Hello, my name is Suzanne Allies. I am a senior lecture at the University of Worcester. I teach science and art to trainee teachers, but my real passion is to support positive mental health in higher education students, children, adolescents, teachers and lecturers.

I am qualified as a mental health first aid England instructor so I can train people to become youth mental health first aiders which involves a two-day course focusing on depression, anxiety, self-harm psychosis, eating disorders and suicide.

I train undergraduate and post graduate students, so they develop more confidence in appropriately supporting the mental health of children in their classes during their careers especially now there is more need for this following the pandemic.

I volunteer for a crisis text line called Shout which supports students who are feeling desperate, and I am one year away from being a qualified therapist.

I have written a book entitled ‘Supporting teacher wellbeing’ published by Routledge which share practical strategies for teachers.

I have also organised a University of Worcester staff mental health network so that colleagues can access informal support and chat to each other about their mental health needs at work.

For this little talk, I will share a few ways I have supported the mental health and well being of university students over the last few years. During the student induction, I ensure that all students have all the signposting that they need. We have a department called Firstpoint where students can access counselling services if needed.

I also refer to other sources of support for example the student minds website. During inductions, students create a personal well being toolkit. This is to encourage a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach, so from the start, they are prepared for any dips in their well being and armed with strategies that have aided them in the past or have been inspired by ideas from their peers. Many students from the beginning planned time in their diaries to ensure that they socialise, exercise and that this will not get lost under pressures from workload.

I email care packages to students during pertinent times in their course that include information about mindfulness, yoga, engaging with the outdoors and nature, work life balance tips, time management tools and creative pursuits. They are encouraged to select these according to what resonates with them.

I constantly reinforce the 5 ways to well being which are to give, be active, keep learning, connect and take notice. Students gratefully received these wellbeing reminders over lockdown. I continuously deliver sessions about wellbeing throughout their training to highlight the importance of it.

Personal and academic tutors meet regularly with their allocated PAT tutees. I’m approached frequently about anxiety levels in students, so I’ve devised a booklet with tips and signposting related to how to cope with anxiety concerns. This booklet was designed in conjunction with undergraduate students in a SAP project which stands for Students as Academic Partners.

Lastly, I am embedding wellbeing content into the curriculum of our students for example the undergraduate module Developing Self has run for 2 years now and received excellent feedback this year. It encourages students to reflect on their identities, how they are feeling, their resilience and confidence levels, their workload and their aspirations. They devise 3 goals to work towards in their first year of university and one of those relates to how they support their personal self by selecting an area of wellbeing to focus on.

Thank you for listening.