



BEECHEN CLIFF

Covid-19: Our Mental Health Strategy Term 6, 2020

Introduction

There have been many stories in the media about concerns over young people's mental health during lockdown and the potential for a 'crisis' on their return to school. For example, see:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-52721132>

<https://about.kooth.com/covid19-data/>

Beechen Cliff prides itself on its mental health work and we want to be well prepared for our part in preventing and coping with the fallout from Covid-19. The pandemic has meanwhile created an opportunity to pilot solution focused (SF) approaches to mental health that have seen a highly positive impact in school already, and are endorsed by Boys in Mind (Girls Mind Too). This document sets out our strategy for this term to pilot a whole-school approach to mental health underpinned by SF and Trauma Informed Practice (TiP). At the heart of our strategy will be a shift from a deficit-model of mental health to a strengths-based one, a central tenet of SF.

Our model

Our mental health strategy will be underpinned by two approaches we have been using for some time: firstly, Trauma Informed Practice (TiP) and secondly 'Solution Focussed Practice' (SF). TiP helps us recognise difficult experiences faced by young people and their adaptations to these; it promotes the power of relationships for healing and growth and is both a reactive and proactive approach to caring for mental health. SF is a compassionate, empowering, hopeful and effective approach to support people to identify their own solutions to issues in their lives, whilst building on their existing strengths and resources.

SF was developed in the 1980's in Milwaukee in America. The approach was developed as a model of therapy; however, it is now widely applied across, health, social care and educational settings. It can be applied in any setting, whether it be in an organisation, a community, groups, families, parenting, as well as for individuals. The SF approach places people as experts in their own lives; with the strengths and resources to reach their own solutions. The approach works with people to enable them to have a clear vision of how they want their life to be and how they would like things to be different; what their best hopes are for the future.

These approaches have already informed and contributed to our safeguarding, pastoral care and mental health work in school, described as 'remarkable' by Ofsted in March. SF is

endorsed by Boys in Mind (Girls Mind Too), the local alliance of which Beechen Cliff is a lead school and whose work we have shared with you previously. We currently employ an SF counsellor for two days a week and individual pupils and students have benefited enormously from this. Finally, some 40 staff and 12 Sixth Form mental health ambassadors are already trained in the SF approach, with more due to be trained next term. We are confident that the strategies offered by SF can make a positive difference to pupils and students, and may also be useful for families as well.

Whilst the school will do all it can to support young people's mental health needs, we recognise there are limits to our expertise. For some mental health issues, medical advice is required and the school will urge parents and pupils to contact their GP or, if they are very worried, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS: <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/>) for support.

Strategy

Our overall aim for our strategy for mental health is as follows:

To create a culture of openness about mental health, encouraging everyone to talk about feelings, listen to one another and promote their ability to bring about change for the better.

The strategy has four specific goals:

1. To raise staff awareness and understanding of SF
2. To raise pupil and parent awareness of SF
3. To trial SF approaches through direct contact with pupils (if possible) and via parents
4. To evaluate the impact of promoting SF and use this to inform 2020-21 strategy

For this period of time, SF will be introduced through 3 key questions:

Using the language of invitation throughout...

1. *On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being you at your best and 0 being the opposite of that, where are you on the scale [since lockdown / this week / today etc]?*
2. *What have you noticed about yourself that has pleased you and makes you that number and not lower?*
3. *Now you have looked where you are on the scale in relation to being at your best, describe what being at your best would look like for you, and what small sign would tell you that you were moving a small step towards being at your best?*

The intention is that these questions will become common language across all stakeholders, thus raising awareness of SF. The key learning strategy will be to make SF *experiential* for all.

This strategy has been developed in collaboration with Tara Gretton of Solution Revolution and Kate Murphy of Boys in Mind (Girls Mind Too) and two student representatives from the Sixth Form. The school greatly values these partnerships and on-going student leadership of our mental health strategy. The strategy document is followed by an action

plan for the next 6 weeks with a management structure, actions and progress monitoring via a RAG rating system.

Themes

We will take a holistic approach that looks at every aspect of pupils' education, community and emotional wellbeing. This will be based on what they have experienced in this period of time and how they hope to support themselves to move through it. Based on this we will be looking at the following Themes before they return to school. We will encourage parents to explore them with their children and family as we all navigate the impact of this time in our life.

- History
- Community
- Emotional health
- Connection

Delivery and Training

There will be two principal mechanisms by which the SF approach will be promoted and trialled with pupils, parents and staff: the first will be weekly newsletter advice to parents with a suggested activity for them to try at home with their child(ren); with all pupils in years 7 to 9 not due to attend school, parents remain the primary vehicle through which we can effect change. For Lower Sixth students, the weekly Sixth Form bulletin will contain the same suggested activity. For year 10 pupils, the weekly bulletin activity will be complemented by a second SF element during in-school sessions, delivered through wellbeing/PSHE lessons when they are on site.

Staff will receive weekly information on SF that mirrors that provided to parents and pupils and will be encouraged to use it themselves. Training will be made available for all staff who wish to receive it.

Evaluation

A range of evaluation methods will be used to measure the impact of this sixth week programme. This will include:

1. A staff survey scaling questions, sent out in week 1 and week 6 to measure confidence in the SF approach; JCO
2. A sample group of parents being asked to trial the approach, organised through the PTA;
3. A survey of pupils, parents and staff at the end of the programme;
4. Brief interviews with a sample of Sixth Form students; and
5. A survey of Year 10 pupils through their on-site sessions.

References

<https://boysinmind.co.uk>
www.solutionrevolution.co.uk

www.ukasfp.org

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3091/adversity-and-trauma-informed-practice-guide-for-professionals.pdf>