



Ormiston Academies Trust

**Ormiston Victory Academy**



## **Mental Health Policy**

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Author	Louise Kay – OAT Safeguarding
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## OAT Mental Health Policy

‘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 Ormiston Academies Trust, we aim to promote positive mental health for every member of staff and all students. We pursue this aim by adopting both a whole academy approach 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. In an average classroom, three children will be suffering from a diagnosable mental health issue. By developing and implementing practical and effective mental health policies and procedures. We aim to promote a safe environment for students affected both directly and indirectly by mental ill health.

### 1. Scope

This policy 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, volunteers and governors.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The OAT Directory of Mental Health ([OAT Directory of Mental Health](#))
- Medical policy in cases where a student’s mental health is linked to a specific medical issue.
- SEND policy where a student has an identified special educational need.
- The Child Protection and Safeguarding policy.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018
- Working together to safeguarding children

### 2. Policy Aims

- 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 experiencing mental ill health and their peers and parents or carers
- Provide support to staff experiencing mental ill health.

### **3. Lead Members of Staff**

Whilst all staff have a responsibility to promote the mental health of students, the following staff have a specific responsibility:

- Dr Dawn Allen – Mental Health Lead
- Dr Dawn Allen – Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Mrs Trish Phillips – Mental Health Governor

Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health or wellbeing of a student should speak to the Mental Health Lead 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 designated safeguarding lead. If the student presents a medical emergency then the normal procedures for medical emergencies should be followed, including alerting first aid staff and contacting the emergency services if necessary.

Where a referral to CAMHS is appropriate, this will be led and managed by the Mental Health Lead/DSL in discussion with the SENCO/Pastoral team.

### **4. Individual Care Plans**

It is often helpful to draw up an individual care plan for pupils causing concern or who receive a diagnosis in respect of their mental health. This could be drawn up involving the student, the parents, pastoral team and relevant health professionals. This can include:

- Details of a student's mental health condition
- Special requirements and risk assessment
- Medication and any side effects
- What to do and who to contact in an emergency
- The role the academy can play in supporting

### **5. The curriculum**

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 developmental PSHE curriculum via assemblies, citizenship programme and SMSC lessons.

The specific content of lessons will be determined by the specific needs of the cohort being taught, 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.

### **6. Signposting**

At Ormiston Victory Academy we will ensure that staff, students and parents are aware of sources of support within school and in the local community, as well as what support is available within our academy and local community, who it is aimed at and how to access it.

We will display relevant sources of support in areas such as classrooms, common areas, toilets and signpost on the academy website. We will also regularly 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

Academy 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 Dr Dawn Allen, our Mental Health Lead

### 7. Possible warning signs:

For further information about mental health conditions and warning signs please refer to the OAT Mental Health Directory.

### 8. 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.

All disclosures should be recorded and held on the student's confidential safeguarding file. This record should include:

- Date and time
- 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 Mental Health Lead/DSL, Dr Dawn Allen, who will store the record appropriately and offer support and advice about next steps.

### 9. Confidentiality

At Ormiston Victory academy we will be honest with regard to the issue of confidentiality. If it is necessary for us to pass our concerns about a student on, then we will discuss with the student:

- 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 student without first telling them. 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.

Staff will always share disclosures with a colleague, usually the Mental Health Lead/DSL, Dr Dawn Allen This helps to safeguard our own emotional wellbeing as we are no longer solely responsible for the student, it ensures continuity of care in our absence; and it provides an extra source of ideas and support. We should explain this to the student and discuss with them who it would be most appropriate and helpful to share this information with.

Parents must always be informed if there is an immediate risk of significant harm; however students may choose to tell their parents themselves. If this is the case, the student should be given 24 hours (where it is deemed that to delay this is safe) to share this information before the academy contacts parents. We should always give students the option of us informing parents for them or with them.

If a child gives us reason to believe that there may be underlying child protection issues, parents should not be informed, but the Designated Safeguard Lead (DSL) Dr Dawn Allen, must be informed immediately.

## 10. Working with Parents

Where it is deemed appropriate to inform parents, we need to be sensitive in our 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.
- Where should the meeting happen? At school, at their home or somewhere neutral
- 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 a parent/carer to learn of their child's issues and they may respond with anger, fear or upset during the first conversation. We will be accepting of this and give the parent time to reflect on the information they have received.

We will always 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 you're sharing. Sharing sources of further support aimed specifically at parents can also be helpful too, e.g. parent 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 parents often have many questions as they process the information. Finish each meeting with agreed next steps and always keep a brief record of the meeting on the child's confidential record.

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
- Make our mental health policy easily accessible to parents
- Share ideas about how parents can support positive mental health in their children through our regular information evenings
- Keep parents informed about the mental health topics their children are learning about in PSHE and share ideas for extending and exploring this learning at home

## 11. 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 affected by mental health 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

## 12. 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.

## Appendix I – Further advice and guidance for staff in talking to students who 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.

### 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 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.