



ASPIRE: Lifeskills Learning Centre

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING POLICY FOR HIGH-FUNCTIONING STUDENTS

1. Aims

At ASPIRE: Lifeskills Learning Centre we recognise that in order to help our students succeed, we have a role to play in supporting them to be resilient and mentally healthy, and we understand the importance of happiness and wellbeing for every member of the Learning Centre community. We aim to create an environment where every student is happy and valued, and can realise their full potential.

We aim to promote positive mental health within the Learning Centre community by educating our students, staff and parents, by increasing understanding and awareness of common mental health issues, and by alerting staff and parents to early warning signs of mental illness.

We aim to support those suffering from mental ill health as well as their teachers, parents and peers, and to promote a safe and caring environment for students affected either directly or indirectly by mental ill health.

Although it is not the Learning Centre's role to diagnose and treat conditions, we do aim to be alert to the signs of a mental health concern, to intervene as soon as possible and to provide support while the student accesses professional help from the appropriate services. Where severe problems occur, we expect students to be supported by medical professionals working in specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), voluntary organisations and local GPs.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED GOOD MENTAL HEALTH?

Emotional and mental health refers to our^[1] overall psychological well being. It includes the way we feel about ourselves, the quality of our relationships, our ability to manage feelings and deal with difficulties, and how much meaning and joy we derive from life.

Good mental health isn't just the absence of mental health problems such as depression^[1] or anxiety. Rather, it's the presence of positive characteristics, such as being able to cope with life's challenges, handle stress, build strong relationships, and recover from setbacks.

'Mental well-being describes your mental state – how you are feeling and how well you can

cope with day-to-day life. Our mental well-being can change, from day to day, month to month or year to year.

If you have good mental well-being (or good mental health), you can:

- Feel relatively confident in yourself – you value and accept yourself and judge yourself on realistic and reasonable standards*
- Feel and express a range of emotions*
- Feel engaged with the world around you – you can build and maintain positive relationships with other people and feel you can contribute to the community you live in*
- Live and work productively*

Cope with the stresses of daily life and manage times of change and uncertainty'

(Mind, the mental health charity www.mind.org.uk)

'Children who are mentally healthy have the ability to:

- Develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually;*
- Initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships;*
- Use and enjoy solitude;*
- Become aware of others and empathise with them;*
- Play and learn;*
- Develop a sense of right and wrong; and*
- Resolve (face) problems and setbacks and learn from them.'*

(DfE guidance Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools: Departmental advice for School Staff, March 2016)

2. The Learning Centre's Approach

The majority of the staff team at ASPIRE: Lifeskills Learning Centre are trained Youth Mental Health First Aiders (YMHFA); and all staff, through their regular safeguarding training, know how to access support when needed. The Learning Centre also has four Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) – Viv Boulton (Head Teacher), Steve Parkinson (Deputy Head), Lee Venning (Deputy Head); and Dan Aitchison (Post-16 Lead). Ally Wand is the Learning Centre Mental Health Lead.

Additionally our Head of Personal Development, Louise Headley, plays a key role in promoting education about mental health as part of the Learning Centre's Personal Development (PSHE) scheme of work.

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health or emotional wellbeing of a student should speak to one of the SLT Team. If there is a fear that the student is in danger of immediate harm, the Learning Centre's Child Protection procedures should be followed with an immediate referral to a DSL (or direct to Leicestershire's Safeguarding Children's Board in an emergency, as detailed in our Child Protection (Safeguarding) Policy). If the student presents a medical emergency, the normal procedures for medical emergencies should be followed, by alerting a Learning Centre First Aider, or contacting the emergency services if appropriate.

The SLT will take responsibility for co-ordinating Learning Centre support (managing the student's academic workload, adjusting co-curricular commitments, liaising with external health professionals etc.) All staff are encouraged to be proactive in reporting any concerns they have about a student, however minor they may be. Parents too are encouraged to share any concerns they have with the Learning Centre.

Where a referral to CAMHS (the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) is appropriate, this will be led and managed by the Mental Health Lead, Ally Wand.

If a student has a long-term mental health condition, the Learning Centre will ensure that he/she is supported by a co-ordinated approach from the SLT Team, working with key staff in the Learning Centre, so that he/she feels that Learning Centre is a safe place where they can be confident of support, and can access well-informed and sympathetic advice at all times.

3. Managing Disclosures

A student may choose to disclose concerns about their own mental health or that of a friend to any member of staff, who should respond in a calm, supportive, non-judgemental way. Staff are encouraged to follow the ALGEE check-list used by YMHFA:

Ask, assess, act

Listen non-judgementally

Give reassurance and information

Enable the young person to get appropriate professional help

Encourage self-help strategies.

All disclosures should be recorded in writing and held on the student's confidential file. This written record should include the date, the name of the member of staff to whom the disclosure was made, the main points from the conversation and the agreed next steps. This information should be shared with an appropriate member of the SLT Team, who will offer support and advice about what happens next.

4. Confidentiality

In most cases the Learning Centre believes that the welfare of a student is best served by working with the knowledge and support of their parents. However, sometimes a student will approach a member of staff for help before telling their parents and will particularly ask for their confidentiality to be respected. In accordance with our Child Protection (Safeguarding) Policy, staff will make it clear that if they believe the student to be at risk of harm, they will need to pass the information on to the appropriate safeguarding authorities. If a student is deemed to be "Gillick competent" (sufficiently mature to make a sound judgement), the Learning Centre will respect their request for confidentiality in the belief that it is important for the student to feel in control of their situation; however, the Learning Centre will strongly encourage sharing of information with their parents and will work to find a way to do so which is acceptable to the student. In some situations, it may be appropriate to give the student 24 hours to talk to their parents, before the Learning Centre contacts home. A student may be offered the option of the Learning Centre informing their parents for them, or with them.

Staff will only share information about a student when they have told them that they need to do this. They should make it clear:

- * who they are going to talk to
- * what they are going to tell them
- * why they need to tell them.

5. Warning Signs

Learning Centre staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate that a student is experiencing mental health or emotional wellbeing issues. These signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing them should always communicate their concerns to one of the SLT Team.

Possible warning signs include:

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- Significant changes in eating/sleeping habits
- Increased isolation from friends or family
- Changes in mood
- Reduced academic achievement
- expressing dark thoughts (talking about self-harm or suicide)
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Expressing feelings of failure or loss of hope
- Secretive behaviour (including long-sleeved clothing, or leggings to cover themselves up)
- Absence from or lateness to Learning Centre.

6. Depression

Feeling low at times is a normal part of life for everyone, but for some students a persistent feeling of sadness comes to affect how they think, feel and behave, causing emotional, cognitive or physical problems. Issues such as peer pressure, academic expectations and the physical changes of adolescence can bring about mood swings for all young people but for some the lows are a symptom of depression. Clinical depression affects approximately 4% of teenagers, and is not a weakness or something to be overcome by will-power: it has serious consequences and requires long-term treatment.

Signs of depression in a young person will vary but include continuous low mood (lasting longer than two weeks), feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, self-reproach and feelings of worthlessness, lack of motivation or interest in things, difficulty making decisions, feeling irritable and intolerant of others, poor concentration, fatigue, disrupted eating and sleeping patterns, refusal to attend school, feeling anxious or worried, and thinking about self-harm or suicide.

When the Learning Centre becomes aware that a student may be suffering from depression, steps will be taken to encourage them to talk to the Learning Centre Mental Health Lead or Learning Centre Key Worker, who can then work with parents to get help and treatment as soon as possible.

7. Anxiety

Feeling anxious at times is a normal part of life for everyone, but for some students manageable levels of anxiety build to become a more serious and long-term anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders can be caused by a variety of factors; signs include panic attacks, OCD, separation anxiety, phobias, problems with sleep patterns, poor concentration and school refusal.

When the Learning Centre becomes aware that a student is suffering from an anxiety disorder the student will be encouraged to talk to the Learning Centre Mental Health Lead or Learning Centre Key Worker who can then work with parents and teachers to support them.

8. Suicidal Thoughts

A student suffering from depression (sometimes compounded by an anxiety disorder) may experience suicidal thoughts. Suicidal behaviour ranges from thinking about killing oneself, to forming a plan about how to do so, to non-fatal suicidal behaviour or ending one's life. A range of contributory factors and individual vulnerabilities may lead to a young person attempting or committing suicide. The Learning Centre recognises, therefore, that it is important to detect mental health problems as early as possible and to work with the student and their family to access appropriate professional support and help a potentially vulnerable student. An understanding of how to achieve good mental health, and the promotion of mental and emotional resilience, is recognised as a priority within the Learning Centre's PSD programme and in Learning Centre life more generally.

If a student is known to be thinking about suicide, the Learning Centre will act within Youth Mental Health First Aid guidelines and an appropriate member of staff will ask him/her direct questions to gauge the level of intent so that they can act accordingly. If it is felt that the student must not be left alone, the Learning Centre Mental Health Lead, Learning Centre Key Workers or a member of the SLT Team will make sure that the student is supervised until help can be sought. If the student is felt to be in immediate danger, staff will contact the emergency services with a 999 call, or take the student to A&E at the nearest hospital.

9. Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are a range of conditions that can affect a person physically, psychologically and socially. They are serious mental illnesses and include anorexia, bulimia and binge-eating disorder. Some students may ask for help because they are worried about their relationship with food, while others will not see that there is a problem and will not ask for help. Usually family or friends will be aware of the problem before the Learning Centre. The Learning Centre will advise the student and their family to go to their GP for help, and will then aim to provide on-going help and monitoring once the student is receiving professional medical support.

10. Self-Harm

Deliberate self-harm describes any behaviour where a student causes harm to himself/herself in order to cope with thoughts, feelings or experiences they are unable to manage by other means. It is not an illness but a behaviour pattern used to manage, or to communicate, emotional distress. It most frequently takes the form of cutting, burning or non-lethal overdoses. It is not attempted suicide but instead is a means of survival. Often it may be the case that the

student is self-harming to get relief from feelings of hopelessness or inability to cope with social, emotional or academic pressures, and if he/she feels that it works as a coping strategy, it may become a habit.

If a student discloses, or a member of staff suspects, that he/she is self-harming, the Learning Centre will work with him/her to discuss the reasons for their self-harm and find less destructive ways to cope. Usually the Learning Centre Mental Health Lead or the Learning Centre DSL will take the lead on this, and other help and guidance as appropriate will be sought (e.g. the student's GP, online support from agencies like Harmless, or professionals within CAMHS).

11. Educating and Supporting Students to maintain good mental health

The Learning Centre's Personal Development Programme covers a number of topics on mental health and emotional wellbeing in all year groups and aims to develop an understanding of good mental health and an awareness of common mental health concerns.

Providing opportunities for our students to develop their relationships and social skills is a key focus for us at ASPIRE. Structured group sessions designed by the Specialist Speech and Language Therapist focus around Social Thinking. Skills taught in these sessions are supported to develop throughout the school week, across all activities. PSHE and PSD programmes are designed to address issues experienced by our cohort of students, as well as addressing the required topics such as SRE (sexuality and relationships education) – but delivered in a way that suits each individual student's needs and learning style.

At ASPIRE we understand the role that healthy eating and a balanced diet play in our Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health. Increasing our students' knowledge (food and drink and its benefits, a balanced diet and portion sizes) and skills (to read labels, make healthier choices and cook safely) can all help to change behaviour; and our lifeskills programmes are designed to support this work.

We also recognise that physical activity, and involvement in sport and outdoor activity can play an important role in supporting Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health. Physical activity is integrated into each young person's individual programme in a way that suits them best e.g. group swimming, individual gym programmes, walks with the therapy dog, table tennis and table football; movement breaks within lessons.

Many of our young people experience poor sleep patterns and we recognise the impact lack of sleep can have on attendance and ability to engage with learning; as well as on emotional and mental wellbeing. At ASPIRE we work closely with families to support with sleep issues, and use a range of therapeutic interventions to enable our young people to maintain a 'just right' state wherever possible.

At ASPIRE we ensure that every student has a safe space to go to when feeling overwhelmed, and we strive to ensure that all students and staff feel safe at all times – checking this through our wellbeing feedback forms and through daily check-ins with students. Individual safe spaces are designed and adapted to meet individual needs e.g. dens under desks, sensory spaces; and visuals support students to communicate when they need time out on their own. As well as a safe space to go to we ensure that each young person has a trusted adult they feel able to

talk to about any concerns or issues. For most students this would be their key worker. For some it may be time with an allocated mentor.

At ASPIRE we focus on raising self-esteem and confidence, and building resilience - to help our young people to reach their full potential in life. In a safe, non-threatening environment, with trusted staff members, we encourage them to express and communicate their feelings, to discuss the challenges they experience; and to identify and develop their strengths and skillset through their individualised programmes and plans for the future. Our person-centred approach ensures that we keep the individual student at the forefront of all that we do.

Meta-cognition and self-regulation approaches (learning how to learn) aim to help our students to think about their own learning – teaching them specific strategies to set goal and to monitor and evaluate their own academic and holistic development. Our Forest School plays a large part in the process of offering opportunities to succeed, and to develop confidence, resilience and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in the woodland environment.

Research shows that learning outside the classroom is more memorable and more engaging, and it can have a much greater impact on students than sitting at their desks to learn. Wherever possible we strive to offer learning opportunities in our local community, such as setting up and running a market stall to practice social communication skills and to develop competency with handling money and calculating change.

Many of our young people are accessing courses working towards examinations and accreditations. At ASPIRE we recognise the detrimental effect that the stress of exams and revision can have on young people. It is our aim to ensure that students are supported to understand how to revise, to organise their revision time, to have repeated opportunities to practice exam papers; and to understand the process on exam days – including all access arrangements. By providing this support we can do our utmost to minimise the stress and anxiety related to examinations for our young people. Further advice and support for students accessing exams can be found on the Childline and YoungMinds websites:

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-stress/>
(Childline) 

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/exam-stress/> (Young Minds) 

12. Working with Parents

The Learning Centre believes that the welfare of its students is almost always best served by working with the full knowledge and support of the student's parents. Sometimes the student will choose to tell their parents themselves, and will be given 24 hours to do so before the Learning Centre contacts home. If the student gives the Learning Centre reason to believe that there may be underlying child protection issues, parents will not be informed but the DSL will take advice from the local Safeguarding Children Board.

When the Learning Centre needs to disclose sensitive information to parents about their child's mental health, thought will be given to how best to handle this with sensitivity. It can be shocking and upsetting for parents to learn that their child is suffering from poor mental health, and the Learning Centre recognises that they may need time to process what they have been

told and reflect on how to respond. Wherever possible, the Learning Centre will highlight further sources of information and support, and will make it clear that parents are welcome to ask for further meetings and follow-up. Meetings and conversations with parents will always conclude with an agreed next step, and a brief record of the meeting will be kept with the student's confidential record.

The Learning Centre works with parents to support their child's mental health and emotional wellbeing by:

- Making the Learning Centre's Wellbeing Policy easily accessible to parents
- Highlighting sources of information about common mental health issues on the Learning Centre website
- Sharing ideas about how parents can support positive mental health in their children (e.g. by inviting guest speakers to the Learning Centre to talk to parents)
- Keeping parents informed about the mental health topics covered in their children's Personal Development programme, so that they can share and extend this learning at home.

13. Supporting Peers

When a student is suffering from mental health issues, it can be a difficult time for their friends. Friends will want to help but often 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 protect peers, the Learning Centre will consider on a case-by-case basis which friends may need additional support and will decide how best to do so. Advice will be given about:

- what it is helpful for friends to know and what they should not be told
- how they can best support their friend who is suffering from mental health problems
- things friends should avoid saying/doing which may cause upset
- warning signs that their friend needs help (e.g. signs of a relapse)
- where and when 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.

14. Policy Review Statement

This policy will be reviewed annually. Additionally, it will be updated immediately to reflect

personnel or legislative changes, and may be reviewed during the course of the year if the need or opportunity arises to improve its content.

SIGNED:.... 

POSITION: Head Teacher

DATE: October 2019

REVIEW DATE: October 2020

FOR & ON BEHALF OF

ASPIRE: Lifeskills