



Extend Learning
Academies Network

Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy - Staff

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1.0	May 2021	Head of HR	New Policy
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1. Why mental health and wellbeing is important

At the Extend Learning Academies Network (ELAN) we believe that good mental health and wellbeing of our staff is vital to organisational success and sustainability. We also know that in order for our staff to support the ongoing mental health of our children, it is essential that we support our workforce in the same way. A healthy, happy workforce means we can:

- reduce sickness absence
- increase attendance
- improve staff retention
- enhance our reputation as an employer who cares
- improve staff morale and performance
- better support our children to learn and succeed.

We are committed to the following principles:

- supporting staff who are experiencing mental health problems
- tackling the causes of work-related mental health problems
- promoting general wellbeing for all staff

2. Definition of mental health and wellbeing

We endorse the World Health Organisation's definition of mental health and wellbeing:

“a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”

We understand that mental health and wellbeing is not just the absence of mental health problems and we want our staff to:

- enjoy working in a safe, open and supportive workplace environment and culture that supports mental health, promotes wellbeing and prevents discrimination
- be aware of mental health and wellbeing issues and behaviours
- help us reduce the stigma around depression and anxiety in the workplace
- feel supported during times of personal or work stress
- maintain a healthy work life balance
- have opportunities to engage in initiatives that support mental health and wellbeing
- feel confident and empowered to talk about their problems to colleagues and or managers as appropriate
- have positive and healthy relationships at work.

3. Links to other policies

This policy is not intended to stand alone and links to other HR policies and procedures such as the Staff Code of Conduct, Drugs and Alcohol Policy, Dignity at Work Policy, Equality and Equal Opportunities Policy, Leave of Absence Policy, Staff Absence Management Policy, Appraisal Policy, Flexible Working Policy, Menopause Policy etc.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Supporting activities that enable good mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is the responsibility of all employees.

ELAN expects line managers within the trust to manage staff in a manner which is not detrimental to mental health and which, at its best, can positively promote wellbeing. We expect all employees to be aware of and alert to the wellbeing of those around them not only as a line manager but also as a colleague.

All employees should strive to achieve a healthy work life balance by regularly taking uninterrupted lunch breaks, refraining from sending work-related emails out of hours, taking annual leave and resting after busy periods, with senior staff leading by example. Weekend and evening emails should be kept to a minimum and only sent where it is absolutely necessary for the smooth running of the schools or where there is an urgent reason for doing so.

All employees have a responsibility to promote a positive working environment that helps them and their colleagues to feel included, supported and empowered to talk about mental health openly and without judgement.

Employees are also responsible for accessing support when they need it and raising any concerns with their line manager. Equally, a member of staff with a genuine concern that a colleague may need a little extra care or support, should notify their line manager at an early opportunity so that this may happen.

5. Wellbeing champions

Across ELAN there are appointed members of staff who are designated as Wellbeing Champions. A list of our current Wellbeing Champions can be found in Appendix B and their role is to:

- champion and promote relevant wellbeing messages and events across ELAN
- signpost colleagues to ELAN wellbeing opportunities and services
- help us provide a culture of wellbeing across the trust
- organise local activities where possible
- contribute to wellbeing updates in the trust bulletin
- attend relevant training and our wellbeing network meetings
- develop and share feedback from the staff forums
- encourage discussions on wellbeing and promote working with wellbeing in mind
- feedback to the wellbeing network on school-based activities

6. Engaging with staff

ELAN is committed to identifying what can be done to further reduce work related stress and support greater wellbeing.

We engage with staff via the wellbeing network and annually via the employee survey and from this we are developing a greater insight into the needs and requirements of our workforce, which has fed into the development of this policy.

We are working to develop a culture of openness whereby the whole of the staff team feel empowered to talk about mental health and put forward their ideas about how ELAN can support this even further. We intend to continue our efforts to engage with our staff teams in the ways outlined above and via the routine channels of communications that already exist in our schools, such as team meetings, 1:1 meetings, senior leadership meetings, performance management meetings, and regular updates.

The feedback from our employees will always drive ELAN's actions and efforts to promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

7. Raising awareness of mental health and positive wellbeing strategies

In many workplaces mental health often goes unnoticed. Too often, employees are scared to talk to their manager and as a result, problems can spiral. ELAN aims to raise awareness by embedding mental health support into induction procedures and training.

Each school within the Trust has a Wellbeing Champion whose role is to promote healthy minds by:

- leading and working with other staff to coordinate whole school activities to promote positive mental health and wellbeing
- providing advice, support and signposting to staff
- organising training and updates
- updating and managing the wellbeing noticeboard with helpful information and signposts

8. Positive working relationships and social connections

ELAN strives to make the workplace a mutually supportive environment where good work relationships are allowed to thrive, by:

- promoting a culture of teamwork, collaboration and information-sharing
- promoting positive behaviours to avoid conflict and ensure fairness
- ensuring robust policies on bullying and harassment are in place well publicised and adhered to
- encouraging exercise and regular events to boost staff health, team work and mental wellbeing
- offering buddy system for new starters to help them gain confidence and develop new skills
- celebrating the successes of teams and individuals in a variety of ways
- encouraging cross MAT networking both socially and professionally

9. Providing the right level of support to staff when it is needed

We recognise that many behaviours and emotional problems can be supported either within ELAN or sometimes with advice from external professionals. Some staff will need more intensive support at times, and there are a range of mental health professionals and organisations that are available to staff within ELAN in addition to our Wellbeing Champions.

Sources of other relevant support include:

- senior leadership teams (SLT)
- the HR department
- occupational health
- counselling services
- NHS Mental Health Services
- MIND
- Samaritans
- other online / telephone helplines and charities.

Line managers will routinely take stock of individual staff wellbeing and mental health to help assess the impact of current approaches and plan further improvements to enhance morale. This will usually take place in 1:1 meetings, performance management meetings and supervision meetings.

ELAN recognises the benefit of regular 1:1 meetings for both employer and employee, and the value they bring in early identification of potential concerns. Whilst we recognise that 1:1s are not always possible due to school schedules and working times, clear and regular lines of communication are essential, especially for those working in isolation.

SLT and team leaders should have the wellbeing of their teams at the forefront of their working practice, and as such look for evidence of things being ok, whilst also being alert to subtle changes that may indicate that a conversation may be needed to check-out where people are. SLT should be mindful of the where and when such a conversation happens and that a response of, 'I'm fine,' may not be a true reflection of the situation, which might require a second check-in along with continued observation.

10. Recruitment

Supporting wellbeing starts with getting the right person for the job. If there is a mismatch between a new recruit and for example, our workplace, or their skills and abilities or ELAN's vision /values, it can lead to stress.

As a trust we will always be realistic about the role being offered and our expectations, and will take care to select people based on their skills, competencies and realistic potential during the selection process.

It is important that we provide a fair and unbiased recruitment process and as an employer we are committed to promoting and protecting the wellbeing of all our staff, which we reference in our recruitment advertising

Recruitment decisions will always be based on whether candidates have the necessary qualifications and competence for the job, without making assumptions about their health or disability.

11. Induction

We understand that starting a new role can feel both exciting and overwhelming and recognise that delivering an effective induction programme is important in reducing any concerns.

To assist with this, each new starter will, as part of their induction, be assigned a buddy to help and support them throughout the probationary period and occasionally beyond.

12. Responding to disclosure

In the event that a wellbeing / mental health disclosure is made by a member of staff, early intervention is important. Their line manager should meet with them at the earliest opportunity to talk about their individual situation, so that the right level of support can be identified. This conversation should always take place in a safe, quiet place and be conducted with empathy, common sense and care.

13. Supporting an employee when they are unwell and off sick

Sometimes an employee may need time off work to recover, recharge or adapt to changing situations. Managing this sensitively and carefully is key in shaping how well and how quickly people are able to get back to feeling healthy and are able to work again.

14. Supporting people to return to work

Effective return to work discussions have a part to play in ensuring that mental health problems are identified at an early stage and these should be carried out in a timely fashion following any absence regardless of duration.

Before the meeting, managers should let the individual know what to expect from the discussion and make it clear that its purpose is to support them to make a successful and lasting return to the workplace and address any on-going health needs they may have.

15. Workplace adjustments

Workplace adjustments for wellbeing / mental health are often quite small, simple, practical and cost effective changes. They could include anything from offering rooms for quiet work or reducing hours to starting a buddy system. Often the change is not physical, but about attitude, expectation or communication within the school community.

Employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments once they are aware that something about work is causing a concern for someone with wellbeing / mental health issues / disability.

16. Building mental health confidence

As a trust, it is important to us to help build mental health confidence by boosting employees' knowledge and skills so they are able to better manage their own mental health and improve their ability to support others.

We recognise that ensuring staff and managers have a good understanding of mental health, and the factors that affect workplace wellbeing, is essential for building a healthy, happy and productive workforce and we will do this by:

- embedding mental health in our induction and training and ensuring our staff are given information on how best to manage mental health and what support is available
- raising the profile of mental health by opening talking about positive mental health
- making the most of internal communications and raising awareness to myth bust, share factsheets/tips, useful web links and FAQs etc.
- offering training to line managers where appropriate to ensure they are fully supported in their role

17. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and may be revised in line with feedback from staff and in response to statutory updates.

Appendix A – NHS Five Stages to Mental Wellbeing

NHS Five Stages to Mental Wellbeing (This poster should be printed and displayed throughout our schools to support staff wellbeing).



Evidence suggests there are 5 steps we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing. If you give them a try, you may feel happier, more positive and able to get the most from life.

Give to others – even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks.

Be active – you don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of football. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.

Keep learning – learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. So why not sign up for that cooking course, start learning to play a musical instrument, or figure out how to fix your bike?

Connect – connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.

Take notice/be mindful – be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

Appendix B - Trust Wellbeing Champions

Our Wellbeing Champions are:

Location	Name
Banwell Primary School	Jo Arnold
Bournville Primary School	Victoria Rowley
Oldmixon Primary School	Steve Davies
Locking Primary School	Sharon Ledbury
Mead Vale Primary School	Emma Laing
Mendip Green Primary School	Lorraine Young/Paul Barton
Milton Park Primary School	Paul Cox
Walliscote Primary School	Emma Grist
Windwhistle Primary School	Caroline Madeley
Central Team	Heidi Neal-Millar