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Introduction to the Wellbeing Stories



Meet the characters
Find out about the stories
Learn about the toolkits

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See growinggreatschoolsworldwide.com and Sue Roffey's *Circle Solutions for Student Wellbeing*, published by Sage Publications.

These stories are dedicated to the memory of Nancy Helen Downs.

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Introduction

You know how sometimes there's a little voice in your head that says things like 'that's not fair' or 'that stupid idiot missing the goal' or 'I wonder if Mel still wants to be friends with me'. Most of the time these voices are just thoughts but sometimes they are attached to some strong feelings such as excitement, anger, disgust, fear, or misery.

We make sense of the world by how we think about things. Some ways of thinking are helpful - but others are not. They can make tricky situations worse and make us feel bad.

These six Wellbeing stories are about alternative ways of thinking. There are ten characters to represent different kinds of self-talk. These are either helpful to you or really not helpful at all and get in the way of your wellbeing big time!

The positive characters give you good ideas and good feelings but the negative ones usually make you feel horrible. They sometimes encourage you to think nasty things about other people. Recognising these different voices shows there are choices about how you see the world and how you deal with what happens to you. Making friends with the positive characters will help you bounce back when things are tough.

It is hard to do this all by yourself, so in each story someone else lends a hand.

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Information for teachers and families

These six Wellbeing Stories address issues facing young people that may impact on their mental health. These include:

- test anxiety
- transition to high school and the challenge of change
- loss and depression
- perfectionism
- organisation issues
- entitlement and negativity

The main theme incorporates characters representing positive and negative thinking and the difference these make on how you see yourself, other people and the situations you face. There are, however, other strands that link to resilience, such as the power of positive relationships and supportive peers and adults. The psychologies underpinning the stories are positive, narrative, and cognitive behavioural. Every suggestion has an evidence base.

The stories are written for 8-11-year-olds but are not intended to be stand-alone narratives.

Thanks to all those who helped in the development of these stories:

Paul Vittles FRSA at the Royal Society of Arts, Australia and New Zealand chapter, was instrumental in gaining seed funding for this project.

Gavin Blake (gavinblake.com.au) helped with much of the early development of the characters.

Keith Heggart did the original design layout for the stories, and field-tested the materials in schools.

David Roffey designed and laid out all of the finished versions.

Sally Jeffrey introduced us to our talented and inspirational illustrator, Beth.

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- the Foster family, the Towson family, Julia and Lucy Smith, Australia,
- McCarthy Catholic College, Emu Plains, New South Wales,
- Ann Rallison & her students, Winnipeg, Canada
- Tatiana Park, Martha and Theo Rumble Turley, Maggie Kidman, Reuben Theron, Olga Mineha, UK
- Lucia, Molly and Tess Porter, Perth, WA

About the authors

Sue Roffey FRSA FBPsS has been a parent, teacher, educational psychologist and academic. She is honorary associate professor at [Western Sydney](#) and [Exeter](#) Universities and Director of [Growing Great Schools Worldwide](#). Sue is an international authority on school and student wellbeing, with numerous publications on behaviour, relationships and social and emotional learning.

Keith Heggart FRSA is a teacher, academic and union organiser. During his teaching career, he developed expertise in social and emotional learning based on his experiences working with children in challenging circumstances, and he has brought some of those experiences to the development of the Wellbeing Stories. He is also a keen proponent of social justice and citizenship education.

For the past thirty years **Elizabeth Stanley** has been a child development educator and deputy principal. Since the loss of her beloved husband and son Elizabeth has gathered her energy to seek positive ways to help others. Each illustration contains a heart and a star to remind us all to seize the moments. Her other illustrations include the award winning cookbook, [This Book Cooks](#), by Kerry Dunnington and *The Primary Behaviour Cookbook* and *Secondary Behaviour Cookbooks* by Sue Roffey.

The Toolkits

Each story, divided into ten short chapters, is accompanied by a teacher toolkit and a family toolkit.

Each **Teacher Toolkit** gives one or two activities for each of the ten chapters. These are all based in the Circle Solutions pedagogy for social and emotional learning and the ASPIRE framework that underpins this. ASPIRE stands for Agency, Safety, Positivity, Inclusion, Respect and Equity. How this works in practice is explained at the beginning of each Teacher Toolkit. There are also photocopyable resources for many of the activities. As some activities are more advanced than others, you will need to choose those that are most suitable for the age of your students and their level of understanding.

The **Family Toolkits** go into more depth about the issue the story is addressing and suggest ways families can help. Each toolkit also covers suggestions about how to talk with children about the story. There are links to resources, including on-line organisations, further reading and video clips.

Where to get the stories

You can see and download this Introduction and find out more about the stories at wellbeingstories.com, where you can also order copies of the stories.

Printed copies of the stories are available either in complete sets or as individual stories.

An **EDUCATION** full set consists of one copy of this Introduction, the 6 **Stories**, the 6 **Teacher Toolkits** and 6 **Family Toolkits**, and a pack of photocopyable resources.

A **FAMILY** full set consists of one copy of this Introduction, the 6 **Stories**, and 6 **Family Toolkits**.

Each individual story is also available as a Family set - Story plus Family Toolkit, or as an Education set - adding the Teacher Toolkit.

Schools who need multiple copies of the stories can purchase an electronic copy of the complete set together with a licence to print the stories for their own use.

To find out more about this option contact
admin@wellbeingstories.com

OLIVER AND THE ORGANISATION OWL:

Ahn is Ollie's best friend and notices how he is getting into more and more difficulty at school. He never seems to have what he needs in school - from books to sports kit to homework. This is traced back to Oliver's parents splitting up and spending time in two houses. Ahn points out that the Misery Maker is making Ollie no fun to be around and suggests that he enlists the help of Organisation Owl to get things sorted.



BENJI AND THE BEAUTIFUL BLESSINGS

is about a primary school teacher who is a real misery. No one wants to be in his class even if he does get good results. He is best friends with SoBS who makes him think that he is entitled to everything and everyone else is a waste of space. Things change when Belle arrives at the school as a new teacher and to Benji's great surprise takes an interest in him and then introduces him to the Beautiful Blessings. This turns out to be transformative.



The characters

First are the nasty **NEGATIVE VOICES**. You will probably recognise some of these.

SoBS is the Sprite of Bad Stories. She is a nasty two-faced creature that sees the worst in everyone and the worst in everything. She can pretend to be your friend but all she is interested in is nasty gossip, putting people down and horror stories. SoBS is there whenever any bullying or blaming is going on. It is easy to believe what SoBS is saying - things like:

'Don't talk to Sammy, no-one likes him.'

'What a stupid mistake - everyone will be laughing at you.'



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WILLIAM AND THE WORRY WART is all about how a worry can get out of hand and become a panic monster. This story is about test anxiety. It is told by Pete, William's older brother, who enlists the help of Common Sense and ZIP to help William to get through the tests without falling apart.



MIA AND THE MINDFULNESS MAGICIAN shows how several emotional challenges over a short period of time can lead to depression. SoBS gives Mia one negative message after another until the Misery Maker takes over Mia's life and drains all the joy and energy from it. Mia's mum eventually realises how bad things are for Mia and takes her to see a counsellor who introduces her to the Mindfulness Magician and suggests Mia invites him in to help.



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About the stories



The **Doom Merchant** hides in the shadows. His voice is just a whisper, slow and scratchy. He takes bits of truth but twists them out of shape by using the words 'always' and 'never' which gives an inaccurate picture and takes away hope. He says things like:

'You will never be good enough, no-one will ever want you on their team.'

'It always rains at the weekends.'

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DANA AND THE DOOM MERCHANT addresses issues of loss and change. Dana has a history of successfully moving schools but now she is distraught because she is going to a different high school from her friends. This gives the Doom Merchant an opportunity to seed thoughts that things will never be good again. ZIP comes along and points out that the Doom Merchant is a fraud who takes away optimism and hope. Dana tells this story from the point of view of now being in High School where things have turned out OK.



IRFAN AND THE IF-ONLY ELF deals with the dangers of perfection. The Mousa family are all doing well but high aspirations go too far. If-Only Elf works through family members to blame each other for any mistake. This all comes to a head when Irfan is in the school team for a spelling contest. The story is told by Selina, Irfan's sister, and with the help of Common Sense she gets the family back on the right track and puts the If-Only Elf in his place.

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The **Beautiful Blessings** throws light on everything there is to be thankful for. We take much in our lives for granted and often focus on the things that are not to our liking rather than the many things - and people - we could be grateful for. Blessings would suggest...

'You have a warm bed to sleep in on cold nights and a roof over your head.'

'Your Auntie Jean always remembers your birthday and sticks up for you when your parents are having a go - give her a hug and say thanks.'



Now you have met all the characters. Now meet them in action in the stories!

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The **Worry Wart** is a small persistent whine of a voice. Nearly everyone has a worry wart. They are irritating and hard to shake off. Worry Warts imagine that the worst will happen.

'I bet we miss the bus - then we'll be late for the match. I bet they won't let us in once it's started.'



When the Worry Wart spends time with SoBS it can turn into a **Panic Monster**. Panic Monsters are very loud and difficult to control. They stop you thinking straight.

'We're going to be late, late - no point in going now. It's all a disaster. A DISASTER'



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The **If-Only Elf** often works through other people to create havoc and stress. He says what should have happened, but didn't, and it's too late now. Imagine his long pointy fingers accusing people and making them feel stupid.



'If-only you had remembered to bring the right book you would know what's going on.'
'If-only you had looked where you were going this accident would never have happened.'

If-Only Elf can block out what might make things better now.

The **Mindfulness Magician** says very little but has a powerful impact. He brings calm and peacefulness into busy or anxious lives by enabling someone to stay in the 'now' moment rather than fret about the past or worry about the future. You need to invite the Mindfulness Magician to help but when you spend time in his magic bubble it builds up your strength to deal with tough times. This is what he might say:

'Just for a moment don't think about the rest of the day - just enjoy being on your bike.'
'Just listen to the waves and feel the sand between your toes - that's all you have to do right now.'





Organisation Owl is imagined as a wise old bird with thick-rimmed glasses, a notebook in his claw and a pencil in his pocket.

Organisation Owl helps with planning so that you get your life back into some control when its been chaotic. He says things like:

'What do you need to get ready?'

'What comes first?'

'Writing things down will help you remember.'

'One thing at a time.'

The Misery Maker is not so much a voice as a sigh and a shadow that takes all the light and laughter out of someone's life. Other people stay away from the Misery Maker because the misery is catching - like a virus of gloom.



Now for the **POSITIVE VOICES**. These can make all the difference to your life, the way you see things and what helps you cope with tough situations.

ZIP sees the best in everyone and looks for the best in everything. Full of fun, energy, and active kindness, ZIP zooms about on a skateboard, and can be assertive when negative voices are making someone's life a misery. People who make ZIP a friend often have a sunny, optimistic outlook on life. ZIP is male when the main person in the story is a boy and female when the main person is a girl. S/he helps you see possibilities, reminds you of your strengths and congratulates you on what goes well. ZIP makes you feel brave, cheerful and that you are a good person.

'Hey, you worked hard when things were tough - good on you for keeping going.'

'Go and ask Scott how he is doing - he looks like he needs a friend right now.'



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Common Sense is very down to earth and sensible and is only interested in the **EVIDENCE** - what really happened. She stops you jumping to conclusions too soon and imagining the worst. She helps keep things in perspective. Often an adult in your life will have a strong **Common Sense** voice that can be helpful but it is even better if you can listen to your own.

'You don't know that Milly doesn't like you because she hasn't texted you back yet. There are lots of other reasons. She might have lost her phone or had tooth-ache.'



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