

Promoting Wellbeing

Using the material

Why look at this?

Beginning to talk about emotions, and exploring how we might better identify and express our feelings, can feel scary. This is however an opportunity to enable the young people we work with to understand how to respond to their experience of themselves, others and their world.

It's important to be aware that in starting this conversation we open the door into the hearts and minds of the young people we are working with. And we don't know what is on the other side of that door. This could feel quite daunting.

Wellbeing

What we do know is that we need to take care, to be aware and to respond sensitively to what each person chooses to share to foster their wellbeing. The World Health Organisation defines wellbeing as: 'a state of mind in which an individual is able to realise his or her own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.'

In looking at this topic we seek to build young people's capacity and opportunities to develop their wellbeing.

An important component of wellbeing is building healthy relationships. It is important that we have an awareness of the need to balance a caring and supportive relationship with... young people with an appropriate... distance. (NYA,2004)

You should be aware that there are limits to our knowledge and skills, and note that this resource does not seek to step into exploring mental health, which is an area requiring professional expertise. At the same time it is important to recognize that starting a conversation about wellbeing may create a space in which young people feel able to share this aspect of their lives.

Wellbeing is a topic that could bring to light thoughts, feelings and behaviours that young people might be struggling with. As a facilitator how might you manage and respond to this?

Be clear about confidentiality and safeguarding

You should be clear with the participants that if they say something that makes you concerned that they are at risk of harm either to themselves or others, or they are at risk of harm from someone else you have a duty to pass this on to the person responsible for safeguarding in your meeting. You also have a duty to speak the person responsible for safeguarding if young people share such information about a young person or vulnerable adult. You should explain to the group that you will let them know that you are doing this (unless it would put them at risk).

Be smart – if you think a young person is in immediate danger to themselves or others, call 999 and report it to the police.

If you are concerned about a young person and you know their parent/s or guardian/s this can feel compromising. Firstly you have a duty to ensure the safety of the young person and there are some situations that may mean that you need to take further action that may include speaking to their parent or guardian. If there is a risk of serious harm or threat to life or actual serious crime is involved, then this needs to be passed on. If possible decisions about involving parents and guardians should be taken by professionals and if you are in any doubt about what to do seek advice. In other situations (for example someone disclosing that they are self-harming in a way that does not put their life at risk) then you might encourage them to seek professional support and explore with them how they could share this with their parent/s or guardian/s.

Be clear about your role, responsibilities and where you can seek support.

Pastoral care

This is about how you support the wellbeing of the participants in your group by taking an approach that is child centred. Putting the young person at the centre is about engaging with the perspectives and needs of the young person (as opposed to imposing your agenda). It is about having safe and clear boundaries for example recognising when you over identify and, especially for young adult facilitators, not seeing the young person as a friend.

What if a young person asks you how to support their friend?

Often young people keep quiet when one of their friends is struggling as they don't want to be seen as a tell-tale. So start by thanking them for sharing this with you. Acknowledge that supporting a friend can be challenging. When someone is struggling it's natural to want to say and do the right thing, but we might not know the best way to do it. That's OK but it can be hard when they know how much their friend is struggling. The challenges that their friend is facing might mean that they feel worried, unhappy, frightened or overwhelmed. This can be especially difficult if their friend has challenges with their mental health. It's really important they don't feel responsible for "fixing" their friend. Improving mental health often takes professional intervention – and even then it can be a long road. Trying to fix is when you tell someone what they should do (think about how that actually feels!). So encourage them to listen. Encourage them that they can do anything but they don't have to do everything. Encourage them to get support with helping their friend. Be open to listening to them, and ask them how they would feel about talking to Childline (who can give advice on line or over the phone). Suggest that they encourage their friend to talk to a trusted adult or to contact an organisation that could provide advice, information or support.

See www.yospace.org.uk/advice for links

Watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06rdR_R6iok 'What is Emotional & Mental Health'.