Mental Health Strategy

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as:

"a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community".

The Moreton Bay Colleges are committed to supporting the physical and mental health of students, and to providing a supportive, caring and Christian learning environment in the Uniting Church tradition. For students to realise their potential the Moreton Bay Colleges acknowledge their responsibility to incorporate wellbeing practices into its core business. This is apparent in our evidence-based wellbeing frameworks ***Hearts and Minds*** at MBC and ***Five to Thrive*** at MBBC.

The Colleges affirm that positive mental health and wellbeing are fundamentally important factors that enable students:

- to focus on, and engage successfully in, learning;
- to develop positive social and life skills which allow them to establish and sustain meaningful and positive relationships with others; and
- to become well-balanced, resilient adults who have the skills to participate and contribute productively to society and enjoy satisfaction and fulfilment in both their personal and professional lives.

Mental health problems occur when young people experience long standing disturbances in their thoughts, their feelings, their behaviour, their ability to learn and their social relationships, as well as their physical health and wellbeing. Unlike some medical conditions that have a direct cause, mental health difficulties and disorders are influenced by multiple factors that interact in different ways depending on the individual, family, social, economic and cultural circumstances.

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that school staff are:

- cognisant of the positive contribution wellbeing and mental health has on creating the conditions central to the pursuit of academic and personal fulfilment and,
- can recognise mental health warning signs in students and know the process for facilitating support.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The earlier a young person obtains support for emotional, behavioural or social difficulties, the better the chance they have of overcoming those issues, and of reducing the chances of more serious mental health concerns.

Parents/caregivers also have responsibilities with respect to their child's mental health and wellbeing. These include:

- contacting the relevant senior member of staff if they are concerned about their child.
- providing full information about their child's history of behaviours or mental health conditions.
- working closely with the relevant staff to support their child.
- following any directions to seek external specialist advice when a referral or recommendation is made.
- notifying the relevant senior staff immediately if concerned about their child's mental state and/or if the child is at risk of self-harm or suicide.

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Students have a role to play in fostering a positive and supportive environment by:

- abiding by the Positive Behaviours Policy and Procedures regarding relationships with other students.
- respecting, caring for and supporting friends and other students.
- sharing any worries or concerns for self or others with a staff member.

Staff

For the majority of school staff, providing support does not require them to be a mental health professional or to find a solution to the problem themselves. They are, however, an important part of the early warning system that helps to recognise potential mental health difficulties earlier and refer to the appropriate support so that action can be provided as soon as possible.

Mental Health Signs and Symptoms

Student behaviour can be difficult to interpret. With so much going on, sorting out what is 'normal' child/adolescent behaviour and what is something more concerning can be challenging.

The table of signs and symptoms (below) can help staff determine when a student may be experiencing mental health difficulties.

Emotions/Feelings	Cognition/Thinking	Behaviour	Physical
Prolonged periods of sadness	Difficulty concentrating on tasks	Social withdrawal or avoidance	Tiredness and fatigue
Prolonged periods of irritability	Difficulty paying attention	Talking about, writing about or making artworks about death or suicide	Complaining of lots of headaches, stomach-aches
Anxiety or excessive worry	Confusion	Increased impulsivity or risk-taking	Loss of appetite or big increase in appetite
Loss of motivation	Hopeless thoughts, for example, "Nothing will ever get better", "Nobody cares".	Increased alcohol or other drug use	Sleeping lots, or difficulties getting to sleep and staying asleep
'Flatness' or apparent loss of enjoyment in things that used to be enjoyable	Helpless thoughts for example, "I can't do it", "There's no way I'll be able to…"	Drop in academic functioning – handing in things late, handing in poorer work than usual	Restlessness or fidgeting
Excessive anger	Suspicion	Absenteeism	Significant weight loss or gain
Excessive fear	Unrealistic expectations on self that is causing distress	Frequent fights with friends or family	
	Anxious thoughts, for example, "Something bad will happen if…"	Self-harm	
	Self-critical thoughts, for example, "I'm not good enough."	Rigid behaviours, for example eating certain foods at fixed times and over-exercising	
		Uncharacteristic, odd or unusual behaviour	

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Red: MBC
Blue: MBBC

Process for Staff

Below is the process for determining the level of action if a staff member notices concerning changes in a student's thinking, behaviour and/or feelings.

The model below can be used as a general guide for responses to different types of observations in students.

1

LEVEL 1 – GATHER MORE INFORMATION

Speak to student, and/or appropriate staff, continue to monitor and check in with others:

- if you have noticed minor changes that are out of character for the student (e.g. they are a little less talkative than usual, turning up late, appearing more tired or less focussed, weight loss, eating issues, increased risk-taking behaviours and impulsivity)

ACTION

Report concern to **Head of House/Deputy Head of Primary (Students)** and **Deputy Head of Secondary/Primary (Student Wellbeing)** who will place a note of the concern in TASS Confidential Notes

2

LEVEL 2 – PROVIDE ASSISTANCE

Advise appropriate staff, support the student, and refer for additional support if:

- you have noticed multiple changes such as not attending class, frequent lateness to class, grades dropping, difficulties with friends, tearful, withdrawn, moody or angry
- you have noticed signs of previous or suspected self-harm (e.g. healed wounds, superficial scratches)
- you have noticed a lack of concentration, reduced participation in class
- you have noticed that changes have occurred in multiple settings, for example home, school or co-curricular practice/training
- the symptoms have been going on for a while and things are not improving
- problems are occurring frequently
- problems are causing difficulties in the student's relationships, schoolwork, usual activities

ACTION

Head of House/Deputy Head of Primary (Students) and **Deputy Head of Secondary/Primary (Student Wellbeing)** contact parents/caregivers

Head of House/Deputy Head of Primary (Students) and **Deputy Head of Secondary/Primary (Student Wellbeing)** share support strategies with teachers

Head of House/Deputy Head of Primary (Students) and **Deputy Head of Secondary/Primary (Student Wellbeing)** place notes of any assistance, support provided in TASS Confidential Notes

3

LEVEL 3 – ACT IMMEDIATELY

Alert appropriate staff, seek immediate mental health or emergency support for alarming observations such as:

- signs of obvious, recent and severe self-harm (e. g. wounds needing medical attention)
- hearing/reading comments indicating that a student is having thoughts of suicide
- risk to self that is suicidal
- behaviour that is odd, unusual, extremely out of character and/or not making sense
- risk to others (e.g. making threats to harm another student/member of staff)

ACTION

Email concern to **Mental Health Risk email group/Deputy Head of Primary (Students)** /**Head of Sub School** and Student Reception

Remain with student until further advice / support from a member of the Pastoral Team / **Head of Sub School**

Mental Health Strategy: Appendix A

Process for staff when dealing with a student at risk of suicide

Staff member is told by the student, another student or other person that the student is thinking, talking about, threatening to, or has attempted to suicide.

Is the student at risk at this time or in a state of distress?

No

If student is not at risk at this time, inform Mental Health Risk / DHPS / HOS / HOP

School Counsellor meets with the student that day to clarify concerns

School Counsellor determines a course of action in consultation with one of DHSS / DHPS / HOS / HOP

1. Contact parents/caregivers
2. Student goes home into care of parents/caregivers
3. Refer to external professional
4. Return to School Plan sent to parents/caregivers
5. Report required from external professional to affirm safety to return to school
6. Wellbeing Plan developed - student returns
7. Wellbeing Plan & TASS alert shared with all teachers ensuring appropriate confidentiality and privacy of the student
8. Ongoing monitoring of student wellbeing

Yes

If student is in a state of distress, take the student or send another student immediately to Student Reception or Health Centre and contact one of DHSS / DHPS / HOS / HOP

Student Reception or Health Centre contacts School Counsellor who meets with student immediately to clarify concerns and risk assess the student's condition

DHSS / DHPS / HOS / HOP or School Counsellor contacts family and/or external professional to determine course of action:

1. Contact parents/caregivers
2. Parents/caregivers take student home or to external professional for formalised assessment
3. Return to School Plan sent to parents/caregivers
4. Report required from external professional to affirm safety to return to school
5. Wellbeing Plan developed - student returns
6. Wellbeing Plan & TASS alert shared with all teachers ensuring appropriate confidentiality and privacy of the student
7. Ongoing monitoring of student

Staff member finds a student attempting to suicide at the College

Staff member to stay with student and NOT leave the student unattended

Staff member to inform Student Reception & the Health Centre. '000' to be called.

Senior Staff refer to Suicide Postvention Response Plan

HOS
Head of Secondary

HOP
Head of Primary

DHSS
Deputy Head of Secondary (Students)

DHPS
Deputy Head of Primary (Students)

HOH
(Head of House)

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