

TIP SHEET 5

Student friendly support services.

Use:
Building Student Capacity
Audience:
Student services team
Intent: Intervention

A vital aspect of providing support and services within a secondary school setting for young people with support needs in mental health and wellbeing is to gain their trust in seeking the support they need. The following strategies support building trust within a youth friendly support service in the school environment.

Building relationships, trust and mutual respect

- Make sure that you take a range of opportunities to build relationships and be accessible to students – e.g. school functions, activities, parent/ student nights
- Establish and/or participate in proactive activities that involve students in small groups and parents in interactive and collaborative projects (e.g. “ACE and Seasons of Growth student groups, Breakfast Clubs, regular “Parent Power” meetings”- GSHS)
- Build relationships through every day interactions with students by showing a genuine interest in their well being
- In some situations there is a need to make new opportunities to build relationships
- (e.g. “We develop relationships through multiple contacts such as visiting classes; running extra-curricular activities; spending time in the school grounds; attending performing art events, school balls, river cruises, camps; connecting to parents by attendance at Parent and Citizen meetings”- GSHS)

“I wanted to be sure that what I said would not be spread around the school”
– Student

Being Proactive

- Be aware of student issues that need to be addressed and involve them proactively in providing creative solutions (e.g.” Forming Friendships Club after school activities to improve relationships between Indigenous and Asian student; Healthy Lifestyles and Healthy Canteen Project to address obesity issues – GSHS)
- Staff understand and make allowances for behaviour that demonstrate distress (e.g. “Staff are inclusive and tolerate cultural differences in vernacular and behaviour – GSHS)

“I felt safe to talk as I was taken seriously – and heard for the first time by someone.”
– Student

Establishing a well coordinated student support team

- A multi-disciplinary team of school-based student support personnel are available to meet the needs of students (e.g. year/ form coordinators, chaplain, school psychologist/ counsellor, learning support teacher)
- Case management and planning for students with support needs is coordinated, discussed and continually reviewed at regular team meetings
- The school executive team support pastoral care and middle/ senior schooling structures to enable an actively functioning student support team

Student awareness of the student support team

- Advertising of names and roles of student support team through school transition and orientation programs, pictures and descriptors on display boards, student diaries, school newsletters, assemblies, class room information e.g. form/year/house time
- Special activities, lunchtime and camps to make connections and begin to build relationships in more informal settings and model appropriate communication and support
- Student Services team members are visible approachable people who are available and effective in engendering confidence in relationships (e.g. "Involvement in lunch time activities means regular contact on an informal basis to model appropriate communication and support"- GSHS)

Being available

- Students have the opportunity to develop a one to one relationship with a supportive adult through a range of strategies (e.g. mentor, advocate) and pastoral care systems such as structuring smaller groups so that student: teacher ratios are smaller for targeted programs (e.g. Regular contact and commitment with student with support needs is enhanced by mentors operating in the school to increase the number of accessible staff – GSHS)
- Lunchtimes are a good time to be available for self referrals – have at least a roster of student support staff on at this time
- Make it easy to make an appointment before, during or after school e.g. email

“Staff here are friendly- they listen and they care.

We get to do extra things that we like to do.”

– Student

Student friendly physical environment

- The counselling/student support room to be comfortable with access to both comfortable chairs and a round table group area
- If feasible make private access possible
- Decorate the room outside and in with student friendly environment which reflects the diverse student population, with pamphlets and information readily available (e.g. student artwork, bean bags, stress balls, food, drink – GSHS)

Accessing students

- Make the access process confidential (e.g. Appointment slips are not identifiable)

Referrals

- Advertise the system for referrals for students through a range of avenues
- Make it easy for students to self refer and make an appointment before, during or after school (through availability, a schedule on the door, email) (e.g. "Because of staff- student relationships appointments are easy to make: staff are visible, available and approachable – they will then connect them to the appropriate person in the Student Services team" – GSHS)
- Have multiple systems of referral, (peer, self, parent or classroom teacher) whereby minor issues can quickly be resolved ("These referrals are often opportunistic i.e. right place at the right time" -GSHS)

Your time together

- Be present for the young person – with no distractions (e.g. do not disturb signs, turn off mobile phone, divert phone to take messages.)
- Schedule the time needed – an optimal time is approx 40 minutes. Always have one urgent appointment time slot if possible.
- Negotiate what you can and can't do especially around confidentiality. A sample introduction can be something like: "I am here to support you. I am glad you came to see me about this. I need to tell you that I will keep what you say as confidential- however if I believe that you are likely to hurt yourself or others, I will need to seek help for you and involve others. If this situation arises I will talk with you about it. I am also keen to negotiate the best outcome possible with you."
- Provide a balance between the student problem-solving and providing ideas and possible directions (e.g. brief strategic, solution-focused and cognitive behaviour therapeutic approaches provide frameworks)
- Be skilled and trained in a variety of counselling strategies
- Be aware of confidentiality and privacy guidelines
- Teach students how to cope with queries about their issues by peers or staff (e.g. I prompt staff about confidentiality and I also coach students if they do get queried with standard responses Q: "Why?" A: "Because I'm upset" Q: "Why?" A: "Because I've got things happening at home" – GSHS)
- Be aware of risk management issues and responses/ procedures including child protection, sexual or racial harassment, bullying, suicide prevention and response to suicide risks
- Provide an opportunity for continuing contact and follow-up of session if appropriate
- Seek outside support in such a way that they still feel you are remaining connected with them and will take an ongoing interest (i.e. they and their issue have not just been shifted).

"We don't like teachers or counsellors to be trying too hard. Be yourself. Show a real interest in our lives. Follow up when we need help."

– Student

Ask the students

- Use a range of formal and informal methods to check on what students think about the support they are getting.

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Relevant learning from MindMatters Plus initiative:

"Involving students as partners in mental health promotion increases their understanding of mental health and their motivation and skills for supporting their peers."

"Student friendly support services are those where students are comfortable to seek help for themselves or other students."

http://mmplus.agca.com.au/key_learnings.php