

# St Aidan's Church of England High School

## Wellbeing and Mental Health Policy

### 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)*

*The Church of England is committed to an education that enables people to live life in all its fullness and fulfils the words of Jesus in John 10:10: "I came that they might have life , and have it abundantly"(Church of England Education Office)*

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. 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 needs 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

### Promoting Positive Mental Health

We want all students at St Aidan's to achieve their full potential. This means we aim to actively assist students to maximise their abilities and health by educating students in practices known to support health such as good diet, sleep, exercise, study habits etc. The

school provides students with lots of opportunities to feel part of a community, to spend time with friends, to participate in extra-curricular activities and to develop skills; these contribute to good mental health and self-esteem. There are mechanisms in place to help those who may find it more difficult to access these activities, ie computer club for learning support, financial support for school trips, y7 form tutors monitoring club attendance etc.

## **Wellbeing and Mental Health of staff**

The school is committed to supporting the wellbeing of all its employees. The school has systems in place that are available to everyone in our Wellspring Counsellor and Health Assured (Free 24 hour counselling service 0800 030 5182); line managers have a responsibility to be alert to concerns amongst their team; staff have a responsibility to look after their own wellbeing and mental health.

Staff who have a concern about the wellbeing or mental health of either themselves, or a colleague, should make the line manager aware (Self-referrals to the school's Wellspring Counsellor are confidential). If referral to the line manager is not appropriate then please let the appropriate member of the SLT know so that support can be offered quickly.

## **Lead Members of Staff**

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

- Gill Soper – Designated safeguarding lead (DSL)/mental health lead
- Kate Douglas - Assistant head pastoral
- Kim Orton – Head of Sixth form pastoral
- Debbie Powell-Medical room

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health or wellbeing of a student should speak to the DSL 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. If the student presents a medical emergency then the normal procedures for medical emergencies should be followed, including alerting the medical room and reception staff and contacting the emergency services if necessary.

Where a referral to CAMHS is appropriate, this will be led and managed by Gill Soper, DSL. Guidance about referring to CAMHS is provided in Appendix F.

## **Individual Care Plans**

It is helpful to draw up an individual care plan and /or risk assessment 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 RSHE 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 [RSHE guidance](#), [PSHE Association Guidance](#)<sup>1</sup> 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 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 the sixth form café, the library and near the medical room and will 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

## [Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources](#)

## Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student 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 with Gill Soper DSL.

Possible warning signs 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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<sup>1</sup> [Teacher Guidance: Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing](#)

## 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 in writing and sent by email or in person to the DSL. This written record should include:

- Date
- The name of the member of staff to whom the disclosure was made
- Main points from the conversation
- Agreed next steps

Once this information is shared with the DSL, Gill Soper she will store the record appropriately and offer support and advice about next steps.

## Confidentiality

We should be honest with regard to the issue of confidentiality. Concerns about a student should always be shared with the DSL or her deputies. 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

Ideally we should never share information about a student without first telling them that we will need to do so. 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. Safeguarding concerns, where a member of staff suspects that a student is in danger of harm, must always be reported immediately, as in other CP cases. This helps to safeguard our own emotional wellbeing as we are no longer solely responsible for the student, and it ensures that the proper help is sought for the student.

Parents must always be informed if a child has self harmed or has threatened to do so. We will always give students the option of informing parents for them or with them.

If a child gives us reason to believe that there may be underlying child protection issues, parents will not be informed as a matter of course, but the DSL should be informed immediately.

## Working with Parents

Where it is deemed appropriate to inform parents, pastoral staff will be sensitive in their 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.
- 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 may highlight further sources of information and give parents 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 is being shared. Sharing sources of further support aimed specifically at parents can also be helpful too, e.g. parent helplines and forums.

We will 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. The meeting should finish with agreed next steps and a brief record of the meeting should be kept on the child's confidential record. (The AMF medical database-welfare section)

## **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 through our website and the planner.
- Make our mental health policy easily accessible to parents

## **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.

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 eg Compass Buzz

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

## **Policy Review**

This policy has been informed by the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust and North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board.

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years as a minimum but it may be reviewed before as appropriate. It is next due for review in July 2024.

If you have a question or suggestion about improving this policy, this should be addressed to Gill Soper, DSL

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

**Gill Soper July 2021**

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

### **Prevalence of Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Issues<sup>2</sup>**

- 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.
- 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [Young Minds](#)

**The statistics outlined above are pre-pandemic.** Young Minds recent surveys indicate 67% of young people believed that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health.

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).

**However, remember that all concerns about mental health must be reported to the relevant member of staff.**

## 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](http://www.selfharm.co.uk): www.selfharm.co.uk

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

**The Key message from any suicide prevention training is that suicidal thoughts must never be ignored or dismissed.**

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. **Any suspicion of suicidal thoughts must be reported to the DSL immediately.**

### Online support

Prevention of young suicide UK – PAPYRUS: [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://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/](http://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](http://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](http://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

[Promoting children and young people's health and wellbeing](#) - departmental advice for school staff (2021)

[Mental health and behaviour in schools](#) - departmental advice for school staff. Department for Education (2018)

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

[Keeping children safe in education](#) - statutory guidance for schools and colleges. Department for Education (2021-updated annually)

[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)

[NICE guidance on social and emotional wellbeing in primary education](#)

[NICE guidance on social and emotional wellbeing in secondary education](#)

## 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.

Growing Up in North Yorkshire provides data on our school in comparison to others in North Yorks.

## Appendix D: Support at school and in the local community

We have a number of people that the students can talk to in school, we make the children aware of this through the form tutor, assemblies, the planner. Teams and via the website.

Initially form tutors or a subject tutor may recognise a change in a child's behaviour or mood, or a child may disclose to a member of staff their concerns, or the child's friends may approach the member of staff for help. Staff should remain calm, supportive and non-judgemental when talking about mental health concerns with any student.

Staff should relay their concerns to either the Head of Year, Kate Douglas/Kim Orton or Gill Soper depending on the perceived severity. Remember the school's confidentiality policy and make sure that this is explained to the student.

In discussion we will decide on a course of action to support the child. This may vary from the form tutor making regular "catch-ups" with the student, to a referral to an outside agency, and various other levels of support in between.

**Mercie Kennedy, the school's counsellor**, is employed by the school through **Wellspring Counselling**. Counselling is talking to someone who is trained to listen empathically in a supportive and confidential environment. It can help clarify thoughts and feelings about challenging situations and gently navigate a constructive way forward. In conversation with key staff, including Gill Soper, DSL, HoY and the medical room, the counsellor co-created the counselling referral scaffolding with the understanding that the system may need refining from time to time to suit the needs of the school. We make sure that information about the service is shared across the whole school through posters, notes for form tutors and emails to parents. The counselling space, next to the Chapel in the RS block, is suitably designed and situated to be a safe and welcoming space.

A standardised referral form for the whole school allows heads of year, and key staff, to refer pupils directly to the counsellor. The referral form allows space for expressing what is hoped will be achieved by accessing counselling, as well as giving opportunity to share information about students' strengths. Referrals are classed as high, medium or low by the referrer. All of this data, together with the timing of the referral, permits the counsellor to fairly prioritise any students on the waiting list. The referral form also includes confirmation of pupil and parental consent for counselling to take place in school. As well as receiving the written data by the

referrer, the counsellor endeavours to liaise regularly in person with staff concerning the referred student's well-being. Good working relationships with teachers and staff are vital to a successful school counselling service.

The 6<sup>th</sup> form senate were keen to clarify that 6th form students had autonomy and confidentiality when using the service. In this regard when students are informed of their appointments they usually receive a discreet appointment slip addressed to them (with no mention of it being for a counselling appointment) in the morning register during form time; this note acts as a reminder and advises them of the time of their appointment. The 6th form students get an email sent directly to their St Aidan's email account advising them of their appointments thus giving them greater autonomy.

## **The drop-in service**

In addition to weekly time-tabled counselling sessions, a drop-in system is also available where students **and staff** can self-refer and book a brief (20-30 minutes) chat to discuss a personal matter that is important to them so that no one feels alone with their concerns. Flexible drop-ins are an additional way for students to receive support during challenging moments. Drop-ins are for those who do not necessarily want to register for ongoing counselling (but could possibly lead to a counselling referral if requested and appropriate).

Pupils can request drop-ins by using the distinctive form or pop into the office to book a time slot if the counsellor is already occupied and speaking to someone else. The forms can be found on the counsellor's door in a letter rack, and some forms are also held at the main school reception. Forms can either be left with reception for collection or brought directly to the counsellor's office. Staff can book a drop in by phone, email or in person.

## **Therapy**

A brief therapy model of up to 6 initial time tabled sessions is used as a brief therapy solution focussed model could better serve a greater number of pupils, keep the waiting list manageable and help to keep focus on the presenting issue. Exceptionally some students may need to be seen for longer than 6 sessions and this extension is agreed following a consultation process with the young person and key staff/parents. Conversely there are other cases where 1 or 2 sessions will be enough to explore a situation and provide some useful strategies.

## **Counselling Assessments**

As part of ongoing counselling assessments, and in line with Wellspring procedures, a CORE (clinical outcomes routine evaluation) form is used at the start and end of therapy for each student. The CORE form is a useful measuring tool that helps gauge levels of stress and swiftly highlights any safe-guarding concerns. High core scores can indicate risk and be complex to work with; therefore they may require extra sessions or onward sign-posting to GP or other. It was agreed that pupils presenting with high scores should be flagged up to the school at the outset by discussion with the DSL.

## **Onward sign-posting**

The following services can all be accessed through the DSL:

- The Healthy Child Team 01423 557711
- Compass REACH 01609 777662
- North Yorkshire Early Help Service:
  - Ripon and Rural Harrogate 01609 532323
  - Harrogate Town and Knaresborough 01609 533446
- CAMHS 01423 726930
- Adoption Support
- Just B
- Young Carers

## 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 behaviour 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.

### **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?<sup>3</sup>**

**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.**

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Surrey and Border NHS Trust

## **General considerations**

- Have you met with the parent(s) or carer(s) and the referred child or children?
- Has the referral to CAMHS 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/carer and 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?
- 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?

For further support and advice, our primary contact:

CAMHS CRISIS 0800 051 6171

GMS September 2021

