

What is health?

Before you can think about how to make your school more health-promoting, you first have to be clear about your concept of 'health.' Concepts of health have changed dramatically in recent years, and in any society, community or school you may find many different views. Before you start to plan for change, it is worth spending time trying to build a consensus on what you mean by 'health' and a 'healthy person.'

Activities on 'what is health?'

There are various ways of opening a discussion, some of which are creative whilst others are more traditional. They can be useful to bring to the surface the fact that different sectors, such as health and education, may hold different views on health and have different values underpinning their work. It is also useful to think about whether any of the activities could be used with pupils.

Brainstorm what comes into people's heads when they hear the word 'health.' Write down all their words on a blackboard. Look with them to see:

- how many are positive/negative?
- how many are to do with illness rather than wellness?

whether the words refer to physical, mental, emotional or social health?

Draw an outline of a healthy child on flipchart. Ask each person to write on a "post-it" what they understand by 'healthy.' Invite them in turn to stick their "post-it" somewhere on the flipchart and tell the group what they have written.

A quiz: ask staff and others involved to quickly complete a quiz such as the one that follows. You can then compare and discuss answers.

Draw a picture of a healthy person, and write round that person what helps to keep them healthy.

Any or all of these activities can be carried out individually or in small groups, and followed by discussion to bring out the areas of agreement and disagreement.

Quiz: different views about health!

How far do you agree with the following statements? Please put a cross on the answer which reflects your opinion.

	YES!	yes	?	no	NO!
1. If I'm free of diseases, then I'm healthy.					
2. Mental and physical health are dependent on one another.					
3. A healthy person is able to make and maintain relationships with others.					
4. People living beyond seventy years of age are proof that they are healthy.					
5. The health issues in our country are no different to what they were 50 years ago.					
6. People have a right to choose for themselves whether or not they wish to be healthy.					
7. The major health concerns of today can usually be solved by legislation rather than education.					
8. Responsibility for health lies mainly with the medical profession.					
9. It is difficult to be healthy if you live in a deprived and polluted environment.					

WHO View of Health

In some cultures health has traditionally meant the absence of illness, but now broader and more positive models of health are developing and re-emerging. Given WHO's well-known definition of health as 'a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity', which has stood for sixty years now, the WHO has always preferred to take an approach which starts from a positive basis, sometimes called the 'salutogenic' or wellness model. The Ottawa Charter suggested that health is 'a positive concept, emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capabilities,' (WHO, 1986). This approach to health involves more than diagnosis and treatment, or even prevention of illness, but is essentially concerned with the promotion of positive wellness.

When it comes to promoting health, we are now generally aware that peoples' health is not primarily determined by their knowledge, but that beliefs, emotions and their social environment are at the root of behaviors affecting their health. People choose whether to look after their health through, for example sensible eating, taking appropriate physical activity and avoiding harmful substances. However, whether they take these actions is influenced by other factors such as;

- how they feel about themselves;
- whether they think they are worth looking after;
- whether they think they have a future;
- whether they believe that they can change;
- their assessment of what others think of them.

They are motivated to take care of the health of others according to how they feel about the group they are in and their place within it. People can be prevented from taking healthy action by their own negative attitudes and feelings, and restricted through a lack of skills; they can also be disempowered by social or environmental circumstances which they feel they cannot change.

The table below outlines the key differences in definitions of health.

Traditional approach to health	World Health Organization view of health
The absence of disease.	Positive well-being.
Physical well-being.	Physical, mental and social - about the body, mind and the surrounding context.
The concern mainly of doctors.	The concern of everyone. Includes educational approaches e.g. learning knowledge, attitudes and skills Includes social change.
The goal is a perfect state of health.	The goal is to help people be as healthy as they want to be – health as a resource for living, not an end in itself.
Health is a matter for individuals – it is entirely up to each of us how healthy we are and if we are not it is our own fault.	Health is influenced by our environment and people need to be supported and given opportunities to be healthy.
Health is improved mainly by medical intervention and lifestyle changes by individuals.	Health is improved mainly through health promotion, helping create social and physical environments that support health, and empowering people to take their own decisions to help them to be as healthy as they want to be. It involves action for social change, increasing social equality, and increasing democratic participation.

What is your vision of a health-promoting school?

Do you have an overall vision of a health-promoting school? It is important to clarify what you hope for in the future as well as a vision of how you want the school to develop in relation to a selected theme.

What comes into your thoughts when you hear the words 'health-promoting school?' Perhaps you have already been involved in work related to health promotion. Maybe you are involved in health screening in your school. Would different people in your school have different views on what we mean by a health-promoting school?

As with health, it is important to spend time reaching an agreement on what the term means and deciding the principles and criteria on which your initiative will be based. If you do not do this, you may find that people may start to pull in different directions.

Activities to use with staff, parents or pupils to clarify your vision of a health-promoting school.

Ask people to work on their own or in small groups to draw and label a picture of a school that is trying to promote the health of all who work and learn there. If they do not want to draw they could make a list of the features of a health-promoting school. After this you could ask:

- How would you know that the school they have drawn is health-promoting?
- Are there similarities or differences in their drawings?
- What makes a school health-promoting?
- Is there any difference between a health-promoting school and an effective school?

If you do the same activity with different groups the results could then be compared.

Their own experience – an activity that could be used with pupils but also with parents and staff

Ask people to think about their own experience of being at school. To what extent do they think it helped them to be healthy? To what extent did it make them more unhealthy? How could it have been made more health-promoting? Encourage them to think about what aspects of health they have considered. Have they thought mainly about physical health, or also emotional and social health? What aspects of school life have they mentioned? Do they think things have changed since they were at school? Looking at the table below, do they think most schools in their locality have a traditional, moralistic approach to promoting health or a broader, more democratic approach. What about your school?

The table below shows the main ways in which the health-promoting school concept, as it has developed through the ENHPS differs from a traditional model of school health in some countries.

Traditional, moralistic approach to school health	Health-promoting school approach - according to the ENHPS
Concept of health	
Focus on individuals e.g. on their health problems, on his or her 'healthy habits' and lifestyles.	A 'settings' approach - focus on the totality of the school as an organization in its community, all staff and all pupils. Developing a school health policy.
Focus mainly on physical health. Physical activity seen as linked only to sport.	Focus on mental, emotional and social health as well as physical health. Physical activity seen as beneficial for all, and as being fun and enjoyable.
Health as the absence of disease and problems. Focus on illness, diagnosis and treatment.	Health as positive well-being. Focus on the quality of life, on prevention of health problems and promotion of positive mental, social and physical health.
Health education seen as a value free approach.	Health promotion based on explicit principles e.g. democracy, equity, participation.
Short term response to events, often 'crisis management'.	Long term, developmental approach which starts early, for all children and meets their stage of development, needs and interests.
Concept of health education	
The focus is changing behaviour, developing healthy habits and lifestyles: conformity and obedience.	The focus is on autonomy and decision making-people decide for themselves how and to what extent they wish to be healthy.
Health education taught as separate lessons.	Health education integrated across the curriculum.
Curriculum aims to teach knowledge.	Curriculum aims to help pupils learn skills and attitudes as well as knowledge. The objective is increasing action competence.
Moralizing: the teacher decides. Teacher-centred methods, often with lectures on 'good health'. Pupils generally passive.	Student participation in decisions. The focus is on learning rather than teaching, and on active methods involving group work, discussion, games, simulations, problem solving, taking action etc.
Emphasis on negative "messages", warnings and inducing fear.	Emphasis on positive methods, the advantages of being healthy, choice and decision making.

The whole school	
Teachers not part of the process or seen as role models in a moralistic sense.	Teachers' mental, emotional and social health are as important as pupils. Teacher support and training is essential.
Only certain parts of the physical environment of the school seen as related to health e.g. gymnasiums, sanatoriums.	Whole physical environment – classrooms, corridors, playgrounds, toilets, healthy eating, routes to school - seen as affecting health.
Links with the community	
Experts from the community are involved in the school or class.	The school and pupils participate in society and function as partners in dialogue; pupils take action and are taken seriously.
Outside agencies used for referral of children with problems and difficulties.	Outside agencies actively involved with whole school work.
Parents and community ignored or asked to 'support' the school.	Parents and the wider community actively involved e.g. in decision making, and there is a programme of out of school activities.
Evaluation	
Measuring pupils' behaviour related to smoking, alcohol etc.	Measuring pupils' action competence (thinking, commitment and vision).
Action based on 'what has always been done'.	Action based on evidence of what is more likely to work and on evaluation.

The settings approach has already been outlined on page 3. Other ideas in the above table will be explored in more detail in the following sections of the resource.

A vision must promote commitment and be measurable. To be committed, everyone concerned must feel some ownership of it and an obligation to contribute towards it. A vision is measurable if a school can formulate indicators that show whether the school is developing in the direction desired.

Activity

Schools could discuss the following questions.

- What do we want in the future and why?
- Which problems do we want to prevent and solve?
- How can we see, hear and feel whether we are moving in a desirable direction?
- What are the signs?