



Student Mental Health Management Policy (Executive Summary)

Macarthur Anglican School is committed to creating and maintaining systems of work that protect the health, safety and well-being of all children at the School. The effective management of student mental health issues and the provision of appropriate mechanisms of support are critical factors in providing an environment that can assist students to overcome mental distress and illness and minimise the risk of self-harm.

Rationale

Macarthur seeks to provide an environment in which student learning is optimised and all children are healthy, happy and safe, and grow up to have opportunities to reach their full potential. A significant inhibitor to student health and learning is mental distress and illness. This will vary from mild distress, which may occur for a short period of time in a significant number of young people, to a prolonged mental illness that may lead a young person to engage in risk-taking behaviours, self-harm or in extreme cases, suicide.

Distress versus Depression

Mild distress, which may occur for a short period of time, is common to all people, including children and young people. It is often linked to particular triggers (eg a family upset or examination stress). Once the trigger has been satisfactorily managed, the distress typically passes.

Depression is more than just a mild distress or low mood – it is a serious, (but often curable), illness affecting the mood centres of the brain. It is essentially caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. Consequently, depressed people experience low mood intensely, for long periods of time and often without reason. It can be accompanied with uncontrollable anxiety and repetitive negative thoughts.

Because it is an illness, depression sufferers cannot simply 'snap out of the mood' they are in by willing themselves to do so. People with depression can find it hard to function every day and may be disinterested or reluctant to participate in activities they once enjoyed. Depression is one of the most common of all mental health problems. Around one million Australian adults and 100,000 young people live with depression each year. On average, one in six people will experience depression in their lifetime - one in five females and one in eight males.

Different types of depression often have slightly different symptoms and may require different treatments. The five main types of depression are listed below.

- Major depression - a depressed mood that lasts for at least two weeks. This may also be referred to as clinical depression or unipolar depression.
- Psychotic depression - a depressed mood which includes symptoms of

psychosis. Psychosis involves seeing or hearing things that are not there (hallucinations), feeling everyone is against you (paranoia) and having delusions.

- Dysthymia - a less severe depressed mood that lasts for years.
- Mixed depression and anxiety - a combination of symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Bipolar disorder - (formerly known as manic depressive illness) - involves periods of feeling low (depressed) and high (manic).

Depression requires medical intervention. Treatments usually include some combination of medication and/or cognitive therapies and self-help (eg getting enough sleep and exercise).¹

Identifying students in distress and/or at risk - The Observable Warning Signs

There are a number of behaviours that may indicate distress and/or that a student is at risk. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Unexpected reduction of academic performance
- Ideas and themes of depression, death and suicide in student work
- Change in mood
- Observable grief about a significant loss
- Withdrawal from relationships and activities
- Physical symptoms with emotional cause
- High-risk behaviours

Students in distress or at risk can demonstrate an unusual failure to complete assignments, become apathetic in class, receive lower than expected grades, be extremely disappointed at being rejected for a course or demonstrate abrupt changes in attendance, such as increased absences, tardiness, or truancy.

Reading selections, written essays, conversation, and artwork containing themes of depression, death and suicide can also be an indicator of significant distress. Statements or suggestions that he/she would not be missed if he/she was gone is also a warning sign. Such students sometimes collect and discuss information on suicide methods and may begin by giving away prized possessions (possibly with some elevation in mood). Previously demonstrated direct or indirect suicide threats or attempts are also matters to be noted.

Withdrawal from friends, the sudden onset of tearfulness, and remarks which indicate profound unhappiness, despair, hopelessness, helplessness, anger at self, increased irritability, moodiness, inability to sleep and aggressiveness are all hallmarks of mental distress and illness. Lack of interest in surroundings and activities and marked emotional instability will often accompany these feelings. In some cases students will involve themselves in high-risk activities and will show greater degrees of carelessness in this regard (eg severe intoxication/drug taking,

¹ Information in this section has been adapted from the 'beyondblue', the National Depression Initiative' website <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?>

dangerous driving). Alternately, a depressed student could lose interest in extra-curricular activities and may drop out of sports and other clubs altogether. Lethargy can overcome a depressed person to the point where they do not want to get out of bed.

The recent disintegration of the family or a recent death or suicide in the family or amongst friends can be a trigger for more profound mental distress as can sudden changes in relationships with significant friends and classmates. Students at risk may begin to spend long periods of time alone.

Mental illness can also manifest in physical disturbances, particularly reduced personal hygiene, eating disorders or chronic physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches, fatigue and body aches. In extreme cases scratching or marking of the body, or other self-destructive self-harming acts can manifest.

The significance of the risk factors above may be accentuated in young people who lack emotional connections and engagement at home or at school.

How to Respond to Student Distress and Mental Illness (Mechanisms of Referral)

A Head of House, (Class Teacher K-6) or a Head of School should be the first point of contact for parents when they are concerned about a child who may have matters of mild distress.

The mental health checklists available on the beyondblue or the mind matters website are useful tools to determine whether a student has mild distress or could possibly be mentally ill with depression or anxiety (See: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety-and-depression-checklist-k10>)

For more profound matters of stress, parents should notify the Head of School who will confer with the Dean of Students and will keep the Deputy Headmaster informed of developments. If it is likely that the distress may have impact on the student's academic studies the Dean of Studies will also be informed.

It is important to note that no teachers (including Executive teachers and the Chaplain) are academically qualified to conduct serious counselling sessions with a student suffering with a profound distress or mental illness and will not attempt to provide anything more than a supportive role in assisting the student to find appropriate help. Typically, this will be via parental access to professional counselling services.

In the case of suspected mental illness (depression, anxiety and other disorders) parents should consult their general medical practitioner first. It must always be remembered that conditions such as clinical depression are illnesses that must be treated by medical professionals.

From time to time parents also seek counselling services for their child or family and/or need to be referred to such services. To assist parents a 'Suggested List of Providers' is attached to the end of this policy.

To assist with the management of their child parents are encouraged to provide any reports (including Mental Health Plans) by Health professionals and external educational services to the School.

The failure of parents to provide support to a mentally ill child who requires medical intervention could be deemed as 'neglect'. Such cases may be required to be reported to the Headmaster directly and possibly to Family and Community Services.

For any further advice on managing a child with mental illness please make contact with your child's Head of School.

Suggested Mental Health Services

Contact Details	Description and Services Offered
<p>Anglicare (Campbelltown) Shop 1 & 2, 31-35 Chamberlain St, Campbelltown 4621 6666 https://www.anglicare.org.au/what-we-offer/counselling/</p>	<p>Anglicare is the urban mission and community care arm of the Sydney Anglican Church. General counseling offered, as well as adolescent and family counselling. Free or inexpensive counselling offered for people who can't pay.</p>
<p>Uniting Burnside: Brighter Futures Macarthur 8 Allman St Campbelltown 2560 1800 864846 ask@uniting.org</p>	<p>Brighter Futures offers early intervention child protection program for families experiencing challenges that impact on their ability to care for their children.</p>
<p>Uniting Counselling and Mediation Campbelltown Level 4, Suite S18 Macarthur Square, Gilchrist Drive, Campbelltown 2560 1800 864846 ask@uniting.org</p>	<p>This office is a Family Relationship Centre which is an initiative of the Australian Government. It offers Individual, Couple and Family Counselling addressing wide-ranging issues from depression and anxiety to relationship challenges.</p>
<p>CatholicCare 35A Cordeaux Street, Campbelltown NSW 2560 Phone: 4628 0044 Fax: 4628 4549 www.catholiccare.dow.org.au</p>	<p>CatholicCare is the social services agency of the Catholic Diocese of Wollongong, covering the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Macarthur and Southern Highlands Regions.</p> <p>CatholicCare's affordable counselling service provides support to children, adults, couples and families who are experiencing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grief and loss • family & relationship difficulties • stress/anxiety/depression • changes in personal or family situations

Headspace Campbelltown
Level 8,
171 - 179 Queen St
Campbelltown.
Postal address is:
PO Box 1138, Campbelltown
NSW 2560
Opening Hours:
Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm
Ph: 4627-9089

Fax: 4627-0889

www.headspace.campbelltown@onedoor.org.au/

beyondblue

<http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

1300-22-4636

Headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year old
The service is designed to make it easy as possible for a young person and their family to get the help they need for problems affecting their wellbeing. This covers four core areas: mental health, physical health, work and study support and alcohol and other drug services. Any 12-25 years old can access these services by calling or emailing Headspace.
Services at a headspace centre are either free or have a low cost.

beyondblue is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia. Resourceful website. The beyondblue Support Service provides advice and support via telephone 24/7 (just call 1300 22 4636), daily web chat (between 3pm-12am) and email (with a response provided within 24 hours). The Beyond Blue organisation provides a list of support services available for those suffering with mental illness.
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/national-help-lines-and-websites>

Lifeline

<http://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Call 13-11-14 24/7

Crisis Support Chat 7pm –
Midnight daily

Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

- Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Personal crisis
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Abuse and trauma
- Family and relationship problems

Relationships Australia

www.relationships.com.au/

1300-364-277

Relationships Australia is a leading provider of relationship support services for individuals, families and communities. We aim to support all people in Australia to achieve positive and respectful relationships.
They community-based, not-for-profit Australian organisation. Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.
We offer services around the country that include [counselling](#), [family dispute resolution \(mediation\)](#) and a range of family and community support and [education programs](#).

Kids Helpline

www.kidshelp.com.au

Phone 1800-55-1800

Free, confidential counselling service students can use to talk about anything that's worrying them – whether it's to do with school, friends, family or work. Kids Help Line is a 24-hour telephone and online counselling for 5 to 25 year olds in Australia, whether you are in crisis or needing emotional support.