



Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

Aims

At Values Academy we recognise that our young people have a vast array of early life experiences many of which may impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (2001, 2013) emphasises the impact of traumatic experiences in early childhood on later physical, emotional and social problems in adulthood. Studies also point to the rising incidence of emotional disorders and mental health issues in children across the UK (2017) and the association of behavioural problems with long term chances of developing mental ill health (2012). With this knowledge in mind our Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing policy outlines how Values Academy aims to create a therapeutic educational environment which takes into account the emotional needs of each individual student and recognises the link between poor mental health and educational attainment as recognised in the SEND Code of Practice (2015).

This policy promotes the importance of supporting parents/carers and seeking their involvement in the emotional wellbeing of their child. At Values Academy we understand that the work with our student group can be challenging and the emotional support and wellbeing of staff is a priority.

Objectives

In order to achieve our aims we

- Adopt a whole-school approach to mental health
- Individualise our approach to the mental and emotional wellbeing of the young person
- Seek to engage parents and carers in the school life of their child and increase their awareness of emotional wellbeing amongst young people.
- Offer support and development to staff in order to increase their understanding of mental health difficulties in young people.
- Support staff with their own emotional health recognising the challenges that the school environment can sometimes present.

A whole- school approach

At Values Academy a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing means that everyone in school recognises that the emotional health of the young people in our care is central to their ability to learn. Excluded from mainstream provision often because of conduct disorder we see 'every behaviour as a communication' and try to work with the young person to understand their underlying difficulty (see behavioural policy).

The school has invested in the pastoral care of the students in a number of ways:

- Therapeutic leads have been identified in both schools.
- Development of an Individual Pupil Approach
- A programme of CPD for staff centred on the possible and probable mental health difficulties which can arise in young people who have experienced/are still experiencing trauma. (See appendix 1)
- Involvement of outside agencies and links to others who provide therapeutic support for young people.
- Maintaining regular contact with parents/carers regarding the emotional wellbeing of the child so that school and home are working in unison to optimise support for the child.
- A school therapist and therapeutic consultant has been contracted to work with Values Academy on a number of projects which will add to this whole school approach.

The Therapeutic Leads

On each school site we have identified a therapeutic lead. This individual works closely with the school therapeutic advisor to create and maintain an ethos of therapeutic thinking throughout the school. (Appendix 2a)

An "Individual Pupil Approach"

Every young person who comes to the school is unique and has had their own set of experiences which have led them to be excluded from mainstream school. At Values Academy we individualise our approach to the mental and emotional wellbeing of the young person. Initially we work with the written information we are given by local authorities and the verbal communication we may get from the child's previous school to begin constructing an idea of the child's struggles which have led to such profound difficulty and to their exclusion. Initial **pupil profiling** and **shared thinking** about the young person begins the process and this is gradually added to over time as staff begin to get to know the child and reflect on their work with them in the **Reflective Practice Groups**. (see appendix 2b)

Reflective Practice Groups are “thinking spaces” facilitated by the school therapist and attended by staff on a weekly basis. Thought is given to individual children, group processes within school, the impact of the work on the staff and therapeutic need within the school. The aim of the RPG is two- fold: to increase understanding of the child and to support the staff in their work.

As part of our individualised approach we work with outside agencies to provide the most appropriate therapeutic experiences and curriculum for the young person. However we recognise that often referral to some outside agencies can be a slow process and that it may be necessary for school to attempt to “bridge the gap” in the meantime. We use a variety of means including:

- Pastoral time each morning with a designated member of staff. These sessions can occur on both a planned and on “acute” basis depending on the young person’s need.
- Mindfulness and yoga sessions
- 1 to 1 counselling support within school
- Close liaison/close work with carers and families

Our list of therapeutic contacts within our community is growing and these are used to enhance the therapeutic curriculum in school as well as to address individual therapeutic need for a young person, including:

- Yoga and Mindfulness providers
- The GROW project
- North Warwickshire Equestrian Centre for Equestrian Assisted Learning
- The Secret Garden Project
- AIM based in Baddesley Ensor

Work with young people and families

At Values Academy we recognise that parents can contribute positively and significantly to the educational performance of their children and to their child’s mental health through regular involvement with school. Parents/carers are welcomed to work in partnership with the school to improve their child’s emotional wellbeing and are encouraged to ask for help when needed. If a child is struggling emotionally or with mental ill health it is important that parents are aware of strategies in school which may also be helpful at home. It is possible that parents and carers can be signposted to find supportive networks within the community, at Values we offer support by:

- Maintaining regular contact with parents/carers about the positive aspects of their child’s school day as well as when their child is struggling.

- Recognising the importance of liaison between home and school so that strengths and difficulties there are recognised, acknowledged and challenged appropriately.
- Encouraging carers/parents to contact the school with information which will improve our understanding of the young person and encourage coherence between home and school.
- Offering contact with therapeutic leads/ school therapist to arrange home/school meetings which enable better pupil profiling and increase understanding of the individual child.
- Offering access to attachment- based parenting support through 1:1 means or group practice.

Working with outside agencies

At times we may feel it is appropriate for a child to be referred or discussed with an outside agency such as “Forward Thinking Birmingham” and RISE (both previously known as CAMHS in Birmingham and Nuneaton respectively), Early help or Educational Psychology. They may provide formal help or informal advice. With parental permission, we can transfer information between these services and school directly and together find the best strategies to help pupils and families.

On occasion it may be necessary to contact social services, where we believe a family needs urgent support in line with our school safeguarding policy. The needs and safety of the child are always paramount and in the first instance parents/carers may not be made aware that contact has been made.

Dealing with complaints

Any complaints concerning mental health or SEND should be made in accordance with the school’s Complaints Policy.

For further information, please refer to the School’s Complaint Policy which can be requested from the school office or is available here on our school website:

<http://5k0i04bgfqu14h9a03convxm.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Complaints-Policy-jul-2018.pdf>

Reviewing this policy

This policy will be formally reviewed annually and published on the school’s website. It is a working document that has been written in response to the needs of Values Academy and as such will continue to develop as the mental health and wellbeing practice in schools develops.

Appendix 1

CPD at Values academy

Programme 2018-19

Introduction to Psychodynamic Therapy 1

Introduction to Psychodynamic Therapy

What is Dialectical Behavioural Therapy?

Neuroscience and Trauma

Child development 1

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Self Harm and Suicidal Thoughts

Introduction to Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy

Attachment and attachment difficulties

Attachment in the Classroom

Appendix 2a

The role of therapeutic lead within school

The therapeutic leads at Values Academy are:

Birmingham: Sian Mitchell

Nuneaton : Sarah Roberts

Therapeutic leads assist other staff members to maintain therapeutic thinking throughout the school and to play a part in developing a whole school approach to mental health. Therapeutic leads attend RPG weekly and liaise with the school therapeutic advisor regarding individual young people or group dynamics. Each therapeutic lead will complete DDP level 1 and will embed the practice of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy)(Hughes, 2006)within the school. Therapeutic leads will liaise with parents and carers when necessary to information gather or share about the emotional wellbeing of the child in school.

Appendix 2b

Reflective Practice Groups at Values Academy.

The young people who attend Values Academy have complex social and emotional difficulties which have led to their exclusion from main stream education. All staff including SMT, teachers, learning mentors and ancillary staff are challenged to educate the young person whilst also managing behaviour which communicates the distress and difficult experiences of that child. It is the job of the staff to hold this in mind whilst maintaining boundaries of acceptable conduct in school.

For all of us the groups that we are part of: be they friendship groups, classes, teams etc. can stir up feelings from our own “original” groups. For example, we may have a colleague who speaks to us in a way which reminds us of a bossy older sibling, or a boss who represents an aunt who was kind and loving towards us when were small. Often we are not consciously aware of these links and the feelings that are present are managed (or “contained”) through experience or restraint, though sometimes we can retaliate or behave in ways which are “out of character”. We can develop ways of coping with difficult feelings such as avoidance or denial, anxiety or anger. The process which we experience is called Transference.

The young people attending Values Academy will experience similar transference phenomena though they are likely to struggle to manage the feelings or their reactions, and their reactions and coping strategies may be more extreme. For example, feelings of sibling rivalry may be stronger, love and admiration may be intense, or feelings of criticism may feel persecutory and physically threatening, just as they may’ve felt or feel in their own families.

As all of this complexity can happen several times in the course of an ordinary school day; the Reflective Practice Group offers a protected time and space for some of these intricacies of interaction to be thought about. The impact of the work on the staff can be shared and a system of mutual support created where values, beliefs and assumptions can be aired.

References

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Brown, E.R., Khan, L. and Parsonage, M. (2012) *A Chance to Change: Delivering effective parenting programmes to transform lives*. London: Centre for Mental Health.

Department for Education and Department of Health (2015) *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*.

Hughes, Dan (2006) *Building the Bonds of attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children*. Aronson.

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