

Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy for Students

Policy Statement

At Epina School, we are committed to supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of our students and staff. We have a supportive and caring ethos and our approach is respectful and kind, where each individual and contribution is valued. At our school, we know that everyone experiences life challenges that can make us vulnerable and at times, anyone may need additional emotional support. We take the view that positive mental health is everybody's business and that we all have a role to play.

Scope

This document describes the schools approach to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. This policy is intended as guidance for all staff including non teaching-staff and governors.

The policy should be read in conjunction with other policies in cases where a student's mental health overlaps with or is linked to a medical issue.

Definition

"Mental Health is a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of everyday life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."
(World Health Organisation)

At our school we:

- help children and young people to understand their emotions and feelings better
- help children and young people feel comfortable sharing any concerns or worries
- help children and young people socially to form and maintain relationships
- promote self esteem and ensure children and young people know that they are valued in society
- encourage children and young people to be confident and accept their differences
- support children and young people to develop emotional resilience and to manage setbacks

We promote a mentally, healthy environment through:

- promoting our school values and encouraging a sense of belonging
- developing and valuing the pupil voice by providing opportunities to participate in decision-making processes
- celebrating academic and non-academic achievements
- promoting opportunities to develop a sense of worth through taking responsibility for themselves and others
- providing opportunities to reflect
- accessing appropriate support that meets their emotional and mental health needs

The Policy aims to:

- Promote positive mental health in all students
- Increase understanding and awareness of common mental health issues
- Alert staff to early warning signs of mental ill health
- Provide support and training to staff working with young people with mental health issues
- Provide support to children and young people suffering mental ill health

In addition to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, we aim to recognise and respond where necessary to mental ill health. By developing and implementing practical, relevant and effective mental health and wellbeing policies and procedures, we can promote a safe and stable environment for children and young people affected both directly and indirectly by mental ill health.

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health or wellbeing of a child or young person should speak to the DSL. If there is a fear that the child or young person is in danger of immediate harm then the child protection procedures for medical emergencies should be followed, with an immediate referral to the designated Lead or in her absence deputy Lead for safeguarding. If the child or young person presents as a medical emergency then the procedures for alerting the first aid staff and contacting the emergency services if necessary.

Teaching about Mental Health

The skills, knowledge and understanding needed by our students to keep themselves and others physically and mentally healthy and safe are included as part of our developmental PSHE curriculum.

The specific content of lessons will be determined by the specific needs of the cohort we're teaching but there will always be an emphasis on enabling students to develop the skills, knowledge, understanding, language and confidence to seek help, as needed, for themselves or others.

We will follow the PSHE Association Guidance to ensure that we teach mental health and emotional wellbeing issues in a safe and sensitive manner which helps rather than harms.

Signposting

We will ensure that staff, students and parents are aware of sources of support within school and in the wider community.

What support is available within our school and local community?

We have a team of Mental health champions in place whose role in school is to promote positive mental health through groups and events as well as to signpost to relevant support and help, where appropriate under the direction of the safeguarding team.

We will display relevant sources of support in communal areas such as entrance hall , cafe ,school corridors and toilets and will regularly highlight sources of support to students within relevant parts of the curriculum. Whenever we highlight sources of support, we will increase the chance of student help-seeking by ensuring students understand:

- What is available?
- Who it is aimed at?
- How to access it?
- Why they should access it?
- What is likely to happen next?

Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student is experiencing mental health or emotional well-being issues. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should communicate their concerns to the DSL through CPOMS.

Possible warning signs include:

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- Changes in eating/sleeping habits
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood
- Lowering of academic achievement
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in clothing – e.g. long sleeves in warm weather
- Secretive behaviour
- Skipping PE or getting changed secretly
- Lateness to or absence from school
- Repeated physical pain or nausea with no evident cause
- An increase in lateness or absenteeism

Managing disclosures

A child or young person may choose to disclose concerns about themselves or a friend to any member of staff so all staff need to know how to respond appropriately to a disclosure. If a child or young person chooses to disclose concerns about their own mental health or that of a friend to a member of staff, the member of staff's response should always be calm, supportive and non-judgemental.

Staff should listen, rather than advise and our first thoughts should be of the student's emotional and physical safety rather than of exploring 'Why?' For more information about how to handle mental health disclosures sensitively speak to safeguarding lead.

All disclosures should be recorded on CPOMS and the DSL informed immediately.

Confidentiality

We should be honest with regards to the issue of confidentiality. If it is necessary for us to pass our concerns about a student on then we should discuss with the student:

- Who we are going to talk to
- What we are going to tell them
- Why we need to tell them

We should never share information about a student without first telling them. Ideally, we would receive their consent, and parental consent though there are certain situations when information must always be shared with another member of

staff from a safeguarding concern. If a student is at risk or is in danger of harm no promises of confidentiality should be made and the DSL should be informed immediately.

It is always advisable to share disclosures with a colleague. This helps to safeguard our own emotional well-being as we are no longer solely responsible for the student, it ensures continuity of care in our absence and it provides an extra source of ideas and support. We should explain this to the student and discuss with them who it would be most appropriate and helpful to share this information with.

Parents must always be informed when disclosures regarding a student's emotional or mental health and wellbeing are made.

If a child or young person gives us reason to believe that there may be underlying child protection issues, the schools safeguarding policy guidance will be followed and the DSL informed.

Working with Parents

Where it is deemed appropriate to inform parents, we need to be sensitive in our approach. Before disclosing to parents we should consider the following questions [On a case by case basis]:

- Can the meeting happen face to face? This is preferable.
- Where should the meeting happen? At school, at their home or somewhere neutral?
- Who should be present? Consider parents, the student, and other members of staff.
- What are the aims of the meeting?

It can be shocking and upsetting for parents to learn of their child's issues and many may respond with anger, fear or upset during the first conversation. We should be accepting of this (within reason) and give the parent time to reflect.

We should always highlight further sources of information and give them leaflets to take away where possible as they will find it hard to take much in whilst coming to terms with the news that you are sharing. Sharing sources of further support aimed specifically at parents can also be helpful e.g parent helplines and forums.

We should always provide clear means of contacting us with further questions and consider booking in a follow up meeting or phone call right away as parents often have many questions as they process the information. Finish each meeting with the agreed next step and always keep a record of the meeting in the child's confidential record.

Working with all Parents

Parents are often very welcoming of support and information from the school about supporting their children's emotional and mental health. In order to support parents we will:

- Highlight sources of available information and support about common mental health issues on our school website
- Ensure that all parents are aware of who to talk to, and how to get about this, if they have concerns about their own child or a friend of their child
- Make our mental health and wellbeing policy easily accessible to parents
- Share ideas about how parents can support positive mental health in their children through regular information sharing
- Keep parents informed about the mental health topics their children are learning about in PSHE and share ideas for extending and exploring this learning at home

Supporting Peers

When a student is suffering from mental health and emotional issues, it can be a difficult time for their friends. Friends often want to support but do not know how. In the case of self-harm or eating disorders, it is possible that friends may learn unhealthy coping mechanisms from each other. In order to keep peers safe, we will consider on a case by case basis which friends may need additional support. Support will be provided either in one to one or group settings and will be guided by conversations by the student who is suffering and their parents with whom we will discuss:

- What is helpful for friends to know and what they should be told
- How friends can best support
- Things they should avoid doing/saying which may inadvertently cause upset
- Warning signs that their friend may have (e.g. signs of relapse)

Additionally, we will want to highlight with peers:

- Where and how they can access support for themselves
- Safe sources of further information about their friend's condition
- Healthy ways of coping with the difficult emotions that they may be feeling

Training

As a minimum, all staff will receive regular training about recognising and responding to mental health issues as part of their regular child protection training in order to enable them to keep students safe.

Training opportunities for staff that require more in depth knowledge will be considered as part of our performance management process and additional CPD will be supported throughout the year.

Suggestions for individual, group or whole school CPD should be discussed with Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Policy approved by Governors:	February 2024
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