



MENTAL HEALTH POLICY

Policy approved & adopted by	Principal
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Review schedule	3 yearly
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Review	Sept 2027

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 Organisation)

At our college, we aim to promote positive Mental Health for every member of our community including advocates, staff and learners. We pursue this aim using both universal, whole college approaches and specialised, targeted approaches aimed at vulnerable learners.

In addition to promoting positive Mental Health, we aim to recognise and respond to Mental Ill Health.

Scope

This document describes the college'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 the SEND policy where a learner has an identified Special Educational Need. As all learners who attend Valley College have additional needs it can be difficult to decipher whether they have Mental Ill Health.

The Policy Aims to:

- Promote positive mental health in all staff and learners.
- 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 learners with mental health issues.
- Provide support to learners suffering mental ill health and their peers and advocates.

Lead Members of Staff

Whilst all staff have a responsibility to promote the Mental Health of learners, staff with a specific, relevant remit include:

- Principal
- Extended Services Lead/DSL
- Designated Safeguarding Leads

Any member of staff who is concerned about the Mental Health or Wellbeing of a learner should speak to the teacher/tutor in the first instance. If there is a fear that the learner is in danger of immediate harm, then the usual safeguarding procedures should be followed with an immediate referral to one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads. If the learner presents a medical emergency, then the usual procedures for medical emergencies should be followed, including alerting the first aid staff and contacting the emergency services if necessary.

Teaching about Mental Health

The skills, knowledge and understanding needed by our learners to keep themselves and others physically and mentally healthy and safe are included as part of the college PSD curriculum.

The specific content of lessons will be determined by the specific needs of the learners. There will always be an emphasis on enabling learners to develop the skills knowledge, understanding, language and confidence to seek help, as needed, for themselves or others.

We 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, learners and advocates are aware of sources of support within college and in the local community.

We will display relevant sources of support in communal areas and will regularly highlight sources of support to learners within relevant parts of the curriculum. Whenever we highlight sources of support, we will increase the chance of the learner seeking help by ensuring learners understand:

- What help is available.
- Who it is aimed at.
- How to access it.
- Why we access it.
- What is likely to happen next.

Warning Signs

College staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a learner 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 the Head of College/DSL.

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 behavior
- Getting changed secretly
- Lateness to or absence from college
- Repeated physical pain or nausea with no evident cause
- An increase in lateness or absenteeism

Managing disclosures

A learner 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.

Staff's response to a disclosure should always be calm, supportive and non-judgmental.

Staff should listen, rather than advise and our first thoughts should be of the learner's emotional and physical safety rather than of exploring 'Why?'

All disclosures should be recorded in writing on a pink learner concern sheet, following Safeguarding procedures and held on the learner's confidential file. 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

This information should be shared with the DSL, who will store the record appropriately and offer support and advice about next steps.

Confidentiality

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

- 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 learner without first telling them. Ideally we would receive their consent, however due to the cognitive ability of learners at Valley College this may not be possible and information will be shared with the best interests of the learners in mind and a record of defensible decision making logged appropriately. This links with the Mental Capacity Act 2005 – see policy.

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

Advocates will be informed where appropriate and with the consent of the learner when possible. If we have any prior knowledge about a family, or a learner gives reason to believe that there may be underlying safeguarding issues, advocates should not be informed. A DSL must be informed immediately.

Working with Advocates

Where it is deemed appropriate to inform advocates, taking into account consent and the Mental Capacity Act, we need to be sensitive in our approach. Before disclosing to them 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 college, at their home or somewhere neutral?
- Who should be present? Consider advocates, the learner, other members of staff.
- What are the aims of the meeting?

It can be shocking and upsetting for advocates to be informed of their learner'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 them time to reflect.

We should always highlight further sources of information. Sharing sources of further support aimed specially at learners and also advocates can also be helpful too e.g 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 learners/ advocates often have many questions as they process the information. Finish each meeting with agreed next step and always keep a brief record of the meeting on the learner's confidential record.

Working with learners/advocates

In order to support our learners and advocates we will:

- Highlight sources of information and support about common Mental Health issues on our college website
- Ensure that all learners and advocates are aware of who to talk to, and how to get this, if they have concerns about their own learner.

- Make our Mental Health Policy easily accessible via the website
- Provide opportunities within college to explore mental health topics eg Mental Health Awareness week, Learner Voice meetings and we will share this information with advocates via newsletters and our website.

Supporting Peers

When a learner is suffering from mental health issues, it can be 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 learner who is suffering and their advocate where applicable.

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/saying which may inadvertently cause upset
- Warning signs that their friend 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