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Dear Parents/Guardians

In school we are increasingly aware of the importance of good mental health to young people growing up today. In order to promote an awareness of mental health issues and an understanding of how to look after mental health, we have organised a peer education project supported by the Mental Health Foundation.

After half-term, Year 7 boys will have a series of five lessons delivered by their Year 12 House Prefects. There will, of course, be a teacher present in the classroom at all times. The older boys have undertaken training in delivering lesson plans provided by the Mental Health Foundation.

We hope that the boys will find these sessions interesting and informative and enjoy being taught by the older boys. Ultimately we hope the course will give them important life skills for the future. There is an information document attached to this email which provides more information on the project.

Your son will complete a short questionnaire before and after the project, which will allow us to assess the effectiveness of the scheme. Your son's answers to the questionnaire will not be seen by anyone within the school or by anyone outside the project team at the Mental Health Foundation. There is more information regarding the questionnaire in the attached document.

If you are happy for your son to take part in the questionnaire, you do not need to do anything. If you do not want your son to take part in the questionnaire please email Mr Brown (dqb@bws.wilts.sch.uk).

Kind regards

Daniel Brown
PEP Coordinator, Assistant Head of Lower School



The Peer Education Project

Information for parents and carers



What is the Peer Education Project?

The Peer Education Project is made up of five mental health and wellbeing lessons, delivered to all Year 7 students by older peers. The lessons aim to introduce the idea of mental health and illness to young people. The lessons also give students the skills to keep well, improve their wellbeing and support their friends.



How was the project developed?

The project began in 2015 and was inspired by the idea that young people with mental health problems often feel the best support and advice comes from their school peers.

We designed and developed the lesson materials with young people in schools and based on the best evidence. Each student in the Peer Education Project will receive their own workbook, containing information and activities, that they can keep as a reference point.

Why is the project needed?

As many as 4 children in each classroom (aged 5-16 years) have a mental health problem. We know that 50% of all mental health problems start before the age of 14.

While there are many things that can affect a child's mental health, having negative beliefs about seeking help for mental health problems can make it difficult for young people to ask for support at a critical age. By teaching students about mental health in PSHE lessons, they are more likely to feel that school is a safe environment to talk about these issues and seek help, if it is needed.

How does the project work?

Schools taking part in the Peer Education Project will select a group of Peer Educators from the sixth form, usually year 12 (the project may work slightly differently in schools with no sixth form). Peer Educators receive training from school staff in how to deliver the five lessons to the Year 7 students.

The Peer Educators work in pairs to deliver the lessons to Year 7 students, with supervision from a class teacher.



How do students benefit?

The Peer Education Project has been evaluated in each year that it has been running. The project evaluation found that both Year 7 students and Peer Educators benefit from the project.

An independent evaluation carried out in 2016/17 by the Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families found that:

- Year 7 students reported significant improvement in their knowledge of key mental health words and phrases after completing the peer education lessons.
- Both Peer Educators and Year 7 students reported improvements about seeking help for their mental health when it is needed.
- 98% of Peer Educators and 88% of Year 7 students said they would 'definitely' or 'maybe' recommend that other students take part.
- 88% of Peer Educators and 79% of Year 7 students said that the topics covered were 'definitely' or 'somewhat' relevant for them.

What does the project teach?

The project lessons introduce the topic of mental health and wellbeing, including:

1. Mental health awareness – such as, what is 'mental health' and what are 'mental health problems'.
2. Myths and facts – what do people believe about mental health and illness? What is 'stigma' and 'discrimination'?
3. Ways to Wellbeing – What are the 5 Ways to Wellbeing? How can we practice them ourselves?
4. Helping ourselves – What helps improve our mental health? What are some mental health 'first aid' skills we can use?
5. Helping others – What can we do to help those around us? Where might they get help if they need it?

Each of the five lessons follows the same structure.

What do we mean by 'mental health'?



In the Peer Education Project, we often compare mental health to physical health. Good mental health is not just about not having a mental health problem. It is about being able to do important things in everyday life, including being able to:

- Learn and take in information
- Feel, show and manage different positive and negative emotions
- Make and keep good relationships with others
- Cope with and manage change and uncertainty

Key topics

There are some key topics and ideas that run through the Peer Education Project. This section tells you a bit more about each of them.

Mental health spectrum

The project introduces the idea that mental health and illness fall on a scale or spectrum in the same way that physical health and illness do. Ill health can be a minor disruption or a serious problem requiring intensive treatment.

The spectrum is a useful tool to help students think about the ways that a person's mental health can get better or worse, and the things that affect mental health.

Thinking about the spectrum can help students understand that mental health is relevant to everyone. There are things each of us can do to keep good mental health. It also helps introduce the idea that recovery from illness is possible, even from severe mental health problems. Everyone can experience high levels of wellbeing, including people who have a diagnosed mental illness.



M E N T A L H E A L T H



The 5 Ways to Wellbeing

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing are a set of five things that people can do that have been found in research to improve mental wellbeing. They were identified by the New Economics Foundation and have been shown to be relevant for children and young people, as well as adults.

You can read more about the evidence behind the 5 Ways to Wellbeing here: <http://neweconomics.org/2008/10/five-ways-to-wellbeing-theevidence/>

We use the 5 Ways to Wellbeing model in the Peer Education Project, as they are easy to remember and simple to do. This model can be used for positive wellbeing programmes across whole schools, reminding students and school staff to take simple actions each day to stay mentally healthy.



Mindfulness

The project introduces young people to the concept of mindfulness. 'Being aware' is one of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing. Students are guided through a short mindfulness exercise at the start and end of each lesson.

Mindfulness is a word that is used a lot nowadays. It seems to have many different meanings but when we talk about mindfulness in the Peer Education Project, we mean:



The process of focusing on what is happening in our minds and body moment by moment, not being caught up in thoughts or images about what happened before (the past) or what might happen next (the future). It's about shifting our focus to staying in the present moment (the now).

Mindfulness is a well-tested tool that we can use day to day to become more aware of what is happening to us, both in our body and in our mind. Practising mindfulness has been shown to help people manage difficult thoughts and feelings.

In the Peer Education Project, mindfulness is practiced by listening to sounds inside and outside of the room; by noticing how we are sitting or standing; or just focusing on how our breath feels. If students find this helpful, this might be something they want to continue practising on their own.

Supporting your child

Once the five lessons have been completed, students will have a better understanding of what mental health is, how to stay well, and some ideas for how they can get help when they need it.

However, they might still have questions about mental health. There will also be stressful situations throughout their school career, such as exams and friendship breakdowns, when they might need extra help to stay happy and healthy.

You can support your children with their mental health in all sorts of way. We've included some 'top tips' for parents to support their children's mental health and wellbeing in the home.



- Think of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing – are there small things you can encourage them to do, or to do together, each day?
- Model good habits – if you are taking care of your own mental health, it's easier for children to copy this, seeing what good habits look like.
- Think about phone use (both theirs and yours) – we listen better to each other when we're not distracted by technology. Using phones and laptops seems to affect sleep, which is also important for good mental health.
- Think about the different ways that young people tell us how they're feeling. They don't always use words to tell us about their feelings. Noticing changes in behaviour can tell us about how our children are feeling and may be a sign that they're struggling.

When times are tough...

Parents sometimes worry about their child's wellbeing. Speaking to a health professional (e.g. GP; school counsellor) may be needed but there are also things that you can do at home to help your child if they're struggling.

1. Let your child know that you're concerned about them.
Explain what makes you feel concerned (such as noticing that they don't want to see friends or are spending a lot of time alone).
2. Use activities that you do together as an opportunity to have a conversation about how your child is feeling. Talking while doing something, such as cooking together, can take the pressure off while giving a chance for your child to open up to you.
3. Let them know that it's normal to struggle and nothing to be ashamed of. It might help to remind them of the spectrum, presented earlier, and how our wellbeing can go up and down throughout life.



4. Use their language – if your child talks about ‘feeling down’ rather than ‘low mood’, try and use those words that they are more comfortable with using.
5. Talk to a professional – there are many online and professional sources of advice, support and information. Your GP is a good first point of contact for getting further professional support.

These are just a few suggestions for supporting your child’s mental wellbeing. You can find out more about all of the topics covered in this guide, and further information about children’s mental health, by visiting the Resources listed below.

Find out more...

Use the resources below to find out more about mental health and wellbeing:
The **Mental Health Foundation** website has a useful A-Z of key mental health topics:
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z>

Young Minds provide useful information for young people and their parents about mental health, seeking treatment and the mental health system:
<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

The **NHS** website is a useful place to find out about all kinds of illnesses, including mental health problems: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/youth-mentalhealth/Pages/Youth-mental-health-help.aspx>

Mind Ed for Families is a site developed by Health Education England and the Department of Education to help families understand and support their children, from parenting tips to getting help in a crisis.
<https://www.minded.org.uk/families/index.html#/>

The project’s evaluation

The Peer Education Project is evaluated each year, since 2015-16, to find out young people’s experience of participating in the project.



The evaluation asks students who take part in the Peer Education Project to complete an online survey once before taking the lessons, and once after the lessons have been completed.

Why are we evaluating the project?

We want to keep reassessing whether and how the Peer Education Project helps young people develop greater mental health awareness and feel more able to seek support and advice when they need to.

What will the survey be about?

The online questionnaire will ask your child about how they feel, how much they know about mental health and how comfortable they are speaking to others about their mental health. The questionnaire also asks some general questions about your child (such as age and ethnicity).

The answers that children give will help us to understand how well the Peer Education Project works and give us ideas for how to make it better. It is not an assessment or a test; there are no right or wrong answers. Your child will be informed that they can leave any questions unanswered if they choose to.

How is the information stored and used?

Your child's answers will not be seen by anyone within the school or by anyone outside of the project team, who work at the Mental Health Foundation. All of the information in the questionnaire will be treated confidentially.

We will not be asking for your child's name, contact details or any other information that could directly identify them. The information provided in the questionnaires will be held securely on Mental Health Foundation servers. The information will be stored for a maximum of ten years before it is deleted.



We will use all the answers we collect to learn more about how the project works and how we can make it better. This means the answers your child gives may be used as part of reports, academic research or presentations. Individual children will never be identified in any of this work as all their data are anonymous, their answers will be combined with all the other answers of the children who also participated in the evaluation.

Does my child have to take part in the evaluation?

It is up to you if you would like your child to complete the questionnaire. If you decide that you do not want them to take part, they will still be able to take part in the Peer Education Project itself without filling in any questionnaire.

All of the young people who participate in the evaluation will be given this same information about questionnaires before they complete any questionnaires. They will be able to ask questions and make an informed decision about participating.

If you are happy for your child to take part in the project evaluation, you don't need to do anything.

If you **do not wish your child to take part** in the Peer Education Project evaluation, please complete the slip attached and return to the school (remember, we don't collect children's names).



You only need to complete this slip if you **do not wish** your child to take part in the Peer Education Project evaluation.

Dear school coordinator for the Peer Education Project,

I wish to withdraw my child from taking part in the evaluation of the Peer Education Project.

Child's name: -----

Parent/carer's name: -----

If you are happy to do so, we invite you to give the reason for withdrawing your child from the project evaluation:

Signature: -----

Date: -----