

Camden School for Girls

**Promoting positive mental health, and
dealing with things when they aren't so
positive -**

A Sixth Form Guide



This is an advice booklet devised by the school PSHE department, and contact numbers for agencies that can help with all of the issues detailed in here are listed at the end.

Positive Mental Well-Being

Most people see the benefit of eating 5 fruit and vegetables a day, brushing their teeth twice a day (hopefully!), or going to the gym to look after their physical health. However, few people set aside time each day to keep their minds healthy - often the focus is on responding to difficulties as and when they crop up - instead of trying to prevent those difficulties in the first place.

At the start of Year 12, all students attend a session on 'Mind Apples' – a training session that gives you knowledge about how your mind works and how to use it more healthily and effectively. Our actions and the environment around us affect our mental health and so it is within our power to make positive moves to improve our mental health. To look after ourselves, each day we should make sure we have:

- ★ Had enough sleep
- ★ Drunk enough water
- ★ Eaten enough and healthily
- ★ Had enough natural light
- ★ Been physically active in *some* way. Even if it's just walking a bit.

We must also determine what are our own breathers and restorers are that help us stay healthy and allow us to get our '5 a day for our mind'. These are 5 things we can do each day that encourage mental well being. It might be walking, being with friends, playing sport, listening to music, etc.

The NHS

The National Health Service puts huge emphasis on well-being, offering the following definition:

Sarah Stewart-Brown, professor of public health at the University of Warwick and a wellbeing expert, says: "Feeling happy is a part of mental wellbeing. But it's far from the whole. Feelings of contentment, enjoyment, confidence and engagement with the world are all a part of mental wellbeing. Self-esteem and self-confidence are, too. So is a feeling that you can do the things you want to do. And so are good relationships, which bring joy to you and those around you."

Of course, good mental wellbeing does not mean that you never experience feelings or situations that you find difficult, but it does mean that you feel you have the resilience to cope when times are tougher than usual."

It can help to think about "being well" as something you do, rather than something you are. The more you put in, the more you are likely to get out.

The NHS recommends the following five steps, which research has shown can really help to boost well-being:

- ★ **Connect** – connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.
- ★ **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 a cooking course, start learning to play a musical instrument, or figure out how to fix your bike?
- ★ **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 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.

Resilience can be learned! Your outlook and daily activities affect your mental wellbeing so make sure you take time to look after your mental health.



We are aware, however, that most people struggle with their mental health at some point in their lives, and resilience strategies might not always work. The rest of this booklet is focussed on some concerns you may have, together with advice offered by experts and some agencies you can refer to if you require further support.

Concerns you might have over your own mental health

Problems with Sleeping

This can range to include insomnia, finding it hard to wake up in the mornings, being tired all the time. The most important thing if this is something you're concerned about is to establish how much of a problem it is. Our memories can be really faulty when it comes to sleep, so try keeping a journal for a couple of weeks to log what time (roughly) you go to bed and what time you wake up. Rank the night from 1-10, with 1 being a terrible night, with many wakeful moments and 10 being an uninterrupted sleep-through. Being able to reflect back on a collection of nights (rather than just one or two) can help you to identify patterns (is Sunday a particularly bad night on a regular basis?), and to work out how best to fix it.

Consider the following:

- ★ Sleep discipline: keep the light low for half an hour before bed. Obviously turn off your screens from smartphones and iPads as the blue light suppresses melatonin levels, which is the hormone responsible for regulating our sleep patterns.
- ★ Regular exercise and general activity during the day will help when it's time to sleep in the evening.
- ★ Drinking and smoking before bed will lead to interrupted sleep, despite the perception that they may relax you.
- ★ If your body temperature is slightly lower (often after a warm shower or a bath) than usual, you might find it easier to fall asleep.

Eating Disorders

This can include punitive eating patterns, such as fasting, bingeing, or purging. A combination of all three isn't unusual either. Orthorexia (an obsession with only eating the 'right' foods) can become life-limiting too, as can excessive exercise.

Consider this issue carefully:

- ★ You are allowed to decide what you eat and what you don't eat, but when it starts to dictate your behaviour and your choices you might benefit from receiving some help.
- ★ Many of you will change weight significantly at this stage in your life due to natural hormonal shifts. Remember that what is 'normal' is a wide range of weights, not just one.
- ★ Eating disorders aren't just to do with mental ill-health: they take a huge toll on the body as well. Excessive weight loss can lead to problems with bone density, hair loss, increased body hair and hormonal deficiencies. For young women, it can affect fertility.
- ★ There are many places you can receive help for issues like this (see the contacts list in this leaflet), and it's recommended that you seek out some support from an adult.
- ★ It can be difficult supporting a friend with an eating disorder too: many of you will know that not only do you worry about the person suffering, but it can make you concerned with your own weight and general eating habits. The helplines are available to you too.

Self-Harm

Self-harm can occur at any age but is most common in adolescence and young adulthood, and, inevitably, young people who self-harm give a wide range of reasons for their behaviour.

Some young people repeatedly injure to escape from painful feelings such as hopelessness and low self-esteem. Because self-harm can reduce tension and sometimes help to control moods, it can become self-reinforcing and habit-forming.

It is important to remember:

- ★ Recovery from self-harm is completely achievable, and practical strategies for recovery include: talking to someone who listens without judgement, resisting the urge to self-harm by distraction techniques such as writing a journal, squeezing a stress-ball or an ice-cube, exercise and being around people.

Panic or Anxiety Attacks

These can have triggers, such as going on a crowded underground or being in other stressful situations, or can arise out of a seemingly innocuous situation. Some people will have these frequently, others occasionally, and some not at all.

- ★ If you are afflicted, the important thing is to *strategise*. Be prepared for situations you know can trigger attacks, and have an arsenal of measures to help you if you do. Self-help books or websites based on cognitive behavioural therapy can prove very useful.
- ★ Practising mindfulness and meditation can help significantly. Lowering your heart rate and staying calm on a regular basis can be a great way of managing.
- ★ Ideally, it's important to get to the root of what is causing these - but it's equally important to understand that Sixth Form is a stressful time in your life and they may be no obvious reason you can find to explain these reactions.

The Impact of Workload

The final two years of school can be a very stressful time in terms of workload. University aspirations, teacher and parental expectations, the leap from GCSE to A-level can all impact on your ability to cope with what you have to do. Struggling with work can be a product of a deeper issue, or it can be the cause of it.

If you do feel yourself not to be coping, make sure you do the following:

- ★ Communicate with your teachers and form tutor. No one at school *wants* you to not to manage, and will be able to help support you with some of the burdens.
- ★ Make getting organised a priority: use your planner and your free periods, attend homework clubs, make revision timetables.
- ★ Consider working with a mentor to manage your time through a regular weekly meeting.

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- This information isn't designed to be comprehensive: many young people will struggle with other issues, such as **very low moods, feelings of isolation, and abuse of drugs and alcohol**.
 - Some presentations of poor mental health may well be the product of **problems with identity**: gender, sexual, racial and personal identity are very complex, and are often felt the most keenly at this time.
 - If you have suffered a **trauma**, whether mental or physical, it is not unlikely that you may need some emotional support to overcome that too.

Talk to someone. Family, friends, teachers: there are many people who can help you if you're going through a difficult time. Alternatively there are many organisations that can offer professional and impartial support.

Contact Details of Useful People and Organisations

FORWARD (FWD) - Drugs & alcohol

ypsmt@camden.gov.uk

<http://www.talktofrank.com/treatment-centre/forward-drug-and-alcohol-service-young-people-camden>

FWD provides one-to-one structured support and group work sessions to young people affected by substance misuse (including the impact of parental substance misuse).

CHILDLINE

Freephone 0800 1111 (24 hours)

www.childline.org.uk

Childline is the UK's free helpline for children and young people. It provides confidential telephone counselling service for any child with a problem. It comforts, advises and protects.

GET CONNECTED

Freephone 0808 808 4994 (7 days a week 1pm-11pm)

www.getconnected.org.uk

Free, confidential telephone and email helpline finding young people the best help whatever the problem. Can text information to callers' mobile phones.

HEADMEDS

www.headmeds.org.uk

Straight talk on mental health medication. Look up your medication to find out about side effects and things you might not feel comfortable asking your GP about, and listen to other people's experiences.

SAMARITANS

Tel: 08457 90 90 90 (24 hrs 7 days a week) www.samaritans.org

Samaritans volunteers listen in confidence to anyone in any type of emotional distress, without judging or telling people what to do.

FRANK

Freephone 0800 77 66 00 (24 hour service, free if call from a landline and won't show up on the phone bill, provides translation for non-English speakers)

www.talktofrank.com

Confidential information and advice for anyone concerned about their own or someone else's drug or solvent misuse.

STONEWALL

Use Stonewall's area database to find local lesbian, gay, and bisexual community groups, other generic services, and gay friendly solicitors.

B-EAT YOUTH HELPLINE

0845 634 7650 (Monday to Friday evenings from 4.30pm to 8.30pm and Saturdays 1.00pm - 4.30pm). Email fyp@b-eat.co.uk

Information, help and support for anyone affected by eating disorders.

THESITE.ORG

TheSite.org is an online guide to life for 16 to 25 year-olds. It provides non-judgemental support and information on everything from sex and exam stress to debt and drugs.

YOUTH ACCESS

Visit www.youthaccess.org.uk to search their directory of services.

Signposting service: 0208 772 9900 (Mon – Fri from 9am-1pm & 2-5pm)

A national membership organisation for youth information, advice and counselling agencies. Provides information on youth agencies to children aged 11-25 and their carers but does not provide direct advice.

CHILDREN'S LEGAL CENTRE

Child Law Advice Line 08088 020 008 (freephone) www.lawstuff.org.uk

The Children's Legal Centre is a charity that promotes children's rights and gives legal advice and representation to children and young people.

YOUNG MINDS

www.youngminds.org.uk

YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity committed to improving emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and empowering their parents and carers. They have a helpline for parents, and a website with a wealth of materials for you. 0808 802 5544

More useful organisations can be found on the school website:

<http://www.camdengirls.camden.sch.uk/page/?pid=21>