

Wellbeing Policy

The Melton Learning Hub

This policy relates to all premises under the governance of the Learning Hub social enterprise. This includes; the Learning Hub and The Venue.

Policy Name: Wellbeing Policy

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Ethos ­ focusing on strengths

At The Melton Learning Hub we choose to adopt a hopeful view of young people. We aim to understand and engage our students from where they are right now.

It is not our aim to judge, diagnose or label the young people we work with. Instead we get alongside our students and help them to work out the best ways forward in their lives.

At the centre of our approach are the principles of being strengths ­based in our work with young people:

* All the people we work with, and the situations and environments we work in, possess strengths that can be marshalled to improve young people’s lives
* An individual’s sense that they cannot make a difference to their worries can be counteracted by a focus on individual strengths.
* Motivation towards positive change can occur through a consistent emphasis on people’s strengths

# Introduction

We have developed a way of working that draws on four evidence based approaches; Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) , emotional literacy and mindfulness, the solution focused and the PLACE Attachment model.

The approach we use can be delivered flexibly, one to one, through small group work, or adapted for use with a class group.

It can have an impact on a wide range of issues, as well as being an enrichment opportunity from which all young people can benefit.

To support our staff we have developed focused training and daily reporting that they can use the approach to plan their work, as well as describing ways in which they can interact with young people on a day­to­day basis so that this approach becomes embedded. An example of this way of working is included in the appendix to this policy.

# Outcomes

The approach is designed to help youngsters reflect on how choices and behaviours create both opportunities and limitations in our lives. Securing real and lasting change is what this work is all about. The approach has clear goals for time spent working with the participants:

* To develop their ability to engage in thinking and reflecting on their behaviour
* To develop their understanding of how this affects what they get out of education, as well as their wider life and relationships
* To heal the trauma and build positive attachments.
* To begin to think about the effect of their behavior on their future
* To work on their goals about what needs to change to improve things
* To initiate small, positive and observable changes that move them towards their goal
* We strive to help young people see the potential for positive change and to achieve small steps towards this which can help them make the most of their potential.

The approach aims to achieve a positive shift in participants’ engagement with opportunities in education and beyond and a positive effect on their emotional health and wellbeing. It aims to encourage feelings of energy, confidence, openness, enjoyment, happiness, calm and caring.

# A non­shaming approach

This work does not shame or label young people. The tools and resources are positive, grounded and realistic and designed to be translated into day­to­day practice.

It is crucial that we do not label or limit students though a deficit­laden approach. This framework involves using indirect and non­shaming ways of working on strengths and weakness, issues of change, and on the identification and enhancement of positive aspects of behaviour, however small. It is our role to search out and reinforce strengths. We build upon these to bring about wider positive change.

# Being evidence­based

The approach draws on evidence, research, theories and ideas derived from some key areas within psychology and therapeutic work: DDP, emotional literacy and mindfulness. Each of these areas has evidence that we can draw on to provide a basis for using the approaches with young people.

Additionally there is evidence about what works with vulnerable youngsters. It is important to be aware that what is good for the many is also good for the few who are vulnerable and at risk. What works well generally is also exactly what needs to be put in place for those who are experiencing difficulties.

Therefore, what our students need is not different, rarefied, or a complex set of interventions and our aim is not to promote some kind of rarified, clinical approach, where young people are labelled or diagnosed.

Weare (2001) reviewed interventions that were most effective in helping at­risk young people. The results did not point to a very complex or clinical approach. What worked was:

* beginning early
* building self­esteem
* providing personal support
* teaching life skills
* involving peers and parents in the process
* creating a positive ethos

Our approach therefore is focused on identifying and developing strengths, on development of goals, on trying out new, fun and enjoyable things, sharing stories, understanding our mind and bodies and our relationships. Our role is that of being a coach, rather than a therapist or counsellor.

# Engage each learner

Meeting each child where they are is essential in our work. Hooking youngsters into the work is the first key step. This is often about helping youngsters to have a greater sense of ownership and agency. Brown (1996) and McKinnon (1992) both found that when people felt they had been given a say in matters and presented with options, they responded favourably. When the opposite happened individuals became alienated and disengaged. Thoburn, Lewis and Shemmings (1995) found that when individuals were actively involved in processes 65% of cases had a good outcome.

# Create a positive alliance

Once we have engaged a child we need to extend this to construct a positive alliance for working together. It has been found that having a positive relationship is actually more important than the person’s level of expertise or the model or technique being used (Hubble and Miller, 2004). It would seem that, first and foremost, people want to work with a person they feel comfortable with and supported by.

# Acknowledge and utilize each learner’s strengths and resources

Knowing the child on the basis of their strengths and interests and the resources they can draw on in their life, such as supportive relationships, is another key way in which we work. This is supported by a large­scale research project by Hubble, Duncan and Miller (1999), whose review of outcome studies found that, in therapeutic work when people used their own personal resources it encouraged a positive outcome. O’Neil and McCashen (1991), in work which focused on work with families as a whole, also found that when they acknowledged family strengths, the family members reported that they felt they were viewed more fairly.

Acknowledging young people’s strengths is also attractive because it brings a competency­ based view of the individual. We begin with the notion that our young people are resourceful and therefore capable of joining in with co­operative relationships. It is therefore our job to create situations that allow this to flourish. We need to actively look for signs, however small, of young people’s strengths and aim to utilize them to bring about positive change. Approaches that harness youngsters’ inner strengths and resources are likely to be most effective and therefore this is a key element in how we work.

# Work on goals for change

As early as possible in the work, we aim to have clear goals. This means we have a clear sight of the ending from the very beginning. Beginning with the end in mind means that our work with young people can include a focus on how they are progressing towards their goals and how they will recognise the signs they are getting there. Goals should evolve and change as things unfold and be described in clear, descriptive language. Evidence for this way of working includes a family support programme in the US which found that families who were reluctant to engage with services became much more likely to do so when practitioners asked them about

their own goals for change from the outset (Becker, Hogue and Little, 2002). We bring this learning into our work by asking youngsters, as soon as it feels appropriate, about the changes they want to see, who they think can help them and what opportunities are around them. When clear and realistic goals are set, checks can then be made on whether progress is being made towards achieving them.

# Focus on solutions and resources

We need to try to make sure we take a balanced approach. It is really easy to slip into “problem talk” and find that negativity dominates our ways of looking at the world. Whilst it is not a good idea to simply ignore worries and concerns, there is evidence that an extensive focus on problems may well be counter productive. A recent study (Byrd­Craven, Geary, Rose and Ponzi, 2008, in Bannink 2008) shows that extensive discussions about problems and encouragement of ‘problem talk’, for example rehashing the details of problems, speculating about problems and dwelling on negative effects in particular, lead to a significant increase in the stress hormone cortisol, which predicts increased depression and anxiety over time. This shows that, in some ways, focusing on problems almost brings them back to life in the present, even if they are not present or occurring.

There is evidence that the creation of new neural links may be a learning process that remains possible into adulthood. This means our brains retain the ability to continually reshape in ways that allow us to learn and grow with new experiences (Siegel, 1999). Therefore, there is some risk that exclusively talking about problems wires our brain in such a way that we begin to see the world through that lens. Bannink (2008) suggests that by focusing on resiliency, coping and competencies (all examples of solution­talk), new positive neural networks may emerge and old negative ones will ‘die away’, leaving the individual more able to skilfully cope with the challenges and opportunities in their life. Therefore, a focus on the resources that a child can draw on in order to help bring about positive change becomes essential and log