



POLICY	Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
STATUS/DATE OF THIS VERSION	Review and ratification by Trustees
APPROVED BY	Trustees (March 2023)
RATIFIED BY	Trustees (March 2023)
REVIEW	April 2027
	Non-statutory policy

This policy applies to all the schools in Unity Education Trust (as listed below). Procedures for implementation vary between schools and these are either attached for each school as Appendices or available in full at the school concerned.

Any queries about this policy should be directed to the school concerned – normally to the Headteacher/Head of School:

- **Beeston Primary School**
- **Garvestone Primary School**
- **Grove House Infant and Nursery School**
- **King’s Park Infant School**
- **Northgate High School and Dereham Sixth Form College**
- **The Pinetree School**
- **The Short Stay School for Norfolk**
- **Churchill Park Academy**
- **Greyfriars Academy**
- **Highgate Infant School**
- **King’s Oak Infant School**
- **Wimbotsham and Stow Academy**
- **Magdalen Academy**
- **St German’s Academy**
- **Great Dunham Primary School**

Churchill Park Academy

Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

Policy Statement

Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to their community (World Health Organization).

At Churchill Park Academy, we are committed to promoting and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our whole school community, including pupils, staff, parents and carers. Our approach is underpinned by our core values of communication, inclusion and independence and is rooted in a trauma-informed, developmentally aware and nurture-based ethos.

We recognise that many of our pupils have complex needs and may have experienced adversity, which can impact on their ability to regulate emotions, communicate needs and engage in learning. We therefore understand that:

Behaviour is a form of communication and mental health needs may present through behaviour, emotional responses or changes in presentation.

We prioritise emotional safety, strong relationships and regulation as a foundation for learning, in line with our "Regulation Before Education" approach.

Scope

This policy outlines the school's approach to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing and supporting those experiencing difficulties. It applies to all staff, pupils, governors and stakeholders.

It should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
 - SEND Policy
 - Behaviour Policy
 - Self-Harm Policy
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Policy Aims

- Promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all
 - Develop a whole-school understanding of mental health, trauma and development
 - Support pupils to develop communication, emotional literacy and independence
 - Enable early identification of mental health needs
 - Provide a graduated Pathway of Support for pupils
 - Support staff in responding appropriately and confidently
 - Work in partnership with families and external agencies
-

Key Staff

All staff have a responsibility to promote wellbeing. Key staff include:

- Headteacher
- Senior Leadership Team
- Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs)
- Class teams
- Pastoral and Wellbeing Team
- Senior Mental Health Lead
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Nursing Team
- External professionals (e.g. CAMHS, Educational Psychology, SALT, OT)
- Governors/Trustees

Any concerns must be reported to a DSL in line with safeguarding procedures.

Pathway of Support and Multi-Agency Working

At Churchill Park Academy, we operate a graduated Pathway of Support to ensure all pupils receive the right support at the right time.

Universal Support Includes

- Whole-school wellbeing and nurture-based practice
- Inclusive curriculum (PSHE, emotional literacy)
- Daily regulation strategies and routines

Targeted Support Includes

- Pastoral and wellbeing interventions
- Therapy Hub
- ELSA support
- Small group or individual interventions
- Personalised behaviour and communication plans

Specialist Support

- Referrals to external agencies
- Multi-agency working including:
 - CAMHS / LD CAMHS
 - Educational Psychologists
 - Speech and Language Therapists
 - Occupational Therapists
 - Social Care / Early Help

This ensures a holistic, coordinated and consistent approach across school, home and external services.

Understanding Mental Health (Trauma-Informed Approach)

We adopt a trauma-informed and developmentally aware approach, recognising that pupils may function at different developmental stages.

Pupils may experience stress responses, including:

- Fight (aggression, resistance)
- Flight (avoidance, running)
- Freeze (shutdown, withdrawal)

These responses are understood as:

- Indicators of distress
- Linked to unmet need or feeling unsafe

Staff respond by:

- Prioritising emotional safety
 - Supporting co-regulation
 - Reducing demands during dysregulation
 - Using calm, consistent and predictable approaches
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Teaching about Mental Health

Mental health is embedded within our curriculum, particularly through PSHE and the Zones of regulation program

We provide:

- Emotional literacy teaching
- Communication support (AAC, visuals, Talking Mats)
- Opportunities to develop:
 - Self-awareness
 - Coping strategies
 - Social interaction skills

All teaching is:

- Developmentally appropriate
 - Accessible to pupils with complex needs
 - Delivered in a safe and supportive environment
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Signposting

We ensure that pupils, staff and families can access support through:

- Visual and accessible signposting
- Communication-friendly formats
- Whole-school awareness

Support includes:

- In-school wellbeing teams
 - External organisations such as MHSTS, CAMHS
-

Recognising and Identifying Warning Signs

Staff should be aware of and use their knowledge of individual pupils.

- Changes in behaviour or presentation
- Increased dysregulation or difficulty regulating
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Changes in communication
- Physical signs of harm
- Reduced engagement

For pupils with SEND, warning signs may include:

- Regression in skills
- Increased sensory behaviours
- Changes in routine tolerance

All concerns must be reported to DSLs.

Managing Disclosures

All staff must:

- Remain calm, supportive and non-judgemental
- Listen rather than question
- Prioritise safety and wellbeing
- Avoid asking “why” during distress

All concerns must:

- Be recorded on CPOMS
- Be reported to DSL

For non-verbal pupils, disclosures may present through behaviour and must be interpreted accordingly.

Supporting Parents/Carers

We work in partnership with families by:

- Providing clear, sensitive communication
- Offering guidance and reassurance
- Signposting to external support

We recognise the emotional impact on families and ensure:

- Meetings are supportive and structured
 - Information is accessible and clear
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Supporting Staff

We recognise the importance of staff wellbeing.

Staff are supported through:

- Training in mental health, trauma-informed practice and SEND
- Access to wellbeing support and supervision
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Reflective practice opportunities
- Staff wellbeing policy

Support includes:

- Wellbeing Team
 - External support services
 - Access to mental health support programmes
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Monitoring and Evaluation

- Mental health provision is monitored regularly
 - Feedback from pupils, families and staff informs development
 - The Pathway of Support is reviewed to ensure effectiveness
 - Policy reviewed annually in line with updated guidance
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Updated Guidance (Aligned with Current Expectations)

This policy reflects:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education
 - Working Together to Safeguard Children
 - SEND Code of Practice (2015)
 - DfE guidance on mental health and behaviour
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Policy Review

Approved by Trustees: March 2023

Last Reviewed: Updated for current practice

Next Review: March 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 Organization)

At Churchill Park Academy 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 strategies to promote a safe and stable environment for students affected both directly, and indirectly by mental ill health.

Please refer to Appendix A- Guidance and Advice Documents

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 SEND and Safeguarding Policy

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 SEND and mental health issues
- Provide support to students suffering mental ill health and their peers and parents/carers

Key Staff

Whilst all staff have a responsibility to promote the mental health and wellbeing of students. Key staff are, but not limited to:

- Headteacher
- Senior Leadership Team
- Designated Safeguarding Leads
- Pastoral Team
- Mental Health Aid First Aiders
- Mental Health Champions
- Nursing Team
- CAMHS, CAMHS LD, and MHSTS
- Governors/Trustees

*Staff teams and roles may/may not be present in all schools

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health or wellbeing of a student should speak to a 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 with an immediate referral to the DSL or the Head teacher. 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.

Withing school we have a Wellbeing Team to support the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. For students we have a tier system and work closely with outside agencies to ensure a holistic approach to

our students mental health and wellbeing. We currently have Blueprint for Mental Health within our school which is a self-auditing and reflection tool to ensure we offer best practise.

Understanding Mental Health

Please see Appendix B- Further Information and sources of support about common mental health issues

Teaching about Mental Health

Studies suggest that children who are experiencing or have been diagnosed with a mental health concern and/or disabilities are more likely to also have SEND.

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 curriculum offer. This is within the PSHE SEND curriculum. Emotional literacy is at the heart of our curriculum, and we offer different communication tools such as talking mats and core boards so that our non-speaking and pre-verbal students are able to communicate their thoughts and feelings.

We will ensure that we teach mental health and emotional wellbeing issues in a safe and sensitive manner appropriate to the students developmental age and ability which helps rather than harms.

Signposting

We will ensure that staff, students and parents are aware of sources of support within school and in their local community.

Please refer to Appendix C – Sources of support in school and the local community

We will display relevant sources of support in communal areas such as staff rooms and toilets and will regularly highlight sources of support to pupils within relevant parts of the curriculum and student council. We will ensure signposting is visual and easy to access and part of the school's total communication approach.

Recognising and Identifying 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 their Headteacher, DSL or Mental Health Lead.

Possible warning signs include:

- Changes in behaviours especially in our pre-verbal and non-speaking students
- 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 or engagement
 - 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

- New behaviours or increased numbers of incidents which may be more prolonged
- Difficulty in self regulating
- Change in mood
- Communicating more/less
- Low mood

Managing disclosures - *Please see Appendix D – talking to students when they make 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. In our non-speaking and pre-verbal students this may be demonstrated through changes in their behaviour.

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 using CPOMS and appropriate actions taken in accordance with data protection and confidentiality procedures

Supporting parents/ carers

We need to be sensitive in our approach when informing parents. 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, Social Worker.
- 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 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.

Supporting Staff

We recognise the importance and value of the wellbeing of our staff and leaders, particularly working with SEND students and any student receiving support for their mental health. 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 in order to enable them to keep pupils safe. We encourage all staff and leaders to seek advice or support in looking after and caring for themselves this maybe through the Wellbeing Team, Norfolk Support Line, Remploy or the Anna Freud Centre. We offer 1:1 support where requested, stress action plans, Schools Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) Personal Toolkit and Maximus Access to Work Mental Health Support Service (MHSS).

Appendix A: 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 (2020)

[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 B: Further information and sources of support about common mental health issues

Prevalence of Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Issues¹

- 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.

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 of 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](http://www.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

¹ Source: [Young Minds](#)

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: 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 Connors (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](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 C : Sources or support in school and in the local community

- Key colleagues– Headteacher / Assistant Head / Mental Health Champion/ DSLs/ Pastoral Team
- E.g. SSSFN website : Services Directory
- School Council
- E.g. Norfolk Steps - All staff (SSSfN)are trained in Step On, and increasingly in our primary schools too, to recognise triggers and to look at roots and fruits and how to respond

Local Support

- The [Wellbeing Service](#) can support you in the first steps to make changes in your life to manage your levels of stress, as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression
- The [Reading Well Books on Prescription](#) scheme at Norfolk libraries offers self-help books that are recommended by healthcare professionals and mood-boosting books
- [Norfolk and Waveney Mind](#) offers services including supported housing, crisis helplines, drop-in centres, employment and training schemes, counselling and befriending.
- For social care advice the [Norfolk Community Advice Network](#) may be able to help

- Don't forget the benefits that being active can have for your wellbeing. Find out what support is available locally to [improve your fitness level](#) or visit [NHS Choices](#) for more tips, online tools and general advice about mental wellbeing and mental health.
- [Rethink - Mental Health Information](#)
- [MindEd](#) - Safe and reliable mental health advice for older people and those who care for them
- Find mental health advice and support for 0-25 year-olds in Norfolk, on the NHS Just One Norfolk website.

Appendix D: 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 they have a problem to 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.