

# Mental Health Awareness Policy

## Our school Mission Statement

St. Aidan's C.B.S. promotes the Edmund Rice Charter through nurturing *faith*, promoting *partnership*, excelling in *teaching*, creating *community* and inspiring *leadership*.



## Our school

St. Aidan's C.B.S. is a voluntary secondary school for boys. Located in north Dublin, we currently have an enrolment of over 700 students.

## Rationale

- St. Aidan's CBS is committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of our students and staff.
- Our culture is supportive, caring, and respectful. We encourage students to be open and we want each student to have their voice heard.
- St. Aidan's CBS acknowledges that everyone experiences different life challenges, and that each of us may need help to cope with them sometimes.
- We understand that anyone and everyone may need additional emotional support. At our school, positive mental health is everybody's responsibility. We all have a role to play.

## **Policy Aims**

- The aim of our policy is to demonstrate our commitment to the mental health of our staff and students.
- St. Aidan's CBS will always:
  - Help students to understand their emotions and experiences better.
  - Ensure our students feel comfortable sharing any concerns and worries.
  - Help students to form and maintain relationships.
  - Encourage students to be confident and help to promote their self-esteem.
  - Help students to develop resilience and ways of coping with setbacks.We will always promote a healthy environment by:

- i.Promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing in all students and staff.
- ii.Celebrating both academic and non-academic achievements.
- iii.Promoting our school values and encouraging a sense of belonging and community.
- iv.Providing opportunities to develop a sense of worth and to reflect.
- v.Promoting our students' voices and giving them the opportunity to participate in decision making.
- vi.Celebrating each student for who they are and making every student feel valued and respected.
- vii.Adopting a whole school approach to mental health and providing support to any student that needs it.
- viii.Raising awareness amongst staff and students about mental health issues and their signs and symptoms.
- ix.Enabling staff to respond to early warning signs of mental-ill health in students.
- x.Supporting staff who are struggling with their mental health.

## **Key Staff Members**

All staff members have a responsibility to promote the mental health of students and each other. However, certain staff members have a specific role in the process.

These are:

- Our Designated Liaison Persons: T. Shannon & A.M. Dunne.
- Pastoral/Support Staff: F. Macken & K. McGrath.
- SENCO: A.M. Dunne.

If a member of staff is concerned about the mental health and wellbeing of a student, then in the first instance they should speak to any of the above mentioned staff.

If a child presents a medical emergency, then relevant procedures will be followed as per the St. Aidan's Health & Safety Statement.

## **Whole School Approach**

We take a whole school approach towards the mental health of our students. This means working with parents and carers and with other agencies and partners, where necessary. This can include celebrating Mental Health Awareness Week in the school community alongside official Mental Health Awareness Week globally.

## **Teaching about Mental Health**

Our SPHE and Wellbeing curriculum are developed to give students the skills, knowledge, and understanding they need to keep themselves mentally healthy. This includes resilience techniques and training.

We will regularly review our SPHE and Wellbeing curriculum and lesson content to ensure that they are meeting the aims outlined in this policy. We will also implement this policy into other subject curriculum at all stages, where necessary, to provide students with strategies to help keep them mentally well.

## **Support and the Local Community**

We have a range of supports available in St. Aidan's CBS for any students struggling, as listed below:

- The Amber Group: This is a student-led group that aims to promote good mental health throughout the school. The group often organises events and activities for their fellow students throughout the school year as well as inviting guest speakers into the school.
- Counselling Service: The school provides counselling to any and all students that might require it. The school offers support from both a Guidance Counsellor (K. McGrath) and an Adolescent Psychotherapist (F. Macken). Appointments/referrals can be arranged through the student's respective Year Heads or Deputy Principals.
- The school has an exceptional Special Educational Needs (SEN) Department that offers support to any students that might be struggling academically, socially or emotionally.
- The school delivers the "Get Up Stand Up" programme to groups of First year students throughout the year. This programme aims to improve the social skills of adolescents, particularly when working in small groups.
- The school can offer the "Walk in my Shoes" programme which is a one-week mental health awareness placement, conducted by clinical staff from St Patrick's Mental Health Services.

There are also a lot of support networks available for young people in the local community. This includes places such as:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS): A service that provides assessment and treatment for young people and their families who are experiencing mental health difficulties.
- Headspace: A global leader in mindfulness and meditation through its app and online content offerings.
- National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI): This is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. They use their collective expertise to act on issues that impact on young people today, especially in relation to their mental health.

## **Signposting**

We will ensure that all staff, students, and parents are aware of the supports that are available in our school for mental health. This includes how to access further support, both inside and outside of school hours.

## **Identifying needs and warning signs**

All of our staff will be trained in how to recognise warning signs of common mental health problems. This means that they will be able to offer help and support to students who need it, when they need it.

These warning signs will always be taken seriously and staff who notice any of these signs will communicate their concerns with the Designated Liaison Officer as appropriate.

Staff will be able to identify a range of behaviour and physical changes, including:

- Physical signs of harm.
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits.
- Increased isolation from friends and family and becoming socially withdrawn.
- Changes in mood.
- Talking and/or joking about self-harm and/or suicide.
- Drug and alcohol abuse.
- Feelings of failure, uselessness, and loss of hope.
- Secretive behaviour.
- Clothing unsuitable for the time of year, e.g. a large winter coat in summer.
- Negative behaviour patterns, e.g. disruption.

Staff will also be able to identify a range of issues, including:

- Attendance and absenteeism.
- Punctuality and lateness.
- Changes in educational attainment and attitude towards education.
- Family and relationship problems.

Finally, staff will be well placed to identify any additional needs arising from difficulties that may impact a child's mental health and wellbeing, such as bereavement and health difficulties.

Exam periods throughout the year can have a detrimental effect on students' mental health so it is essential extra support is available and provided to any that need it.

## **Managing Disclosures**

If a student discloses concerns about themselves or a friend, to any member of staff, then all staff will respond in a calm, supportive, and non-judgemental manner.

All disclosures will be recorded confidentially and only shared with the appropriate authorities if it is necessary to keep the child safe, in line with our Health and Safety Policy as well as our Child Protection Policy.

The disclosure record will contain:

- The date of the disclosure.
- The name of the staff member to whom the disclosure was made.
- The nature of the disclosure and the main points from the conversation.
- Agreed next steps.

## **Confidentiality**

If a member of staff thinks it is necessary to pass on concerns about a student, either to somebody inside the school or somebody outside it, then this will first be discussed with the student. They will be told:

- Who the staff member is going to tell.
- What the staff member is going to disclose.
- Why it's necessary for somebody else to be told.
- When the contact will be.

However, it may not be possible to gain the student's consent first, such as in the case of students who are at immediate risk. Protecting a student's safety is our main priority so we would share disclosures if we judged a child to be at risk.

## **Working with Parents and Carers**

We aim to support parents as much as possible. This means keeping them informed about their child and offering our support at all times. To support parents we will:

- Highlight sources of information and support about mental health and emotional wellbeing that we have in our school.
- Share and allow parents to access further support.
- Ensure that parents are aware of who to talk to if they have any concerns about their child.
- Give parents guidance about how they can support their child's/children's positive mental health.
- Ensure this policy is easily accessible to parents.
- Keep parents informed about the mental health training our school staff receive and how mental health is covered in our school curriculum.

## **Working with other agencies and partners**

As part of our whole school approach, we will also work with other agencies to support our students' emotional health and wellbeing. This might include liaising with:

- The School Year Group Care Team.

The Student support services Team

- Paediatricians.
- CAMHS.
- Counselling services.
- Therapists.
- Family support workers.
- Behavioural support workers.

## **Supporting Peers**

We understand that, when a student is suffering from mental health issues, it can be a difficult time for their peers. In response to this, we will consider, on a case by case basis, any peers that may need additional support.

We will provide support in a one-on-one or group setting. These sessions will be guided by the student, but they will discuss how peers can help, how peers can access support themselves, and healthy ways of coping with any emotions they might be feeling.

## **Unprecedented Events**

Should an unprecedented event occur, i.e. a global pandemic, death of someone in our school community, a critical incident, etc., where feelings of anxiety and stress could be heightened, the appropriate measures will be enforced to assist with this.

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) will provide assistance should we experience a critical incident, meaning a situation that may arise that could overwhelm the normal coping capacity of our school.

Advice for our students and their mental health during the Covid-19 outbreak can be sought from following links:

- <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/covid-19/young-peoples-mental-health-during-coronavirus.html>
- <https://www.oco.ie/childrens-rights/coronavirus-information-for-children-and-young-people/>

## **Training**

All staff will receive regular training in child mental health so that they can recognise and respond to mental health issues. This will form part of their regular health and safety training as well as child protection training and is a requirement to keep children safe. Training records will be held in staff files.

We will post all relevant information, and additional information, on our school noticeboard so staff can learn more about child mental health. We will consider additional training opportunities for staff and we will support additional CPD throughout the year where it becomes appropriate due to developing situations with pupils.

## **Communication, involvement and dissemination**

This policy was written by the Mental Health Awareness working group having consulted with the policy co-ordinator. A process of consultation was then carried out involving school management, staff, the students' council, and the parents' council.

## **Evaluation**

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this programme. Specifically important to our Mental Health Awareness policy is:

- Pupil feedback.
- Staff feedback.
- Parental feedback.

## **Ratification**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 08/02/2021.

## **Review and Development**

We are also committed to the review and development of our school policies. As part of our ongoing review process, this policy will be examined to reflect feedback from our evaluation practices and also to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practices.