

The Autism Project Wellbeing Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate how TAP staff promote positive mental health for learners; how they identify and support autistic young adults with mental health needs; how management train and support all staff to understand mental health issues and how to spot early warning signs to help prevent or address mental health problems; how key information is selected about some common mental health problems and how learners, parents and staff can get further advice and support.

1.2 Terminology

Throughout this policy we will refer to The Autism Project (TAP). Additionally, where we refer to 'TAP Learners'

1.3 Definition of mental health and wellbeing

We use the World Health Organisation's definition of mental health and wellbeing (August 2014):

*"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".*

Mental health and wellbeing is not just the absence of mental health problems. We want all our learners to:

- feel confident in themselves.
- be able to express a range of emotions appropriately.
- be able to make and maintain positive relationships with others.
- cope with the stress of everyday life.
- Identify the triggers of stress and how to manage it.
- learn and achieve.
- improve their independence skills and prepare for the future.
- to know where to seek support when needed.

1.4 Background and Need

Autism is not a mental health condition. It is a developmental condition that affects how people see the world and how they interact with others. Like anyone else, autistic people can have good mental health, and they can also experience mental health conditions. Autism is a spectrum condition that affects people in different ways, which means that each autistic person is different. Autism and mental health conditions are both also within the neurodiversity concept <https://www.geniuswithin.org/what-is-neurodiversity/>

It is estimated that at least 20% of the population will experience a period of depression at some point but it is even more common in people on the autism spectrum. Even though mental illness can be more common for autistic people than in the general population, the mental health of autistic people is often overlooked. Roughly 40% have symptoms of at least one anxiety disorder at any time, compared with up to 15% in the general population.

The mental health of those in education settings (such as TAP learners) has been the focus of recent legislation (DoH & DfE, 2017). As a result, schools and all educational providers are encouraged to have provisions targeting learners' mental health. Even though this is not compulsory, it allows students to get well-rounded support in schools and colleges and to achieve more for their future.

On TAP, project staff have noticed learners' wellbeing can vary over the academic year. This might be due to them transitioning to adulthood, being in a formal work environment for the first time, or due to learners leaving their school support network they had had for a long period of time. For learners to be successful and confident in their work placements, we need to ensure that all students are healthy, that they develop skills in resilience to manage stress and that learners with life challenges receive specialist support.

Similarly, across other CareTrade projects, our learners have fluctuating mental health and wellbeing. This can be due to the stressors of daily life, and the challenges of trying to gain and maintain employment as someone with a neurodiverse condition. Learners should be supported to gain and maintain employment in a supportive way that prioritises their wellbeing. Learners should have opportunities to discuss their mental health and wellbeing and be supported to access relevant services if needed.

1.5 Link to Mission, Beliefs and other policies

We passionately believe that 'employment is the biggest single factor that will transform the life of an autistic person'. Our vision for the future is a world that embraces neurodiversity where all autistic people can lead a purposeful working life.

Studies have shown that people with higher well-being are more likely to live healthier and longer lives and are also more likely to enjoy a better quality of life. In addition, psychological well-being tends to predict a higher chance of gaining employment, higher earnings, and more prosocial behaviour e.g., volunteering.

This policy links to our other policies such as Safeguarding and Prevent, Online Safety, Equality and Diversity and TAP Behaviour Policy. Links with the TAP Behaviour Policy are especially important

because behaviour, whether it is disruptive, withdrawn, anxious, depressed, or otherwise, may be related to learners wellbeing or unmet Mental Health needs.

1.6 How was this policy developed?

In developing this policy, we have taken account of:

- Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools, DfE 2018.
- Supporting children with medical conditions, DfE 2015.
- Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges, DfE August 2017
- Supporting Student Mental Health and Wellbeing in Colleges: A Resource Pack, AoC 2015

1.7 Outcomes

TAP is committed to boosting our learner's confidence, building their resilience, and improving their general wellbeing. Our aim is to ensure that all learner's wellbeing is prioritised.

As a result of the policy and associated procedures being followed, learners with compromised wellbeing, or who are at risk of developing a mental health issue, will be identified by using resources such as EHCPs and communication with their parents, Social Services or other relevant professionals and offered extra support from TAP. Their mental health needs will be prioritised and targeted within the wellbeing support and services at TAP. When this is not possible, beneficiaries will be referred to other relevant and specialised services such as GP, or other voluntary and independent services. The staff, volunteers and trustees will take the necessary steps to ensure TAP learners wellbeing is paramount.

TAP learners without identified mental health needs will be offered to participate in Optional Wellbeing group activities where they will be able to express their feelings, connect with other learners and participate in meditation, Yoga, and other fun activities.

2. Key principle

- This policy aims to achieve a culture within TAP, in which a proactive approach is taken to promote learner's wellbeing.
- All adults that use TAP have the right to live purposeful lives where their wellbeing is paramount.
- To work in partnership with learners to ensure their wellbeing is met to high standards.
- To work in partnership with other relevant professionals and agencies to seek professional advice.
- To ensure that learners are prioritised according to their Mental Health needs
- All TAP learners to be given a choice to participate in 1:1 or small group Wellbeing sessions.
- All staff have a responsibility to communicate with each other to provide the best service for the learners
- Encourage learners to take more personal responsibility for their health and wellbeing and providing opportunities for them to do so.
- Choose some themed weeks and days throughout the year to promote within TAP, e.g., Mental Health Week

TAP will:

- Maintain a non-stigmatising community.
- Ensure learners presenting with mental health difficulties is seen as an individual, not a problem or a condition.
- Uphold confidentiality (wherever safety is not at risk)
- Recognise the limits to what they can do.

3. Scope

TAP's Wellbeing policy applies to:

1. All staff that are working directly with learners (Teachers, Job Coaches, Teaching assistants, Project staff and Managers)
2. Safeguarding Leads
3. Wellbeing Leads

4. Wellbeing sessions and Workshops provided at TAP.

Objectives of Wellbeing sessions and workshops – to encourage and support learners make healthier choices that are beneficial for their wellbeing and to build resilience to manage stress and difficult life situations.

While different wellbeing discussions will be held in class, there are a variety of provisions for TAP learners that aim to improve their general wellbeing and to increase their understanding of how to recognise and manage their emotions and mental health.

These include:

- 1) Lunchtime board/card games with a staff member.
- 2) Group wellbeing activities (e.g., breathing exercises, meditation) on Wellbeing Wednesdays.
- 3) Wellbeing displays with relevant events and information. (E.g., Mental Health Awareness week)
- 4) Guest speakers/ wellbeing seminars/workshops. (E.g., Yoga, Meditation, Art Therapy, Sex Education)
- 5) Quiet room with wellbeing resources.
- 6) Wellbeing 1:1 or group support (i.e., drop-ins on Wellbeing Wednesday).
- 7) Wellbeing literature available to students,
- 8) Wellbeing days (e.g. Fake News Workshop, Meditation Workshops etc.)

- 9) Provided various online resources for resilience, relaxation etc.
- 10) Celebrations (Autism Awareness, Black History Month, LGBTQ, Christmas, Eid, Chinese New Year, Hannukah, Diwali and many more)
- 11) Encourage learners to sign up for Gym to promote their Physical wellbeing.
- 12) Monthly Peer Support groups delivered by The Nest in Southwark.

TAP learners will be encouraged to take part in the optional activities, yet everyone will access some sessions, like the wellbeing seminars/guest speakers and the wellbeing days. This aim is to provide all TAP learners with ideas on how to build on their resilience when dealing with difficult everyday life situations. In addition, it also aims to emphasise the importance of self-care and seeking support in difficult life situations (e.g., bereavement) learners might experience in the future.

5. Wellbeing support across other CareTrade projects

In addition to TAP deliver other employment support projects that vary in terms of length and activities, depending on funding. For this reason, the frequency of wellbeing activities may vary but will include the below:

- 1) Learners will have an opportunity to discuss their wellbeing in every one-to-one session. Project staff will ask specifically about wellbeing, listen to any concerns, provide advice around positive actions that can be taken to improve wellbeing, and signpost to other services such as GP or mental health services where necessary.
- 2) Learners will be offered the opportunity to attend a peer support group where they will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences in previous employment, their job search and things that may be worrying them.
- 3) Project staff will give learners opportunities to plan social and wellbeing activities on an ad hoc basis.

6. Contacts with other professionals

The Autism Project has built a relationship with **The Nest in Southwark**, which delivers free & confidential mental wellbeing advice and support for young people aged 11 – 25.

The TAP Wellbeing Lead works closely with the organisation for the learners to receive relevant workshops to improve their independence and wellbeing as well as to build confidence in communication when attending Peer Support groups. <https://www.thenestsouthwark.org.uk/>

TAP staff also ensure that they communicate with other professionals such as psychologists, therapists, support workers, carers to provide the best possible support to improve learner's wellbeing.

7. Communication

All TAP staff will be able to read this policy on Breathe Portal.

TAP learners will be informed of Wellbeing sessions in their Induction week. Learners will be introduced to TAP Wellbeing Lead and given a consent form to sign if they would like to attend Wednesday 1:1 or small groups wellbeing sessions.

8. Appendix

Useful Contacts

1. Anxiety UK

Charity providing support if you have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition.

Phone: 03444 775 774 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.30pm)

Website: www.anxietyuk.org.uk

2. CALM

CALM is the Campaign Against Living Miserably. A charity providing a mental health helpline and webchat.

Phone: 0800 58 58 58 (daily, 5pm to midnight)

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

3. Mind

Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems.

Phone: 0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)

Website: www.mind.org.uk

4. No Panic

Voluntary charity offering support for sufferers of panic attacks and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Offers a course to help overcome your phobia or OCD.

Phone: 0844 967 4848 (daily, 10am to 10pm). Calls cost 5p per minute plus your phone provider's Access Charge

Website: www.nopanic.org.uk

5. OCD Action

Support for people with OCD. Includes information on treatment and online resources.

Phone: 0845 390 6232 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5pm). Calls cost 5p per minute plus your phone provider's Access Charge

Website: www.ocdaction.org.uk

6. PAPYRUS

Young suicide prevention society.

Phone: HOPElineUK 0800 068 4141 (9am to midnight, every day of the year)

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

7. Rethink Mental Illness

Support and advice for people living with mental illness.

Phone: 0300 5000 927 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)

Website: www.rethink.org

8. Samaritans

Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

9. SANE

Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers.

Textcare: comfort and care via text message, sent when the person needs it most: www.sane.org.uk/textcare

Peer support forum: www.sane.org.uk/supportforum

Website: www.sane.org.uk/support

10. YoungMinds

Information on child and adolescent mental health. Services for parents and professionals.

Phone: Parents' helpline 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk