15 Mental health promotion policy

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How to use this policy

Schools can play a major part in influencing the mental health of both students and staff. Hence there is a need to not only take steps to assist those with mental health problems but also to create an environment that builds and supports good mental health. This policy provides concrete suggestions for schools to plan and implement activities, both in and out of the classroom, known to promote good mental health.

It is recommended that a Mental Health Promotion Committee, consisting of staff and student representatives, be formed to assist in ideas for implementation of the Policy overall and for organising mental health promoting activities.

As for other policies in this Handbook, the Policy can be incorporated into school values and rules, with a rotating series of posters around the school to remind students and staff of things they can do to keep mentally healthy. It is recommended that students be encouraged, perhaps via quarterly competitions, to submit ideas for such reminders.

[INSERT name of school] Mental health promotion policy

Rationale

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2004) as: “a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. As outlined by Koushede and Donovan (2020), a prosperous and sustainable society requires a mentally healthy population. That is, an individual’s mental health affects cognition and ability to learn, which in turn affect educational attainment and employment. Furthermore, mental health problems have been shown to be important risk factors for unintentional and intentional injury and the risk of marginalisation (WHO, 2004). Overall, good mental health is profoundly important to quality of life and the capacity to cope with life’s ups and downs; it is also protective

against physical illness, social inequalities and unhealthy lifestyles (UK Faculty of Public Health & The Mental Health Foundation, 2016; Huppert, 2014).

Schools are an important setting for mental health promotion to prevent mental health problems (Power et al., 2008), enhance quality of life and contribute to the social and economic development of individuals, communities and nations (WHO, 2000; Anwar-McHenry et al., 2016). This is because many mental health problems and disorders have a peak age onset in childhood or adolescence (McGorry et al., 2007), and young people spend almost half their waking lives at school. Hence, their experiences and relationships at school have a substantial impact on their wellbeing, influencing both behaviour and academic performance (Bourke, 2003). In line with these findings, and mindful of the crucial role that schools play in young people's lives, having and acting on a mental health promotion policy should be a priority for schools around the globe.

One approach for promoting student and staff mental health and wellbeing in schools is the three domains of the *Act-Belong-Commit* (or *ABC for Mental Health*) campaign: *Act* refers to keeping active physically, socially, mentally and spiritually; *Belong* involves keeping connected to friends and family, being involved in groups, or joining in local community activities; *Commit* refers to a commitment to an interest or a cause, such as volunteering, learning a new skill or challenging oneself, and setting goals to achieve these commitments (Donovan & Anwar-McHenry, 2014).

Purpose

The purpose of the Mental Health Promotion Policy is to provide a framework to enable the embedding of mental health promotion campaigns (such as the above *Act-Belong-Commit Campaign*) within the classroom, the school environment and the whole school community in order to build and maintain the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff and prevent the onset of mental health problems.

The **[INSERT name of school]** Mental Health Promotion Policy aims to encourage students to adopt mentally healthy behaviours early in life, build resilience so they can cope better with problems and stress, reduce stigma around mental illness and increase openness about discussing mental health. At the same time, the Policy aims to build the capacity of school staff to create mentally healthy school environments and foster partnerships between schools and their communities.

Scope

The Mental Health Promotion Schools Policy provides directions for equipping all school staff with the guidance, resources and training for translating the principles and ethos of mental health promotion into the whole school

setting, and involving all members of the school community and, where applicable, local community organisations.

[INSERT specific roles and responsibilities of individuals or teams]

Policy statement

[INSERT name of school] will undertake activities to ensure that students and staff become more proactive about their mental health.

[INSERT name of school] will facilitate and undertake activities that aim to strengthen and maintain student and staff mental health.

[INSERT name of school] will facilitate and undertake activities to build and maintain student and staff knowledge of and participation in activities that strengthen mental health and wellbeing.

[INSERT name of school] will form and provide resource support for a Mental Health Promotion Committee, including representatives of students, teaching and non-teaching staff, and parents, that will be responsible for implementing mental health promotion activities in the school.

[INSERT name of school] will support this Committee to seek advice and assistance from relevant authorities and organisations already involved in mental health promotion activities in their locality/state/nation (for example, *Five Ways to Wellbeing* in the UK; *Act-Belong-Commit* in Australia; *ABC for Mental Sundhed* in Nordic countries).

In cooperation with these expert sources, [INSERT name of school] will draw up a plan of activities on an annual basis.

In cooperation with these expert sources, [INSERT name of school] will also decide on measures of impact on an annual basis (including surveys of students and staff to measure awareness and adoption of behaviours that strengthen mental health).

[INSERT name of school] will facilitate all staff, teaching and non-teaching, to attend workshops or access online mental health promotion professional learning.

[INSERT name of school] will use the WHO Guidelines for Health Promoting Schools to embed mental health promotion principles and practices into the school curriculum, the school environment, and the community in which the school is located (see Anwar-McHenry et al., 2016).

[INSERT name of school] will ensure that mental health promoting activities involve active participation by students and teachers (rather than simply passive instructions).

[INSERT name of school] will ensure parents are kept fully informed of the school's commitment to mental health promotion and the activities undertaken by the school for that purpose.

[INSERT name of school] will foster the sustainability of mental health promotion activities in the school (for example, via measures such as rotation

and renewal of committee members, competitions and awards for active participation, annual calls for new ideas, or variations on activities).

Rating of evidence base

Figure 15.1. Mental Health Promotion Rating of Evidence.

Authorship

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[INSERT RELEVANT STAFF MEMBERS]

Related policy and documents

Safety policy

Counselling policy

Anti-bullying and discrimination policy

Staff belonging policy

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS]

Date of ratification

This policy was ratified on the [INSERT DATE].

Date of review

This policy will be reviewed by [INSERT DATE].

Recommended reading

Anwar-McHenry, J., Donovan, R. J., Nicholas, A., Kerrigan, S., Francas, S., & Phan, T. Implementing a mentally healthy schools framework based on the population wide Act-Belong-Commit mental health promotion campaign. *Health Education*, 116 (6), 561–579.

Act-Belong-Commit: <https://www.actbelongcommit.org.au/>

ABC for Mental Sundhed (Denmark): <http://www.abcmentalsundhed.dk/>

Five ways to wellbeing: <http://www.neweconomics.org/>

Koushede, V., & Donovan, R. J. (2020). The application of salutogenesis to communitywide mental health promotion: The Act-Belong-Commit/ABC's of Mental Health Campaign and framework. In M. Mittelmarm (Ed.), *The handbook of salutogenesis* (2nd Edition). Springer.

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Bourke, L. (2003). Toward understanding youth suicide in an Australian rural community. *Social Science and Medicine*, 57(12), 2355–2365.

Donovan, R., & Anwar-McHenry, J. (2014). Act-Belong-Commit: Lifestyle medicine for keeping mentally healthy. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 10(3), 193–199.

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McGorry, P., Purcell, R., Hickie, I., & Jorm, A. (2007). Investing in youth mental health is a best buy. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 187(7), S5–S7.

- Power, M., Cleary, D., & Fitzpatrick, C. (2008). Mental health promotion in Irish schools: A selective review. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 1(1), 5–15.
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- World Health Organization [WHO]. (2004). *Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice: Summary report*. World Health Organisation.