

MENTAL HEALTH POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Terminology:

For the purposes of this policy/document the term mental health difficulties includes severe stress, anxiety and panic attacks as well as diagnosed mental health difficulties such as depression, manic depression, obsessions, phobias, eating disorders and schizophrenia. Many problems are temporary and will respond to periods of rest, counselling and/or medication. Others are longer term and the person may experience intermittent periods of good and poor health.

The Mind website can provide more information on mental health difficulties.
<http://www.mind.org.uk/>

2. Purpose of the policy:

The purpose of this policy is to set out procedures to be followed in dealing with students with mental health issues and to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.

3. Policy:

- 3.1 This policy relates to learners and prospective learners. Staff mental health issues are managed through Personnel policies and procedures, including those relating to sickness and stress.
- 3.2 Stanmore College is committed to widening participation and equality of opportunities for all, which includes support for people with disabilities, including those with mental health needs. This policy aims to safeguard and promote the particular welfare of students with mental health needs as well as ensuring the health and safety of all who learn, work or visit the College.
- 3.3 The most common symptoms of mental illness are depression and withdrawal. A very small minority may exhibit violence or anti-social behaviour such as physical aggression or self-harm. Great care must be taken in attributing behaviour to illness. Diagnosis is a matter for mental health professionals outside of College and is based on a range of symptoms observed and verified over a period of time.
- 3.4 Many learners who are dealing with mental illness manage this in a way that does not affect their studies and in many cases the College will not be aware they are ill. However the College needs effective procedures to assist and support learners whose studies are affected by their mental illness. These learners may require some adaptation to their mode/frequency of attendance and course work deadlines and other aspects of their course. Staff need to be aware that for learners with mental health issues the level of stress they can handle without it

interfering with their day to day life could be critical. Mutual expectations need to be negotiated on an individual basis.

- 3.5 The College will endeavour, through its marketing materials and interview processes, to ensure that prospective learners feel confident enough to declare their mental health needs when choosing and starting a course.
- 3.6 The Specialist Support Manager with specific responsibility for in-class support work will assess the needs of these learners, where necessary seeking advice from mental health professionals outside college, to ensure that college is a suitable environment for the prospective learner.
- 3.7 The College will use the LSC additional support funding budget to provide the required resources to support learners with mental health needs. The Specialist Support Manager will regularly review the support to ensure it continues to be adequate.
- 3.8 The College recognises that some learners may choose not to disclose their mental health needs or may not wish the College to contact their professional carers outside college. In these cases we respect their right to confidentiality but where health and safety cannot be assured, the offer of a College place may not be possible. Where serious mental health issues come to light only after the applicant has started College, the student may need to have “time out”(study at home) while the College seeks professional advice about whether or not the college environment is suitable. See case studies in appendix (i).
- 3.9 If a learner’s behaviour strongly suggests that they present a danger to themselves or others, a member of Senior Management should attend urgently and if necessary call on the support of the police to contain the situation. Personal safety of all concerned must be paramount.
- 3.10 All College staff are asked to familiarise themselves with the procedures attached to this policy and to attend staff training on these issues which will take place during staff induction. All staff who act as Duty Principal in the evenings and on Saturdays will receive appropriate training.
- 3.11 If there is a mental health issue with a student, the appropriate Year Head (16-19), the Programme Co-ordinator (19+) working with the student will consult any appropriate professionals and/or the College counsellor (if they have been working with the student) and any other appropriate staff involved in the particular case to come to a joint decision regarding the student’s safety and wellbeing as well as the student’s academic programme.
- 3.12 The Director of Student Services is responsible for the annual monitoring of procedure and reporting to the Health and Safety Committee whether any alterations may need to be made to the policy and procedures. Monitoring will focus on staff and learner awareness of the policy and on how well the procedures are working in themselves and in relation to other College policies.
- 3.13 Other related policies: Disability Statement; Equality and Diversity Policy; Health and Safety Policy; Child Protection Policy; Student Disciplinary Procedure.

4. Procedures for dealing with mental health concerns

4.1 *Applicants who inform staff about their mental health needs*

- i) The College's application form, interviewing procedures, and learning agreement all give an opportunity for prospective learners to tell us about any disability or learning difficulty they may have.
- ii) Where a disability (including mental ill health) is noted, the applicant is referred for an interview with the Specialist Support Manager.
- iii) The Specialist Support Manager interviews the prospective learner with a view to arranging any additional support that may be needed by the individual. The College Disability Statement describes this process in more detail.
- iv) Where the applicant discloses mental health needs, the Specialist Support Manager will discuss with the applicant what arrangements are already in place outside College to support the applicant. These may include medication, GP support, Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) or social worker support, psychiatric outpatient appointments and counselling/psychotherapy.
- v) In some cases, and always where there is a history of violence or self-harm, the Specialist Support Manager will obtain the applicant's permission to write to the GP or psychiatrist to obtain/confirm details about the applicant's health, and/or to arrange an on-going link with the applicant's supporters outside College. The GP or support worker or psychiatrist will be asked for a written assessment of the learner's suitability for attendance at a FE college, but College staff are expected to observe the requirements and safe systems of work resulting from the assessment. The Specialist Support Manager will carry out a risk assessment on behalf of the College.
- vi) The Specialist Support Manager will discuss with the applicant how any stress they might experience at College could be managed. This could involve preliminary meetings with personal tutor or lecturers, or a referral for counselling in College. Disclosure should always be with the consent of the applicant and on a need-to-know basis. It should focus on College support for the learner, not on the details of diagnosis. However, relevant College staff must be aware of any risks. College staff must not discuss the applicant's mental health with any one other than those agreed by the applicant.
- vii) If an applicant chooses not to notify the College about their mental health needs, or does not wish to discuss them in any detail, or does not want to give permission for the Specialist Support Manager to contact their GP or psychiatrist, we respect their right to confidentiality. However, this may affect the ability of the College to provide appropriate support. The success of the learning programme may depend on the full exchange of relevant information between the College and the learner's supporter(s) outside College. Where this has not happened, the offer of a College place may not be possible.

4.2 Learners who give some cause for concern

- i) Any member of staff may encounter behaviour in a learner that gives cause for concern. Sometimes this happens because the learner tells the member of staff about a problem; in other cases the staff member observes unusual behaviour. A checklist of behavioural indicators is attached (Appendix i) but they should never be taken in isolation as they can be misleading. However, where a member of staff feels concerned, and particularly where he /she notes other staff or learners have a similar reaction to the learner's behaviour, the member of staff should take his/her concerns seriously.
- ii) The member of staff should seek advice from the Specialist Support Manager to see if concerns were raised at the application stage or on the enrolment form. The Specialist Support Manager will help the member of staff decide on the next step, which might include offering the learner an appointment with a counsellor, or continuing to support the member of staff in his/her conversations with the learner.
- iii) **The immediate sympathy and support of the person to whom the learner has turned is initially the most useful action.** However, it is important that tutorial and other staff do not raise unrealistic expectations about their availability to students. Never give a personal phone number. Staff need to know when to bring in others eg the Counsellor or Year Head. There may even be a Child Protection issue.

4.3 Learners who give cause for urgent concern

Response to a serious incident or series of incidents

- i) If a learner's behaviour suggests that they present a danger to themselves or others, or is seriously disruptive, an appropriate Senior Manager will attend with another member of staff to contain the situation. Personal safety of all concerned must be paramount. No member of staff should be left alone with the learner.
- ii) Initially it may be unclear whether or not this is a situation related to the mental health of the learner. It may be, or appear to be, a breach of discipline. If necessary the learner should be suspended while an investigation takes place.
- iii) If it becomes clear that an incident is causing immediate serious danger to other site users, then the Senior Manager should call the police.
- iv) Where the danger recedes substantially, and the learner is cooperative, the Senior Manager may not need to call the police but can make clear arrangements for family or reliable friends to take the learner home or to hospital. In the meantime, the Senior Manager needs to ensure that the learner is accompanied and is in a safe place in College. The safe location and accompanying person will vary depending on what has happened and who is available.

- v) The Senior Manager should make a clear record for the learner's file, and copy it to the Vice Principal (Curriculum) who will agree a plan of further action including arrangements for continuation of study and will consult with the relevant Senior Manager.
- vi) Staff dealing with students with mental health problems, or who have been affected by an incident, may wish to talk this over with a counsellor in College.

Continuation of study following a serious incident or series of incidents

- i) The Head of Year will write to the GP/Psychiatrist and to the learner, explaining this. The letter will make clear that the learner is NOT being suspended for disciplinary reasons, but that a "time-out" period is necessary in order to make sure that adequate support can be provided in College for the learner to continue the course. "Time out" should be thought of as a negotiated period of time away from course attendance, to allow learners to regain their physical and mental energy and to return to College when their coping strategies are adequate to meet the demands of College study.
- ii) If a learner wishes to return to College following a serious incident or a series of incidents raising grave concern, such return requires the positive assessment of the learner's GP or psychiatrist.
- iii) If/when the learner returns the personal tutor/Course Manager should work with the Specialist Support Manager to ensure appropriate support is in place. There should be regular reviews of the situation through meetings involving learner, personal tutor, Specialist Support Manager, Year Head, Course Manager and possibly an outside supporter.

General guidelines for staff supporting learners with mental health difficulties

The purpose of this Appendix to the Mental Health Policy and Procedures is to give basic guidance to tutors and mentors and other staff who do not have specific responsibilities under the Mental Health Policy and Procedures, but who teach or work with learners who may have mental health difficulties.

In deciding whether there may be a mental health difficulty, it may be useful to consider some of the following questions:

- Has the learner told you they have a problem?
- Have there been any significant changes in the learner's appearance?
- Does the learner smell any different (e.g. can you smell alcohol or cannabis)?
- How does the learner sound? (e.g. flat, agitated, very quiet, very loud)
- Has the mood of the learner recently changed a lot from your previous experiences with them? (e.g. moods vary up and down, miserable, tired a lot)
- Have others expressed concern about the learner?
- Have there been recent changes in the learner's behaviour?
- How long has the learner been feeling or behaving like this? (everyone can have bad days, but if it goes on for weeks/months there may be a problem).

If the answer to some of the above questions is yes, then the following guidance may be useful in approaching the learner:

- Do not avoid the situation or pretend nothing is wrong, as this could make the problem worse and persist for longer.
- Approach the learner in a sympathetic and understanding way. Remember to be sensitive to issues relating to sexuality, race, religion, culture and gender.
- **If you simply ask the learner how they are**, this may provide them with an opportunity to discuss their concerns with you.
- Be prepared to listen and give some time if you can. If there are constraints on your time, inform the learner from the start that this is the case.
- Avoid using unhelpful comments like 'pull yourself together'.
- Being open and honest in your initial contact will help to develop trust.
- If you feel you can, do support the learner, but be clear about your role and its boundaries. Do not give your phone number or address to the learner.

When a learner does not want to talk but you are concerned

- It is extremely difficult to help someone with a mental health problem unless they are ready to admit they have one. If the learner is not ready to accept help or talk about their problem, do not ask intrusive questions. Always respect the right of the learner if they do not wish to discuss things.
- Offer an open invitation to the learner to come back and talk to you in the future. When you see them again, continue to ask how they are and reiterate that they can talk to you. Give them information about other people they could talk to.
- However, if you are still very concerned about a learner who has refused help, speak to the Specialist Support Manager for advice.

When a learner does want to talk

- If you do feel able to handle an initial discussion with the learner yourself, you might:

- Ask the learner how they have handled similar difficulties in the past, highlighting what has and has not worked
- Explore with the learner what changes they would like to make to enable them to continue with their studies
- Break academic tasks down into shorter term and more manageable goals
- Encourage them to reconnect with possible supporters outside College e.g. their social worker or CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse)
- Try not to give advice that is not within the boundaries of your role, but rather listen and encourage the learner to seek the appropriate help through their GP or by making an appointment for counselling in College.
- It can be extremely stressful and time-consuming helping a learner with mental health problems. It is important to remember to look after yourself and seek appropriate support and help from others. The College counsellors can help you with this.

Handling crisis situations:

Most of the time the steps outlined above are sufficient. Occasionally, however, the learner concerned may reach a point of crisis when their feelings have become outside their control. These emotions might express themselves in a number of ways, for example self-harming, talking about suicide or having persistent suicidal thoughts, having no sense of reality and exhibiting behaviour that is out of character. However, it is important to emphasise two points:

- People experiencing mental health problems are very rarely violent towards others; and
- Crisis situations are extremely rare and often occur in private rather than in public.

In all crisis situations, assuring your safety and that of others, including the person involved, is paramount. These guidance notes may help you:

- Try to remain calm and adopt a non-threatening approach (in most cases calm behaviour by others is all that is required).
- Do not approach the learner from behind without warning, nor stare at them, as this could be interpreted as threatening.
- If there are other learners about, calmly ask them to leave the area.
- Some situations can be very frightening and distressing. If you do not feel confident to approach the learner, then go and get help.
- If you stay with the learner, give them space, avoid touching them, explain your actions before you act and continue to reassure them, without being patronising, about what is happening.
- Take threats of suicide seriously - do not ignore them - it is a myth that 'those who talk about it don't do it'.
- If the situation does not settle quickly, ensure a member of Senior Management is contacted.

Confidentiality

Staff should make themselves familiar with the College Data Protection Policy and bear this in mind when dealing with learners who have or may have mental health problems.

The main points of this policy are that data should:

- Be obtained and processed fairly and lawfully and shall not be processed unless certain conditions are met.
- Be obtained for a specified and lawful purpose and shall not be processed in any manner incompatible with that purpose.

- Be adequate, relevant and not excessive for those purposes.
- Be accurate and kept up to date.
- Not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose.
- Be processed in accordance with the data subject's rights.
- Be kept safe from unauthorised access, accidental loss or destruction.
- Not be transferred to a country outside the European Economic Area, unless that country has equivalent levels of protection for personal data.

Appendix (ii)

Self Harm

Deliberate harm may be impulsive or carried out in a controlled, methodical way, often planned in advance. It is a mechanism for coping with overwhelming feelings.

1. Signs/symptoms of self-harm

- Cutting - scars, cuts
- burning
- scratching
- bruising
- carving words on skin
- breaking bones
- piercing skin with a sharp object- keeping sharp objects
- head banging
- spending lots of time alone
- wearing long sleeves in hot weather
- claiming to have frequent accidents

2. Inappropriate behaviour

It is inappropriate for self harm to take place in any public place and to involve anyone else.

3. Support

If staff come across a student who is self-harming/has self-harmed then it is important for the student to be given a sterile pack through Student Services

Things to consider:

Is it an emergency that needs treatment?

Are they able to use a pack and who needs to assist?

Are there issues around child protection and the duty of care?

How does it fit or conflict with other college policies?

Who should be informed?

4. What should staff do?

- Assess the situation to determine whether immediate treatment is required or whether the emergency services should be contacted
- Be supportive and understanding but establish boundaries. (Explain that the student may need to talk to someone with more experience in self harm/ counselling)
- Make sure the student is given a sterile pack - see above
- Encourage the student to see a College counsellor as soon as possible and/or disclose to parents/doctor

FLOW CHART FOR PROCEDURES FOR MENTAL HEALTH CONCERN

