

## Teaching the 'Stress Bucket' tool in schools

### Background to the tool-

We all have a stress bucket. Some people have bigger buckets than others. For example, if we have a learning difficulty or a poor attachment to a care giver we may have a smaller bucket and therefore a smaller capacity to manage stress. Our bucket fills as we experience life stresses such as friendship difficulties, school work or bereavement. Some life events can cause our buckets to overflow quite quickly whilst sometimes small life stressors can build and accumulate also causing our buckets to fill up more gradually. If our bucket gets too full as the stresses of life flow in to it, it will over fill and over flow and we will begin to feel overwhelmed and we may experience problems such as mental health difficulties. The tap at the bottom represents our coping strategies. These should be used to allow some of the stress to be released and to prevent us from becoming overwhelmed. Some coping strategies such as talking to others, exercising, listening to music can help the stress be released slowly and helpfully. However, sometimes we can use unhelpful coping strategies such as alcohol, bottling things up, self-harming. This means that the tap fails to work properly in releasing the stress and contributes to the bucket overflowing. By supporting people/young people to complete their own stress bucket, it can help identify what triggers to stress they may be experiencing and also what helpful/unhelpful strategies they are using to cope.

### How to teach the tool-

#### Individually-

Explain the concept of the stress bucket and share the handout below. Pupils individually reflect on things that would cause their own stress bucket to overflow. Then direct them to individually explore coping strategies that they may use and to consider whether these are helpful or unhelpful? Can they identify any more helpful ideas that are going to help their tap work better? Pupils are welcome to feedback and share with the group if they wish or keep to reflect on themselves.

#### As a group-

Explain the concept of the stress bucket and share the handout below. Pupils individually reflect on things that would cause their own stress bucket to overflow. Then divide the class into four groups. Give each group a bucket which included a drop of food colouring, a jug to fill the bucket and a scenario.

The four scenarios were:

1. Your pet dies
2. You are diagnosed with diabetes
3. You fail an exam
4. You are late for school

Each group had to discuss the scenario and agree how much stress it would cause them. They then had to fill the bucket with the amount of water which they felt represented the stress caused.

After this they had to discuss ways to reduce the stress caused by the scenario they were given.

Here is a picture depicting how much water they put into their stress buckets (apologies for the spelling error 'your' should be 'you're').



Teacher feedback-

I was shocked to see that "failing an exam" was filled to the top but it does illustrate how much pressure pupils feel to do well in exams.

We discussed each scenario in great depth and reflected on how pupils could reduce the stress if such a scenario were to happen in real life. We spent a long time discussing worries over failing exams and how to reduce exam stress.

I actually think this lesson was a valuable lesson for me a teacher. It helped me to realise what my pupils were most stressed about at that point in time and to respond to that in the best way I knew. It gave them an opportunity to discuss this openly among their peers and to come up with some suggestions of coping strategies to reduce their stresses.

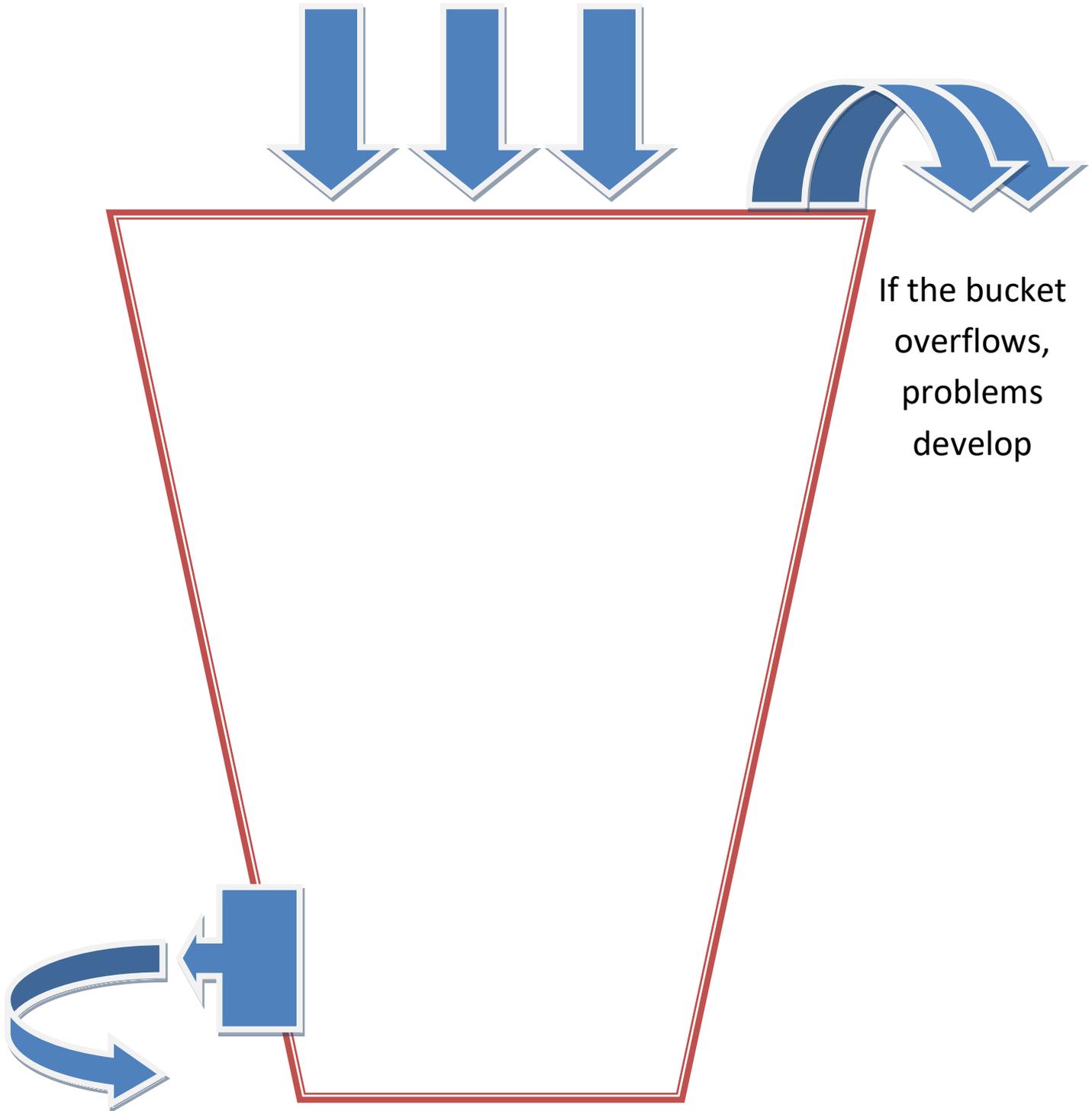
So I would highly recommend it to other teachers to use. A very insightful activity for form teachers to do with their tutees to find out how they are coping with school and the stresses of growing up.

Because we all experience stress and talking about stress and learning about coping skills reduces stress and improves mental health. Its time to talk, its time to change and its time that schools take mental health just as seriously as physical health.

For further training in the stress bucket tool contact <https://www.cmb-training.co.uk> or <https://www.mhfaengland.org>

# Stress Bucket

Stress flows into the bucket



**Good coping=** Tap working, lets the stress out with helpful coping strategies.

**Bad coping=** Tap not working, so stress fills bucket and overflows.