

Positive Mental Health Policy

Ashbury Meadow Primary School



Written March 2021
Review March 2024

Policy Statement

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 life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (World Health Organization)

At our school, we aim to promote positive mental health for every member of our staff and student body. We pursue this aim using both universal, whole school approaches and specialised, targeted approaches aimed at vulnerable students.

In addition to promoting positive mental health, we aim to recognise and respond to mental ill health. In an average classroom, three children will be suffering from a diagnosable mental health issue. By developing and implementing practical, relevant and effective mental health policies and procedures we can promote a safe and stable environment for students affected both directly and indirectly by mental ill health.

Scope

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

This policy should be read in conjunction with our medical policy in cases where a student's mental health overlaps with or is linked to a medical issue and the SEND policy where a student has an identified special educational need.

The Policy Aims to:

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

Lead Members of Staff

Whilst all staff have a responsibility to promote the mental health of students, staff with a specific, relevant remit include:

- A Barratt, L Thomas, K Greenough, M Gibson, T Morgan- designated child protection / safeguarding officers
- K Greenough - mental health lead
- K Greenough- pastoral lead
- L Thomas, M Fuller- Nurture Leads
- L Upton- Curriculum Lead for PSHE
- J Allen – Lead for HR

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health or wellbeing of a student should speak to the mental health lead in the first instance. If there is a fear that the student is in danger of immediate harm then the normal child protection procedures should be followed with an immediate referral to the designated child protection officer, the head teacher or the designated governor. If the

student presents a medical emergency then the normal procedures for medical emergencies should be followed, including alerting the first aid staff and contacting the emergency services if necessary.

Where a referral to CAMHS is appropriate, this will be led and managed by M Fuller, SENDCO. Guidance about referring to CAMHS is provided in Appendix F.

Individual Care Plans

It is helpful to draw up an individual care plan for pupils causing concern or who receive a diagnosis pertaining to their mental health. This should be drawn up involving the pupil, the parents and relevant health professionals. This can include:

- Details of a pupil's condition
- Special requirements and precautions
- Medication and any side effects
- What to do and who to contact in an emergency
- The role the school can play

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, in particular Coram Life.

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](#)¹ to ensure that we teach mental health and emotional wellbeing issues in a safe and sensitive manner which helps rather than harms. We will also follow Nurture Schools Wellbeing Toolkit. The school is a Nurture school and follows the Nurture principles, which directly link to positive mental health for pupils and staff:

The Six Principles Of Nurture

- Children's **learning** is understood developmentally.
- The classroom offers a safe base.
- The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing.
- Language is a vital means of **communication**.
- All behaviour is **communication**.
- The importance of transition in children's lives.

Signposting

¹ [Teacher Guidance: Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing](#)

We will ensure that staff, students and parents are aware of sources of support within school and in the local community. What support is available within our school and local community, who it is aimed at and how to access it is outlined in Appendix D.

We will display relevant sources of support in communal areas such as common rooms 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 help is available
- Who it is aimed at
- How to access it
- Why to access it
- What is likely to happen next

Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student or another member of staff is experiencing mental health or emotional wellbeing issues. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should communicate their concerns via cpoms to our DSLs.

Possible warning signs in pupils include:

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- Changes in eating or 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
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We also use Netsupport DNA to monitor pupils searches and comments on computers and DSLs will act if key words etc are reported. Pupils can also report concerns to the DSLs via netsupport DNA.

Managing disclosures

A student 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 student 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 see appendix E.

All disclosures should be recorded on Cpoms

This information should be shared via Cpoms with the DSLs with the who will store the record appropriately and offer support and advice about next steps. See appendix F for guidance about making a referral to CAMHS.

Members of staff may choose to disclose concerns about their own mental health to their line manager, Miss Allen, pastoral support or the headteacher, who operates an open-door policy with regard to these issues. Staff concerns will be treated confidentially and appropriate support put in place, all staff have access to the Health Assured App which will give you access to advice and counselling.

Confidentiality

We should be honest with regard 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, though there are certain situations when information must always be shared with another member of staff and / or a parent. Such as students up to the age of 16 who are in danger of harm.

It is always advisable to share disclosures with a colleague, usually K Greenough, DSL and mental health lead. This helps to safeguard our own emotional wellbeing 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 and students may choose to tell their parents themselves. We should always give students the option of us informing parents for them or with them. A meeting would be held either via phone or face to face. This would be held by pastoral support.

If a child gives us reason to believe that there may be underlying child protection issues, parents should not be informed, and the DSL would escalate the incident according to our safeguarding policy.

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, 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 often find it hard to take much in whilst coming to terms with the news that you're sharing. Sharing sources of further support aimed specifically at parents can also be helpful too, 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 agreed next steps and always keep a brief record of the meeting on 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 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 go about this, if they have concerns about their own child or a friend of their child
- Make our mental health policy easily accessible to parents
- Share ideas about how parents can support positive mental health in their children through our regular information evenings
- 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 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 with the student who is suffering and their parents with whom we will discuss:

- What it is helpful for friends to know and what they should not be told
- How friends can best support
- Things friends should avoid doing or saying which may inadvertently cause upset
- Warning signs that their friend may need help (e.g. signs of relapse)

Additionally, we will want to highlight with peers:

- Where and how to access support for themselves
- Safe sources of further information about their friend's condition
- Healthy ways of coping with the difficult emotions 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 to enable them to keep students safe.

We will host relevant information on our virtual learning environment for staff who wish to learn more about mental health. The [MindEd learning portal](#)² provides free online training suitable for staff wishing to know more about a specific issue.

Training opportunities for staff who require more in depth knowledge will be considered as part of our performance management process and additional CPD will be supported throughout the year where it becomes appropriate due developing situations with one or more students.

Where the need to do so becomes evident, we will host twilight training sessions for all staff to promote learning or understanding about specific issues related to mental health. These will be whole school and relate to our Nurture School Principles, work around ACE and Trauma Informed Schools as well as specific needs.

Suggestions for individual, group or whole school CPD should be discussed with L Thomas, who can also highlight sources of relevant training and support for individuals as needed.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years as a minimum. It is next due for review in March 2025.

Additionally, this policy will be reviewed and updated as appropriate on an ad hoc basis. If you have a question or suggestion about improving this policy, this should be addressed to the headteacher

This policy will always be immediately updated to reflect personnel changes.

Appendix A: Further information and sources of support about common mental health issues

Prevalence of Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Issues³

- 1 in 10 children and young people aged 5 - 16 suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder - that is around three children in every class.
- Between 1 in every 12 and 1 in 15 children and young people deliberately self-harm.
- There has been a big increase in the number of young people being admitted to hospital because of self-harm. Over the last ten years this figure has increased by 68%.
- More than half of all adults with mental health problems were diagnosed in childhood. Less than half were treated appropriately at the time.
- Nearly 80,000 children and young people suffer from severe depression.

² www.minded.org.uk

³ Source: [Young Minds](#)

- The number of young people aged 15-16 with depression nearly doubled between the 1980s and the 2000s.
- Over 8,000 children aged under 10 years old suffer from severe depression.
- 3.3% or about 290,000 children and young people have an anxiety disorder.
- 72% of children in care have behavioural or emotional problems - these are some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Below, we have sign-posted information and guidance about the issues most commonly seen in school-aged children. The links will take you through to the most relevant page of the listed website. Some pages are aimed primarily at parents but they are listed here because we think they are useful for school staff too.

Support on all these issues can be accessed via [Young Minds](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) (www.youngminds.org.uk), [Mind](http://www.mind.org.uk) (www.mind.org.uk) and (for e-learning opportunities) [Minded](http://www.minded.org.uk) (www.minded.org.uk).

Self-harm

Self-harm describes any behaviour where a young person causes harm to themselves in order to cope with thoughts, feelings or experiences they are not able to manage in any other way. It most frequently takes the form of cutting, burning or non-lethal overdoses in adolescents, while younger children and young people with special needs are more likely to pick or scratch at wounds, pull out their hair or bang or bruise themselves.

Online support

SelfHarm.co.uk: www.selfharm.co.uk

[National Self-Harm Network](http://www.nshn.co.uk): www.nshn.co.uk

Books

Pooky Knightsmith (2015) *Self-Harm and Eating Disorders in Schools: A Guide to Whole School Support and Practical Strategies*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Keith Hawton and Karen Rodham (2006) *By Their Own Young Hand: Deliberate Self-harm and Suicidal Ideas in Adolescents*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Carol Fitzpatrick (2012) *A Short Introduction to Understanding and Supporting Children and Young People Who Self-Harm*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Depression

Ups and downs are a normal part of life for all of us, but for someone who is suffering from depression these ups and downs may be more extreme. Feelings of failure, hopelessness, numbness or sadness may invade their day-to-day life over an extended period of weeks or months, and have a significant impact on their behaviour and ability and motivation to engage in day-to-day activities.

Online support

[Depression Alliance](http://www.depressionalliance.org/information/what-depression): www.depressionalliance.org/information/what-depression

Books

Christopher Dowrick and Susan Martin (2015) *Can I Tell you about Depression?: A guide for friends, family and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Anxiety, panic attacks and phobias

Anxiety can take many forms in children and young people, and it is something that each of us experiences at low levels as part of normal life. When thoughts of anxiety, fear or panic are repeatedly present over several weeks or months and/or they are beginning to impact on a young person's ability to access or enjoy day-to-day life, intervention is needed.

Online support

Anxiety UK: www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Books

Lucy Willetts and Polly Waite (2014) *Can I Tell you about Anxiety?: A guide for friends, family and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Carol Fitzpatrick (2015) *A Short Introduction to Helping Young People Manage Anxiety*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Obsessions and compulsions

Obsessions describe intrusive thoughts or feelings that enter our minds which are disturbing or upsetting; compulsions are the behaviours we carry out in order to manage those thoughts or feelings. For example, a young person may be constantly worried that their house will burn down if they don't turn off all switches before leaving the house. They may respond to these thoughts by repeatedly checking switches, perhaps returning home several times to do so. Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) can take many forms – it is not just about cleaning and checking.

Online support

OCD UK: www.ocduk.org/ocd

Books

Amita Jassi and Sarah Hull (2013) *Can I Tell you about OCD?: A guide for friends, family and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Susan Conners (2011) *The Tourette Syndrome & OCD Checklist: A practical reference for parents and teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Suicidal feelings

Young people may experience complicated thoughts and feelings about wanting to end their own lives. Some young people never act on these feelings though they may openly discuss and explore them, while other young people die suddenly from suicide apparently out of the blue.

Online support

Prevention of young suicide UK – PAPYRUS: www.papyrus-uk.org

On the edge: ChildLine spotlight report on suicide:

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/research-and-resources/on-the-edge-childline-spotlight/

Books

Keith Hawton and Karen Rodham (2006) *By Their Own Young Hand: Deliberate Self-harm and Suicidal Ideas in Adolescents*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Terri A.Erbacher, Jonathan B. Singer and Scott Poland (2015) *Suicide in Schools: A Practitioner's Guide to Multi-level Prevention, Assessment, Intervention, and Postvention*. New York: Routledge

Eating problems

Food, weight and shape may be used as a way of coping with, or communicating about, difficult thoughts, feelings and behaviours that a young person experiences day to day. Some young people develop eating disorders such as anorexia (where food intake is restricted), binge eating disorder and bulimia nervosa (a cycle of bingeing and purging). Other young people, particularly those of primary or preschool age, may develop problematic behaviours around food including refusing to eat in certain situations or with certain people. This can be a way of communicating messages the child does not have the words to convey.

Online support

Beat – the eating disorders charity: www.b-eat.co.uk/about-eating-disorders

Eating Difficulties in Younger Children and when to worry:
www.inourhands.com/eating-difficulties-in-younger-children

Books

Bryan Lask and Lucy Watson (2014) *Can I tell you about Eating Disorders?: A Guide for Friends, Family and Professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Pooky Knightsmith (2015) *Self-Harm and Eating Disorders in Schools: A Guide to Whole School Support and Practical Strategies*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Pooky Knightsmith (2012) *Eating Disorders Pocketbook*. Teachers' Pocketbooks

Appendix B: Guidance and advice documents

Mental health and behaviour in schools - departmental advice for school staff. Department for Education (2014)

Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future - departmental advice for school staff and counsellors. Department for Education (2015)

Teacher Guidance: Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing (2015). PSHE Association. Funded by the Department for Education (2015)

Keeping children safe in education - statutory guidance for schools and colleges. Department for Education (2014)

Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions - statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England. Department for Education (2014)

Healthy child programme from 5 to 19 years old is a recommended framework of universal and progressive services for children and young people to promote optimal health and wellbeing. Department of Health (2009)

Future in mind – promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing - a report produced by the Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce to examine how to improve mental health services for children and young people. Department of Health (2015)

NICE guidance on social and emotional wellbeing in primary education

NICE guidance on social and emotional wellbeing in secondary education

What works in promoting social and emotional wellbeing and responding to mental health problems in schools? Advice for schools and framework document written by Professor Katherine Weare. National Children’s Bureau (2015)

Appendix C: Data Sources

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing profiling tool collates and analyses a wide range of publically available data on risk, prevalence and detail (including cost data) on those services that support children with, or vulnerable to, mental illness. It enables benchmarking of data between areas.

ChiMat school health hub provides access to resources relating to the commissioning and delivery of health services for school children and young people and its associated good practice, including the new service offer for school nursing.

Health behaviour of school age children is an international cross-sectional study that takes place in 43 countries and is concerned with the determinants of young people's health and wellbeing.

Boxhall Profile: Early identification and assessment

Supporting staff to develop their observational skills and their understanding of children and young people's difficulties.

Appendix D: Sources or support at school and in the local community

School Based Support

At Ashbury Meadow we have a vast amount of support on offer to students whether that be through play, anxiety workshops, group discussions, team building and nurture groups.

The Pastoral team run a number of nurture sessions which are tailored to meet the needs of the individuals who attend. The aims of the sessions are to create a safe and nurturing environment for pupils to be able to express themselves and develop skills which will aid them through school and through life.

When pupils are selected to attend the nurture sessions below the first week is all about the pupils getting to know the others in their group and understanding why they have been chosen to attend and what to expect from the sessions. Group 'rules' are also discussed to ensure an agreement is made to respect each other's differences and to create a safe environment for all.

Anxiety workshops (Sunshine club) – The Anxiety workshops are for groups of pupils who have been identified as showing signs of worry and/or panic and pupils who are at risk of school avoidance due to anxiety. The sessions focus on feelings of negativity and how to deal with them in a productive way. The sessions are based in the nurture room of the school with the Pastoral team who have attended anxiety and mental health training.

Volcano in my Belly – The Volcano in my Belly sessions are based around feelings of anger and frustration and it helps children to understand why they may feel this way and allows them to take responsibility for their own actions. These groups often support the pupils who can struggle in the classroom setting and find themselves displaying negative behaviour around school and/or towards others. These children are often identified by the Pastoral team or the class teachers.

Outdoor nurture sessions – The outdoor nurture sessions are used to support the mental health of pupils as fresh air and being active plays a large roll in promoting positive mindsets. The outdoor sessions include activities such as sports, gardening, den making, arts and crafts and imaginative play. These sessions are suited for all pupils who may need support in one or a number of areas of their social and emotional development whether it be their confidence, their regulation of feelings or their social skills with other pupils.

Chatter box – All pupils in school have access to the 'Chatter Box' which is located outside the Pastoral Support Office. The Chatter box is a confidential tool to enable pupils to express any worries or concerns they may have and are able to post it in the box. The box is checked regularly by the Pastoral Team and a conversation is set up for the pupil to have chance to talk verbally if they want to.

Commando Jo – As a school we buy into the 'commando jo' service. Every Thursday Commando Jo runs sessions which are based around team building, resilience and problem solving. These sessions are tailored to the ages and needs of the group and are having a positive impact through-out the school. Children are selected to participate in the small intervention groups based on their individual needs and whole classes are also able to participate on a rota basis.

Extra curriculum activities – As a school we have a wide range of after school clubs which are free of charge and they include; Football clubs, Chess Club, Pool club, Boxing Club, Gymnastics, Street Dance and Multi sports. These groups are tailored for Key Stage 1 or 2 and give all pupils In these year groups equal opportunities to take part in a team and to develop new skills and build friendships which all have a positive impact on their physical and mental health.

School council and the Rights Team – As a school we have a pupil led school council and a pupil led Rights respecting team. They're both made up of individual students who give a voice for all and allow the child's voice to be at the centre of everything we do. The teams meet up regularly to discuss current issues and express thoughts and feelings around what is working well as it is and what children would like moving forward. They each have their own display board in school so all children are able to see what is happening.

Ashbury Buds – Ashbury Buds is school's 'Buddy' system which is pupil led aimed at year 4-year 6 students. Pupils are able to 'apply' for the role and others are picked by members of staff who feel they would benefit from the responsibility. All Ashbury Buds receive training from the Pastoral staff and then are on a rota basis to support the other children on the playground during lunch and break times. Ashbury Buds are given a special vest to wear so they're visible and it gives the children great pride, it boosts their confidence, self-esteem and it gives them a sense of value to help and support others. Children who struggle with the non-structure of play times enjoy this role and it helps them follow expectations themselves as they're setting example for others.

Local Support

The Pastoral team are often signposting families to support from other agencies in the local community to help with specific difficulties they may be experiencing. Some of these services can be accessed free of charge but need a professional referral which the Pastoral Team complete alongside the family.

EHA – An EHA can be completed for a number of things to support families and young people. Parents are able to book meetings with the Pastoral team and an EHA can be discussed as an option for the family. Often a family can be stepped down from Children's services but they still require support from EHA.

Kooth – Kooth is a free Mental Health service for young people. If staff in school identify a child who may be struggling with their mental health a meeting can be held with the parents and Kooth is discussed as an option to support the child.

42nd Street – A mental Health service for children and young people based in Ancoats, Manchester.

Gaddum Centre – The Pastoral team can make a referral for a child or young person to the Gaddum Centre if they have recently lost a loved one and are struggling with Bereavement.

Childline – Childline is a service which is displayed in and around school on posters. The number for ChildLine is on each poster for children to access if they need to.

NSPCC – NSPCC come into school and deliver assemblies to the children and year group interventions.

Woodstreet Mission – A foodbank service based in Manchester which provide food parcels, some clothing and housing essentials and can be accessed through a referral made by a professional in school or at the children's centre.

Trusle Trust – A foodbank service which can be accessed through a referral made by a professional in school or at the Children's centre.

Ashbury Meadow Children's Centre – Families can be directed to the children's centre if they require support with a child is not at school age and parents can access parenting courses and language courses.

School nurse/health services – Referrals can be made to our school nurse for any medical issues which may need intervention.

CAMHS – A mental health service which supports children and young people. A referral can be made by a professional in school or via the school's nurse.

Appendix E: Talking to students when they make mental health disclosures

The advice below is from students themselves, in their own words, together with some additional ideas to help you in initial conversations with students when they disclose mental health concerns. This advice should be considered alongside relevant school policies on pastoral care and child protection and discussed with relevant colleagues as appropriate.

Focus on listening

"She listened, and I mean REALLY listened. She didn't interrupt me or ask me to explain myself or anything, she just let me talk and talk and talk. I had been unsure about talking to anyone but I knew quite quickly that I'd chosen the right person to talk to and that it would be a turning point."

If a student has come to you, it's because they trust you and feel a need to share their difficulties with someone. Let them talk. Ask occasional open questions if you need to in order to encourage them to keep exploring their feelings and opening up to you. Just letting them pour out what they're thinking will make a huge difference and marks a huge first step in recovery. Up until now they may not have admitted even to themselves that there is a problem.

Don't talk too much

"Sometimes it's hard to explain what's going on in my head – it doesn't make a lot of sense and I've kind of gotten used to keeping myself to myself. But just 'cos I'm struggling to find the right words doesn't mean you should help me. Just keep quiet, I'll get there in the end."

The student should be talking at least three quarters of the time. If that's not the case then you need to redress the balance. You are here to listen, not to talk. Sometimes the conversation may lapse into silence. Try not to give in to the urge to fill the gap, but rather wait until the student does so. This can often lead to them exploring their feelings more deeply. Of course, you should interject occasionally, perhaps with questions to the student to explore certain topics they've touched on more deeply, or to show that you understand and are supportive. Don't feel an urge to over-analyse the situation or try to offer answers. This all comes later. For now your role is simply one of supportive listener. So make sure you're listening!

Don't pretend to understand

"I think that all teachers got taught on some course somewhere to say 'I understand how that must feel' the moment you open up. YOU DON'T – don't even pretend to, it's not helpful, it's insulting."

The concept of a mental health difficulty such as an eating disorder or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) can seem completely alien if you've never experienced these difficulties first hand. You may find yourself wondering why on earth someone would do these things to themselves, but don't explore those feelings with the sufferer. Instead listen hard to what they're saying and encourage them to talk and you'll slowly start to understand what steps they might be ready to take in order to start making some changes.

Don't be afraid to make eye contact

"She was so disgusted by what I told her that she couldn't bear to look at me."

It's important to try to maintain a natural level of eye contact (even if you have to think very hard about doing so and it doesn't feel natural to you at all). If you make too much eye contact, the student may interpret this as you staring at them. They may think that you are horrified about what they are saying or think they are a 'freak'. On the other hand, if you don't make eye contact at all then a student may interpret this as you being disgusted by them – to the extent that you can't bring yourself to look at them. Making an effort to maintain natural eye contact will convey a very positive message to the student.

Offer support

"I was worried how she'd react, but my Mum just listened then said 'How can I support you?' – no one had asked me that before and it made me realise that she cared. Between us we thought of some really practical things she could do to help me stop self-harming."

Never leave this kind of conversation without agreeing next steps. These will be informed by your conversations with appropriate colleagues and the schools' policies on such issues. Whatever happens, you should have some form of next steps to carry out after the conversation because this will help the student to realise that you're working with them to move things forward.

Acknowledge how hard it is to discuss these issues

"Talking about my bingeing for the first time was the hardest thing I ever did. When I was done talking, my teacher looked me in the eye and said 'That must have been really tough' – he was right, it was, but it meant so much that he realised what a big deal it was for me."

It can take a young person weeks or even months to admit to themselves they have a problem, themselves, let alone share that with anyone else. If a student chooses to confide in you, you should feel proud and privileged that they have such a high level of trust in you. Acknowledging both how brave they have been, and how glad you are they chose to speak to you, conveys positive messages of support to the student.

Don't assume that an apparently negative response is actually a negative response

“The anorexic voice in my head was telling me to push help away so I was saying no. But there was a tiny part of me that wanted to get better. I just couldn’t say it out loud or else I’d have to punish myself.”

Despite the fact that a student has confided in you, and may even have expressed a desire to get on top of their illness, that doesn’t mean they’ll readily accept help. The illness may ensure they resist any form of help for as long as they possibly can. Don’t be offended or upset if your offers of help are met with anger, indifference or insolence; it’s the illness talking, not the student.

Never break your promises

“Whatever you say you’ll do you have to do or else the trust we’ve built in you will be smashed to smithereens. And never lie. Just be honest. If you’re going to tell someone just be upfront about it, we can handle that, what we can’t handle is having our trust broken.”

Above all else, a student wants to know they can trust you. That means if they want you to keep their issues confidential and you can’t then you must be honest. Explain that, whilst you can’t keep it a secret, you can ensure that it is handled within the school’s policy of confidentiality and that only those who need to know about it in order to help will know about the situation. You can also be honest about the fact you don’t have all the answers or aren’t exactly sure what will happen next. Consider yourself the student’s ally rather than their saviour and think about which next steps you can take together, always ensuring you follow relevant policies and consult appropriate colleagues.

Appendix F: What makes a good CAMHS referral?⁴

If the referral is urgent it should be initiated by phone so that CAMHS can advise of best next steps

Before making the referral, have a clear outcome in mind. What do you want CAMHS to do? You might be looking for advice, strategies, support or a diagnosis, for instance.

You must also be able to provide evidence to CAMHS about what intervention and support has been offered to the pupil by the school and the impact of this. CAMHS will always ask 'What have you tried?' so be prepared to supply relevant evidence, reports and records.

General considerations

- Have you met with the parent(s) or carer(s) and the referred child or children?
- Has the referral to CMHS been discussed with a parent or carer and the referred pupil?
- Has the pupil given consent for the referral?
- Has a parent or carer given consent for the referral?
- What are the parent or carer pupil's attitudes to the referral?

Basic information

- Is there a child protection plan in place?
- Is the child looked after?
- Name and date of birth of referred child/children
- Address and telephone number
- Who has parental responsibility?
- Surnames if different to child's
- GP details
- What is the ethnicity of the pupil / family?
- Will an interpreter be needed?
- Are there other agencies involved?

Reason for referral

- What are the specific difficulties that you want CAMHS to address?
- How long has this been a problem and why is the family seeking help now?
- Is the problem situation-specific or more generalised?
- Your understanding of the problem or issues involved.

Further helpful information

- Who else is living at home and details of separated parents if appropriate
- Name of school
- Who else has been or is professionally involved and in what capacity?
- Has there been any previous contact with our department?

⁴ Adapted from Surrey and Border NHS Trust

- Has there been any previous contact with social services?
- Details of any known protective factors
- Any relevant history i.e. family, life events and/or developmental factors
- Are there any recent changes in the pupil's or family's life?
- Are there any known risks, to self, to others or to professionals?
- Is there a history of developmental delay e.g. speech and language delay
- Are there any symptoms of ADHD/ASD and if so have you talked to the educational psychologist?

The screening tool on the following page will help guide you as to whether or not a CAMHS referral is appropriate.



Raising awareness fighting depression

www.cwmt.org.uk



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