmed with information when you start in a new school. It is also normal to feel uncertainty and self-doubt when you are going into a new role where you will inevitably have gaps in your knowledge that you need to develop. This can feel uncomfortable, which is normal and is recognition that you are aware of the limits of your knowledge. When you are newly qualified, in any profession, this discomfort can be even greater as you are gaining experience and are at the start of your lifelong learning as a teacher. You may come across frequent situations where further learning is required and you feel out of your depth, which may create feelings of discomfort and anxiety.

In our comfort zone we feel confident in our skills and abilities, however when we experience new situations or need to learn new skills we inevitably step outside of our comfort zone. Discomfort as a result of being out of your comfort zone is normal for professionals of all stages, particularly when they are required to learn new skills or start a new role. Stepping outside of your comfort zone and experiencing new situations can make you feel deskilled at any stage in a profession. However because so much of a probationer teacher role is new learning, this may occur more often. This is part of learning and the more we experience situations the more we build up a knowledge base in our brain which means we feel more comfortable in responding to these situations in the future. Professional learning can also be a positive, empowering, collaborative and team building experience during times of uncertainty that builds support networks, provides opportunities for success, discovery and a joint purpose.

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## Recognising and acknowledging the limits of your knowledge

It is an important skill to be able to recognise and acknowledge the limits of our knowledge. At times, particularly in the early stages of a career, when we have gaps in knowledge it can be difficult to differentiate between what can be learned and what is uncertain for most people. We often think we should know something and this means we may feel uncomfortable acknowledging that we don't. Because of the inevitable uncertainties around the current situation, this may occur more frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic. For a number of reasons, it can be difficult to acknowledge gaps in our knowledge and we may feel anxious about admitting when we don't know. Sometimes people can be unsure when to say "I don't know" or ask questions for fear it shows lack of knowledge. Part of professional development is becoming comfortable in knowing what you don't know, the limits of your knowledge and being able to tolerate and become comfortable with uncertainty.

Everybody has gaps in their knowledge and it can be helpful to think how you will manage these when you notice them and the situations they may occur in. For example, you may want to think about how to ask questions in meetings or write down topics you want further information about, so you can ask or seek out this information afterwards as appropriate. You may also want to think about how you will respond to questions from parents or other professionals when you don't have the information you need to respond immediately. There will be various situations which highlight gaps in your knowledge: this is an inevitable part of any professional's life. Sometimes you can fill these gaps by identifying learning needs or seeking out the information. But at other times, there may actually be no answer to these questions as because this is an area of uncertainty that nobody knows about. Both of these situations can feel uncomfortable, but nobody can or is expected to know everything, at any stage and how you deal with these uncertainties is an important part of professional learning. You can seek advice from your supporter about how to manage these.

## Imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome is not a clinical diagnosis but describes common feelings that often occur together. Imposter syndrome is when you doubt your success has been legitimately achieved, and instead assume it is due to luck, rather than your own skills and abilities. You may also feel you are not as competent as you should be or as other people perceive you. You may feel like you are acting as a teacher and worry that you don't have the skills to do the role. It is also common to worry that you will be "found out" and fear that your lack of knowledge or skills will be exposed. Surveys suggest this is very common in professionals at all stages, but it may be more common in the early years of a profession. Estimates based on surveys suggest that 70-80% of people experience Imposter syndrome at some time during their career, and career steps (such as taking on a new role) are more likely to trigger these sorts of feelings.

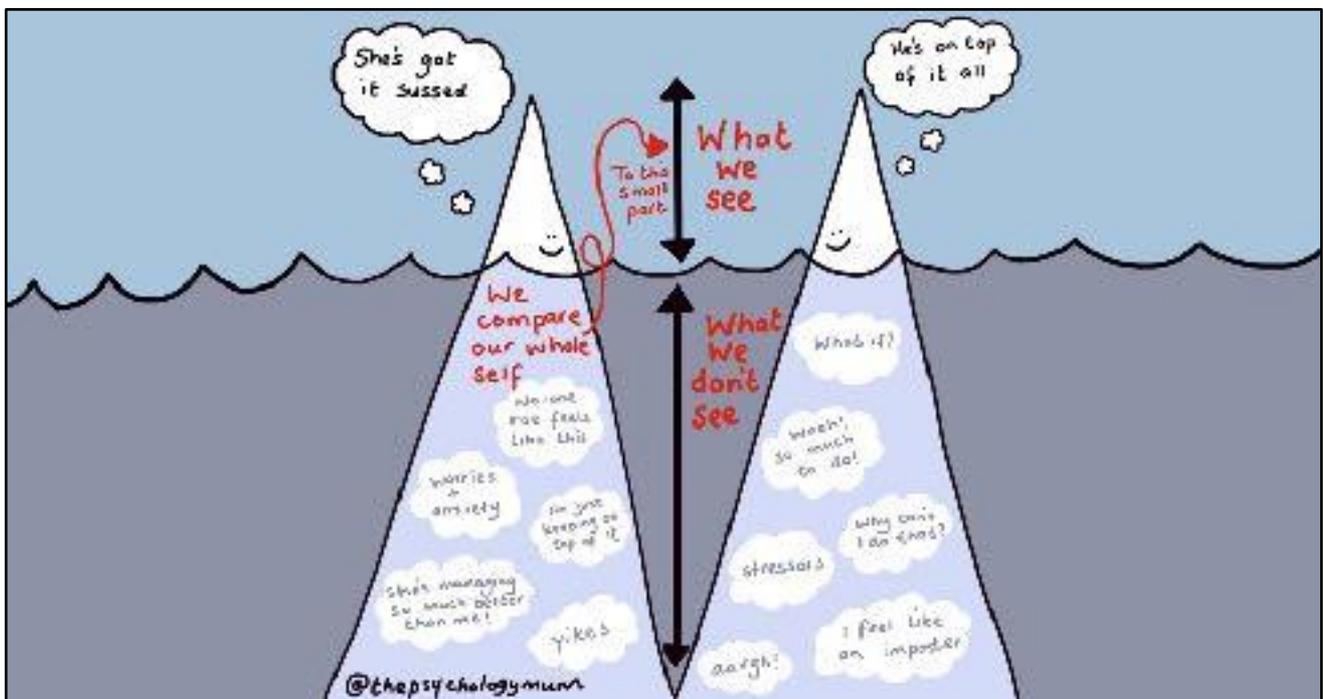
It is important to recognise the feelings and behaviours associated with imposter syndrome, as research suggests that experiencing imposter syndrome and the associated self-doubt can have an impact on how you behave day to day. It may result in being less likely to put ourselves forward for roles, being less likely to speak in meetings and ask question and put ideas forward. We may also be more likely to stretch our capacity and feel unable to say no to things in an attempt to prove our abilities, to both ourselves and others.

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Part of imposter syndrome is the mistaken belief that feeling self-doubt, discomfort and anxiety is an indicator of incompetence. While these feelings can be difficult, there is no evidence of a positive correlation between confidence levels and competence, particularly in the early stages of a career. Therefore your level of anxiety or discomfort is not a direct marker of your competence. Instead it can be an indicator that you have a realistic perception that you know what you don't know. While self-doubt in early stages of career is normal for this reason, it is also important to identify when self-doubt and anxiety become unhelpful and are getting in the way of your performance and your life.

Inherent in Imposter syndrome are the comparisons we make to other people and the judgments we make about ourselves, which are often affected by subjective criticism and self-doubt. We often make judgements that other colleagues or peers are managing better than us. While of course it is important to identify our own areas for development and learn from other's strengths, it is also important to notice unfair comparisons you are making that contribute to how you are feeling.

In addition, the judgments we make about ourselves are often more subjective and critical. We are generally more focused on what we do wrong, as our brains pick this up more easily because it identifies this as a threat. It can also be harder to identify correctly what we did well and our strengths. While it is important to try and identify what you can improve on accurately and think about how you can develop skills in this area, it is equally important to learn from what went well so you can build on these achievements. There is also good evidence that being able to identify and reflect on your achievements can have a positive impact on how you are feeling and your wellbeing. There are specific questions to help around this in the 'Recognising your achievement' section. The exercise on page 8 ('Noticing your critical inner voice') may also help identify unfair comparisons and self-perceptions you are making.



## Managing mistakes and when things go wrong

It is inevitable that as part of your learning and development you will get things wrong and make mistakes. Mistakes can feel very scary and we can be very fearful of making mistakes. If we are experiencing imposter syndrome, then we can be worried that mistakes will reveal our fear that we are not as competent as we appear or people think we are. However owning our mistakes, learning to manage mistakes, reflecting on them as a reflective practitioner and thinking about how we respond to these are important parts of professional development. Most mistakes can be remedied and are not as bad as we fear and how we respond to these is often more important than the mistake itself.

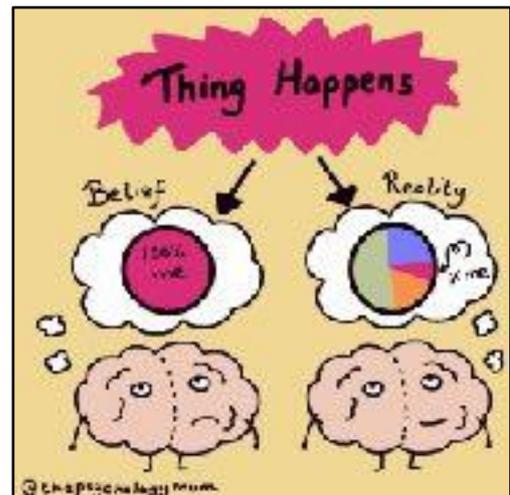
How you think about mistakes and the interpretation you make when these occur influence your emotional response and behaviour when mistakes occur. When you make a mistake it is important to recognise the interpretation you are making about this mistake and checking out how factually correct it is. Some examples might be:

**“I’m a useless teacher because I made a mistake.”**

**“I get everything wrong.”**

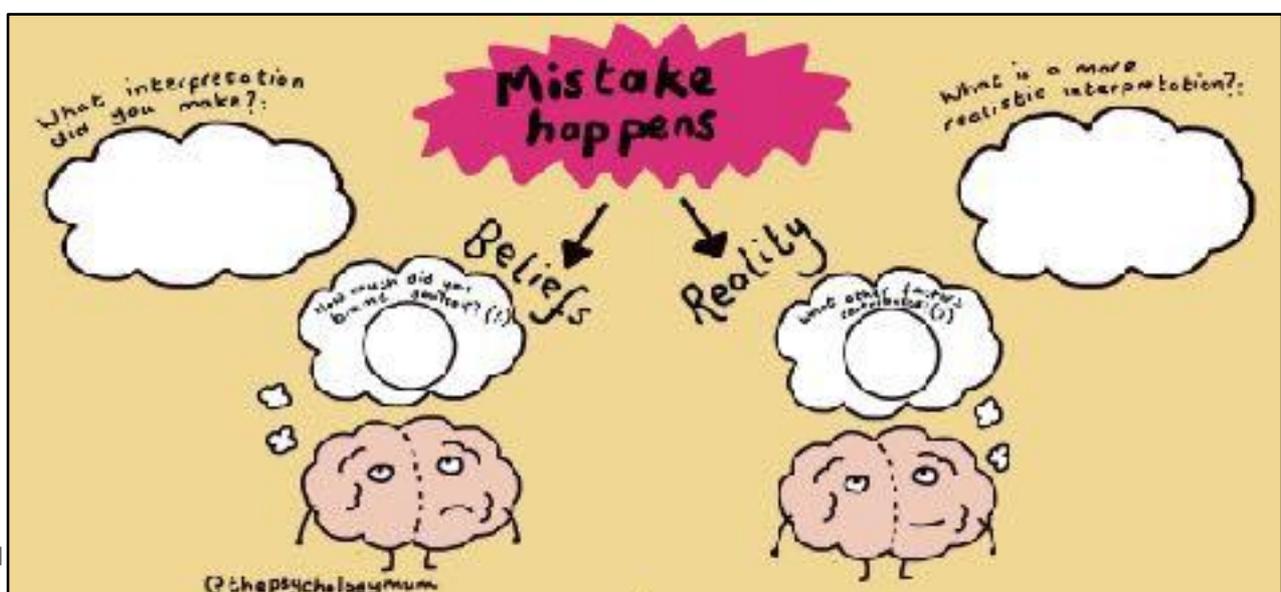
**“I’m terrible at my job.”**

In these examples, the meaning of the mistake is overgeneralised to mean something about you as a person.



The other common reaction to a mistake is to internalise it and blame yourself entirely for it. This interpretation excludes all the other reasons that mistakes happen, including the external reasons. While it is important to take responsibility and recognise how to improve when you do make mistakes, it is also important to recognise the factors contributing to the mistake, both internal and external as this will give you a more accurate picture about how to best respond in the future. Often mistakes are a result of a complex range of internal and external factors, and not just down to you. Recognising the contributing factors as accurately as possible, rather than just blaming yourself can help you respond to mistakes helpfully.

**This exercise aims to help you identify the interpretation you are making about mistakes or when things go wrong, and help develop more accurate responses.**



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## Recognising your achievements

Our brains are goal-orientated and we often focus on what we need to do, and forget to pause to think about what we have done and therefore achievements often get overlooked. Our brains are also threat-orientated, which means we are more likely to pick up on information in the environment that is a threat to us, which includes making mistakes and getting things wrong. In addition a critical inner narrative can create a filter, which means that we are more likely to filter out information that is not consistent with our beliefs.

These brain mechanisms drive us to overly focus on negative information. Therefore when reflecting on pieces of work, sometimes extra effort is required to direct your attention to focus not just on the negatives, but also the positives. For professional development, it is equally as important to recognise what has gone well so you can build on this in the future.

Taking some time to reflect on what you have done well and achieved in your work and your day and can help you both notice and remember your achievements and build on these so that you can use this information in the future. This is also therefore a way of directing your attention to pick up on the positive aspects of your day, which otherwise your brain may miss.

**You can use this diagram to regularly help you think about what you did well and what you achieved by noting these in the flags.**



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**Some ideas to help notice achievements:**

- Makes sure whenever you are reflecting on a piece of work you also ask yourself “what did I do well?”
- Take some time, perhaps at the end of the day in your buffer period, to reflect on and notice your achievements, no matter how small.
- Notice what your thoughts are telling you and consider if this is a fair reflection, or whether any of the brain biases mentioned above have influenced your thinking.
- It can be helpful to think about what you might say to someone else in this situation, as often we are more objective when we think about other people.
- If you are having difficulty recognising what you are doing well, check with other people whether this is an accurate representation of what is happening.
- Note down the positive feedback you receive so you can remind yourself of this.
- If this is something you are struggling with, it may be worth thinking about how you can manage this with your supporter or your support systems.

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## ACCESSING SUPPORT

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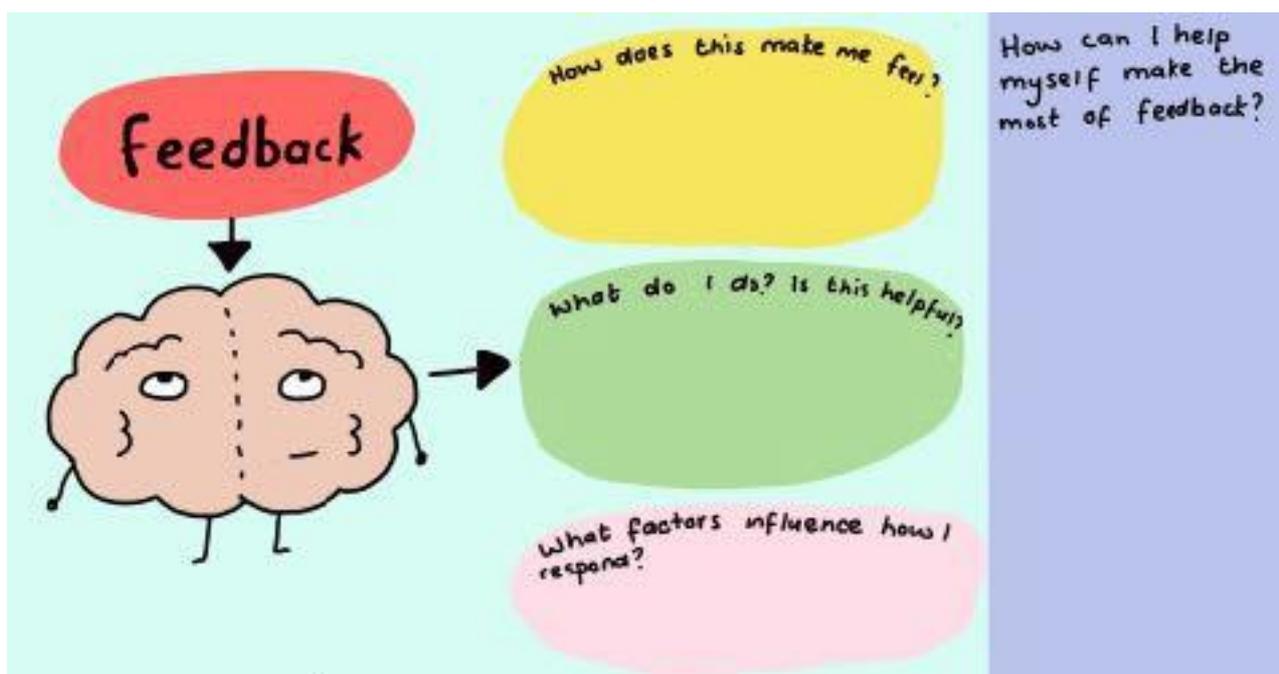
### Making the most of feedback and support

Feedback, mentoring and support mechanisms can help you gain an accurate self-reflection on your skills and performance, and help you learn and develop as a teacher. But receiving feedback isn't always easy and being observed can create anxieties. In addition, if we are experiencing imposter syndrome we may be wary about opening up about how we feel or our fears for a variety of reasons, including the fear that we will reveal our lack of knowledge.

Feedback can feel like criticism, as it may tap into our fears or anxieties about ourselves. Because of this we can react to feedback like we would to a threat, which trigger our brains threat response system and results in feeling we need to try and protect ourselves. This may lead to us finding it difficult to hear feedback or feeling like we need to defend ourselves when we receive feedback. While this response is sometimes appropriate (for example when feedback is undermining, not helpful or constructive) it can hinder or get in the way of receiving and incorporating constructive feedback into our practice or using supports effectively. Thinking about how we respond to feedback can help make sure you best utilise this experience as part of your learning journey.

Sharing our own experiences can also be difficult at times. If we are experiencing imposter syndrome, we can fear that speaking about our lack of knowledge, anxieties and concerns exposes our inadequacies and lack of knowledge. We may be worried that it will impact on how others perceive us. However it is important to identify and reflect on these in a trusted support relationships to build as a professional. At all stages of professional development we will have concerns, anxieties and uncertainties about our work. This is expected and a normal part of working in a complex environment which has many unpredictable challenges and high levels of cognitive demand. Sharing experiences can also be validating and help us process our emotions. Talking these through with peers or more experienced supportive colleagues brings another perspective to think about things and allows you to incorporate a wider range of experiences and knowledge to help you develop as a professional.

**This exercise aims to help you make the most of feedback:**



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## Identifying when you require additional support

It can be hard to identify that you need additional support. Sometimes it's not clear cut: things can build up gradually so that we reach the point of overwhelm or feeling burnout before we notice. Sometimes we can doubt ourselves that the issues we are having are valid and feel uncertain about whether we should seek or deserve support. Sometimes we simply don't notice as we are so busy with our lives and trying to juggle all aspects of this. Sometimes the signs that we require additional support are not specific tangible issues, but are less tangible signs including how we feel and our behaviours. Or it may be the impact on our lives- including sleep difficulties, inability to switch off, exhaustion- are indicators that you require extra support. Sometimes factors in other parts of our lives impact on our capacity so we have more difficulty managing the demands placed on us in our role.

While sometimes there will be specific issues that you will require support with, it is also important to think about the general signs you experience that indicate that you may need extra support. These signs will be slightly different for everybody and sometimes it can be difficult to know your signs. Noticing how you are feeling on a regular basis (page 4) can help you recognise and understand your signs so you can see when additional support is required and think about what type of support might help.

**This exercise aims to help identify your personal signs that you may need additional support:**

Practical signs I may need support e.g. falling behind, not managing workload etc.	Emotional + cognitive signs I may need support e.g. feeling overwhelmed, difficulty thinking clearly etc.	Physical signs I may need support: e.g. sleep, exhaustion etc.
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## Barriers to Accessing support

Many of the barriers to support have been touched on in this document. This can include being fearful or worried of opening up about your concerns for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it can be difficult to describe concerns, particularly when feeling anxious about these as it can be difficult to pin down or verbalise how we are feeling and why. We may feel shame about how we are feeling or come across other stigma, both internally and externally, that makes us doubt whether our concerns are valid, or feel able to express them. Further barriers can be not recognising that support is required early, until it reaches a point of overwhelm where it is more difficult to function, think and plan and problem solve generally. This is why it is important to be aware of the support available, and the different support options and be able to identify and raise concerns at an early stage with trusted and confidential support systems.

Another key barrier is thinking that asking for help is a failure as we should be able to cope and manage on our own. This is a commonly held belief and many people, possibly more so in helping professions, find asking for help more difficult than providing it. However asking for help and seeking support is not a failure, it is active coping - seeking support can help enable you to problem solve and find solutions to help you get through difficult times and continue to manage.

A further barrier may be seeing your concerns as irrelevant or minimising your own worries. Sometimes we may consider that our concerns are not relevant because they are not directly related to the teaching role, or we may consider they are not worthy of being addressed. We can be guilty of comparing to others and saying "If they can cope I should be able to as well". As a teacher, while it is of course important to set boundaries, you are still a person and it is impossible to separate what is happening in one area of your life from another. Therefore anything in your life that is affecting you in your role as a probationary teacher is worth discussing and seeking support for.

- What are my barriers to accessing support?
- How can I overcome these barriers?

## Support networks

There are a range of formal supports that will be available to you in your probationary year, which are detailed on the GTC Scotland website. You may have informal support networks too. Many people also find peer support helpful, as this can validate experiences. Or you may have supportive colleagues that you can pass questions by. You may also have family and friends who you talk through your non-confidential worries or concerns with. There is evidence that talking through stressors helps us process them, reduces physiological stress and improves overall health and wellbeing. By having a range of different kinds of support in place, your support network, can be effective in helping you manage a range of different needs. No one person can provide for all your needs so it can be helpful to think about what your support network looks like and who you might go to with different concerns, taking into account your professional regulations and guidelines and the boundaries of confidentiality.

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## Accessing support

There are a range of supports available to you in your probationary year, which are detailed on the GTC Scotland website. Further support and advice on managing your health and wellbeing can be accessed: <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing/>

### Exercises from this document are available at the following links:

Personal Values:

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/personal-values-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

How am I feeling?

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/how-am-i-feeling-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

Managing your capacity and overwhelm:

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/managing-your-capacity-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

What helps me cope with life's storms?

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/what-helps-me-cope-with-lifes-storms-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

Developing kinder self-talk

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/developing-kinder-self-talk-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

Switching between brains

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/switching-between-brains-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

Interpreting mistakes

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/interpreting-mistakes-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

Celebrating achievements:

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/celebrating-achievements-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

Making the most of feedback:

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/make-the-most-of-feedback-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

Identify the personal signs that you may need additional support:

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/identify-signs-additional-support-emma-hepburn-gtcs.pdf>

