GORDON'S SCHOOL

MENTAL HEALTH POLICY

The core principle that guides everything we do is **Putting Students First.**

1.   Introduction

This policy sets out Gordon's School's approach to promoting positive social and emotional well-being for students in school and recognising the mental health problems of students in more serious difficulty. This policy is for students, parents/carers and staff and is consistent with the school's overall aims and values. Please see also the Gordon's School Policies on Self-Harm and Eating Disorders.

2.   Background information

Experiencing some level of mental health challenge in life is totally normal. The emotional and physical transitions involved in growing up can be stressful for all young people, and even completely predictable life changes, such as moving up through school years can be challenging and can affect learning. The hormonal shifts of adolescence bring profound emotional, intellectual and physical changes which shake the sense of self identity and relationships. The 'teenage brain' has less ability to regulate emotion and impulse and feel empathy than in childhood. Added to these 'normal' pressures we have the accelerating pace of social change, including the rise of IT and social media, with associated problems of isolation, dependency, and cyberbullying.

The statistics on mental health problems in the young are alarming:

- Half of lifetime mental illness starts by the age of 14
- 1 in 10 children and young people have a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder and/or emotional and behaviour problems (often the same children) and around one in seven has less severe problems that interfere with their development and learning.
- Anti-social behaviour and conduct disorder affect over five per cent of children, particularly boys, while anxiety and depression affect four per cent.
- About 7% of children have attempted suicide by the age of 17 and almost one in four say they have self-harmed in the past year, according to a paper in the British Journal of Psychiatry, and experts say the figures could rise as a result of the pandemic.
- In 2018, 759 young people took their own life in the UK and Republic of Ireland, data shows. In the UK, suicide rates among young people have been increasing in recent years. The suicide rate for young females is now at its highest rate on record.

3.   Promoting positive social and emotional well-being for students in school – a universal approach

Social and emotional well-being refers to a state of positive mental health and wellness. It involves a sense of optimism, confidence, happiness, clarity, self-worth, achievement, having a sense of purpose, engagement, having good relationships with others and understanding oneself. The following are ways in which Gordon's School are actively promoting this well-being of our students.

- PSHE curriculum that combines a positive focus on well-being, strengths and healthy choices with specific information on problems and issues that may present at some point in life.
- Robust policies and practice in areas such as behaviour, anti-bullying and diversity that underpin our school values and ensure a safe environment for all students.
- Comprehensive pastoral and tutorial system that supports everyone as well as creating a supportive school and classroom climate.
- Assembly programme which addresses Mental Health, both specifically and as part of wider issues such as Addiction, Drugs and Alcohol use.
- Peer mentoring programme allowing students to support others and model positive behaviours. There are two peer mentors per house, one each from years 9 and 10.
- 'Student Voice'. This is a programme to allow genuine consultation and involvement of all students in making decisions about school life. It allows students to feel a connection to school, whilst learning to take responsibility, building social skills and a sense of self.
- Staff development and training to help staff understand the risk factors to well-being and raise awareness about mental health problems and the school's role in intervening early.
- Ensuring open communication between school, parents/carers and students via formal (parent's evenings, presentations) and informal (conversations) means.
- Helping all students through predictable change and transitions
- Inclusive and varied Co-Curricular offering to all Students to aid relaxation, physical fitness, confidence and self-esteem.

- Celebrating, sharing and rewarding everyday successes and achievements. Examples of this in school include good comments and postcards home, InterHouse competitions, specific awards and trophies.

4.   Tackling the Mental Health Problems of students in more serious difficulty – a targeted approach

Mental Health Problems refer to the wide range of mental health, emotional and social challenges, difficulties, conditions and illnesses that can affect students. The following is a brief and certainly not exhaustive list of such Mental Health problems.

Anxiety disorders are the most common of the childhood disorders. These young people experience excessive fear, worry, or uneasiness that interferes with their daily lives. Anxiety disorders include:

- Phobia – an unrealistic and overwhelming fear of some object or situation,
- Generalised anxiety disorder – a pattern of excessive and unrealistic worry not attributable to any recent experience,
- Panic disorder – frightening panic attacks, with physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat and dizziness,
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder – being trapped in a pattern of repeated thoughts and behaviours, e.g., counting or hand washing.

Depression is marked by changes in emotion (withdrawn, sad, tearful, feelings of worthlessness), motivation (schoolwork declines, shows little interest in play), physical well-being (changes in appetite and sleep, vague physical complaints), thoughts (belief that they are ugly/unable to do anything right/ the world is hopeless).

Bipolar Depression is marked by exaggerated mood swings between extreme lows and highs.

Conduct Disorders cause children to act out their feelings or impulses towards others in destructive ways, often violating the rights of others and flouting any rules.

Eating Disorders can be life threatening and include Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia and Binge Eating Disorder.

Self-Harm is where someone does something to purposely harm him or herself, for example, cutting. People self-harm for a number of reasons, which include managing difficult emotions or because of an underlying mental health issue.

Gordon's School targeted approach to tackling such Mental Health problems is as follows;

- Robust policies and practice in Mental Health problems such as Eating Disorders and Self harm.
- Individual Welfare Plans created for Students and subsequently facilitated and monitored by a nominated member of the House Staff.
- Social Emotional Mental Health Plans created for Students and subsequently facilitated and monitored by a nominated Pastoral Mentor.
- The Student may have a Red Card, so they can exit a lesson to go to a designated safe space within school. The member of staff should email the school office.
- Engaging with external providers of Mental Health advice, treatment and support such as Eikon, CAMHS, Educational Psychologists, the Surrey School Nursing service and (for Residential Boarders only) the School GP.
- School Counselling Service running 3 days per week, offering a total of 20 Counselling Sessions per week. Students can self-refer or be referred by any member of Staff (with their consent).
- Staff development and training to raise awareness of early warning signs, initiate early intervention and manage/support the student.
- Staff Counselling Supervision Service aimed at supporting and empowering Staff to care for their Student's Mental Health needs.
- Robust Risk Assessments in place for Students with complex Mental Health needs that could threaten their safety in School.
- Clear plans and pathways for referral, monitoring, documenting and communication of all Student interventions as appropriate.

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