



Students' Mental Health Policy (AY 2024-26)

Introduction

Wellbeing is fundamental to student progression and success. Schools have a responsibility to nurture and sustain the mental wellbeing of their student community, and to identify and support students at risk of poor mental health. This policy sets out the basic requirements for schools in relation to the education of students about mental wellbeing, and the provision of mental health support services. It should be read in conjunction with the BRS wellbeing policies.

Purpose

- Ensure that mental health is prioritized and integrated in all aspects of the school environment.
- Encourage the school to adopt a community-wide approach to promote mental health through awareness campaigns and initiatives aimed at all stakeholders.
- Support early identification and intervention by establishing systems and protocols for identifying and addressing mental health concerns early.

Definitions

<p>BRS Wellbeing Policies</p>	<p>The group of BRS policies that relate to student and/ or staff wellbeing includes the following policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Digital Policy</i> • <i>Educational Risk Policy</i> • <i>Extracurricular Activities and Events Policy</i> • <i>Health and Safety Policy</i> • <i>Healthy Eating and Food Safety Policy</i> • <i>Inclusion Policy</i> • <i>In-School Specialist Services Policy</i> • <i>Physical Education and School Sports Policy</i> • <i>Safeguarding Policy</i> • <i>Staff Wellbeing Policy</i> • <i>Student Behavior Policy</i> • <i>Student Mental Health Policy</i> • <i>Student Protection Policy</i> • <i>Sustainability Policy</i> • <i>Wellbeing Policy</i>
<p>Additional Learning Needs</p>	<p>Individual requirements for additional support, modifications, or accommodations within a school setting on a permanent or temporary basis in response to a specific context. This applies to any support required by students of determination and those who have special educational needs and/or additional barriers to learning, access, or interaction in that specific context (e.g., dyslexic, hearing or visually impaired, twice exceptional, or gifted and/or talented).</p> <p>For example, a student with restricted mobility may require lesson accommodations to participate in Physical Education and building accommodations to access facilities but may not require any accommodations in assessments. Equally, a student with hearing impairment may require adaptive and assistive technology to access content in class and may also require physical accommodations (e.g., sit in the front of the class to be able to lip read) to access learning.</p>
<p>Confidentiality</p>	<p>A professional's promise or contract to respect a counselee's privacy by not disclosing anything revealed during counseling, except under specific, agreed-upon conditions (Glosoff & Pate, 2002).</p>
<p>Coping Mechanism</p>	<p>Any conscious or nonconscious adjustment or adaptation that decreases tension and anxiety in a stressful experience or situation (APA, n.d.).</p>
<p>Counseling</p>	<p>Highly personalized therapeutic support provided to an individual by qualified professionals to promote their wellbeing by addressing their academic, career, and social-emotional development needs.</p>

Concerning Behavior	A significant change in behavior (observed in relation to academic performance, interests, social activities, or ability to perform familiar tasks) with the potential to negatively affect an individual's wellbeing or that of others.
Cycle	A stage in the primary and secondary educational process and is classified in Abu Dhabi as the following: Kindergarten (KG), Cycle 1 (G1/ Y2-G5/ Y6), Cycle 2 (G6/ Y7- G8/ Y9), and Cycle 3 (G9/ Y10-G12/ Y13). Private schools teaching UAE Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum may follow MoE cycles: KG, Cycle 1 (G1-G4), Cycle 2 (G5-G8), and Cycle 3 (G9-G12).
Documented Learning Plan	A plan which outlines any personalized learning targets, modifications to curriculum, additional support, or tools for learning which are agreed by school staff, parents, and students (where appropriate), including Individual Educational Plans (IEP), Individual Support Plans (ISP), Individual Learning Plans (ILP), Behavior Support plans (BSP), Advanced Learning Plans (ALP), etc. This may be to address any specific identified academic, behavioral, language, or social and emotional need.
Emotional Regulation	A measure of an individual's ability to appropriately feel, identify, reflect, and act on their emotions/ emotional states to internal as well as external stimuli, dependent on time, place, and circumstance.
Mental Health	A state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to their community (WHO, 2022).
Neglect	Failure of a parent or any adult supervising a student to provide for the basic needs and rights of a student towards their physical safety, development, and wellbeing, which may lead to a failure to thrive in the context of the resources reasonably available to the parent. Such failure causes or has a high probability of causing significant harm to the student's health and/or physical, social, educational, mental, spiritual, or moral integrity.
Parent	The person legally liable for a child or entrusted with their care, defined as the custodian of the child as per the Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 Concerning Child Rights.
Protective Factor	Behavior or characteristic that reduces the likelihood or impact of negative outcomes on an individual (e.g., having social support networks).
School Counselor	A social care professional who provides social, emotional and academic support, guidance, and counseling to students by designing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing programs and initiatives related to academic, social, and emotional wellbeing.

Social and Emotional Learning	The acquisition and application of knowledge and skills that enable self-awareness, emotional regulation, meaningful social relationships and interactions, constructive choices, and resilience.
Social Worker	A professional who supports individuals, families, or groups of people (including children, the elderly, and People of Determination) with social problems, by conducting an assessment of their needs, causes and impact, and working with them and/ or their caregivers to identify, coordinate and manage appropriate solutions to enhance their personal, social, and economic competencies (DCD, 2020).
Suicidal Ideation	Thoughts about or a preoccupation with killing oneself.
Wellness Space	An area in the school that is accessible to all students and is designated for the purpose of recuperation and the promotion of calmness and mental and emotional health.
Young Caregiver	A student who tends to the needs and concerns of their parents or other family members with short-term or long-term limitations due to illness, injury, or disability (John Hopkins Medicine, n.d.).

Policy

1. School Policy on Student Mental Health

- 1.1 Policy Requirements: BRS implemented a Student Mental Health Policy, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention, in line with the ADEK wellbeing policies. The policy shall include, at minimum, the following elements:
1. Student Awareness and Education: A clear approach and plan ensuring that students learn and understand how to live balanced and healthy lives, including activities to promote and maintain mental health.
 2. Student Counseling: The provision of in-school or outsourced qualified specialist services to students who may require additional support or counseling (see [Section 3. Counseling and Support Services](#)).
 3. Referral Pathways: The procedures through which individuals can refer themselves or others for the mental health support services offered by the school (see [Section 4. Referral Pathways](#)).
 4. Support During Vulnerable Phases: Step-by-step approach to support students in managing and alleviating stress during vulnerable phases of the academic year (see [Section 5. Support During Vulnerable Phases](#)).
 5. Wellness Resources: The provision of appropriate resources, such as a wellness space, that provide opportunities for students to focus on their wellbeing (e.g., reduce stress and anxiety).
 6. Inclusion: Tailored, needs-led services for students with additional learning needs, in line with the [BRS Inclusion Policy](#) and the Federal Decree-Law No. (29) of 2006 on the Rights of Persons with Special Needs, and planned programs and initiatives to promote inclusion in schools (see [Section 6. Support for Students with Additional Learning Needs](#)).

2. Mental Health Awareness and Education

- 2.1 Educating Students About Mental Health: BRS imparts students about mental health and living healthy, balanced lives, with a focus on increasing protective factors and developing coping mechanisms. This includes mindfulness, social and emotional learning (including emotional regulation and resilience), stress management, time management and organization, and the importance of creating a receptive environment for those seeking mental health support and avoiding actions that can lead to stigmatization.
1. For students in Cycles 2 and 3, topics should also include mental health difficulties (e.g., depression, anxiety) and related coping mechanisms (e.g., surrounding parents' separation/divorce), substance use (misuse, abuse, and addiction) and its prevention and treatment, eating disorders (including causes, indicators, and treatment), digital gaming addiction, suicide and suicidal ideation, any maltreatment concerns, and ways to access help.

- 2.2 Parental Awareness: BRS informs parents about the students' mental health policy, and initiatives, and offers engagement opportunities.

3. Counseling and Support Services

- 3.1 Mandatory Provision of Counseling: BRS provides all students with access to counseling as required and ensures each step of the counseling process is documented as per requirements in line with the [BRS Reporting Policy](#).
- 3.2 Appointment of School Counselors: BRS has employed a school counselor internally as a staff member in order to provide students with access to counseling to address their mental health.

1. Qualifications: The school ensures that:
 - a. The counselor hired internally by the school as staff member meets the requirements specified in the [BRS Staff Eligibility Policy](#).

2. Counselor Responsibilities:
 - a. The school counselor conducts the following duties in addition to providing counseling services and in line with their professional qualifications:
 - Work with relevant stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, to cater to students' counseling needs, as appropriate and in line with confidentiality requirements (see [Section 3.5. Confidentiality](#)).
 - Liaise with external bodies (e.g., psychiatric centers, child protection specialists, Family Care Authority, etc.) to ensure the provision of necessary support to student(s), as appropriate and in line with confidentiality requirements (see [Section 3.5. Confidentiality](#)).

- 3.3 Appointment of Social Worker: The school shall appoint a social worker as a member of staff to support students (and their families) as an integral link between the school, home, and the community in helping students succeed.

1. Qualifications: The school shall ensure that:
 - a. Social workers hired by the school as staff members meet the requirements specified in the [BRS Staff Eligibility Policy](#).

2. Social Workers Responsibilities:
 - a. The school shall require the social worker to conduct the following duties in line with their professional qualifications:
 - As part of an interdisciplinary team to help students succeed, play a crucial role in evaluating needs, causes, and impact and providing assistance through support services to students inside the school setting.
 - Work with students, parents, teachers, school staff, and the wider community to support the personal, social, mental, and emotional

health needs of students with the goal of providing emotional and behavioral support to enhance competencies and enable them to be successful in the classroom.

- Social workers are not authorized to provide therapy/counseling.

3.4 Mental Health Committee or Lead: The school shall appoint a committee under the leadership of the counselor to promote awareness of mental health and social and emotional learning.

3.5 Confidentiality: The school and the counselor shall adhere to confidentiality requirements

as per Federal Decree Law No. (45) of 2021 on the Protection of Personal Data, the DCD Social Care Professionals Code of Conduct & Ethics in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (DCD, 2020), and other relevant government authorities.

1. The school shall authorize school counselor to share information with relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, principal, and vice principal) where the school counselor deems this is required to protect the best interests of the student or where this is required legally.
 - a. In case of suspected maltreatment or potential significant self-harm, the school counselor shall share information with the Child Protection Coordinator or any member of the Child Protection Team, in line with the [BRS Student Protection Policy](#).
 - b. In cases such as suicidal ideation or severe substance abuse, the school counselor shall immediately inform the school leadership to take further action.
2. The school counselor shall explain to the student the limitations of confidentiality in age-appropriate terms.

3.6 Parental Consent: The school shall seek consent from parents if regular or structured counseling is provided to a student. Where the need for counseling is identified but parents refuse to give consent, the school shall require them to indicate their decision in writing, with an acknowledgment that they will take responsibility for the wellbeing of the student.

1. Parental consent shall not be required when a student interacts with the school counselor in an unstructured or irregular manner (e.g., a spontaneous conversation regarding daily life, or unplanned drop-ins).
2. Parental consent shall not be required if the counselor deems it to be in the best interest of the student, i.e., in situations where informing parents may adversely affect the wellbeing of the child.
3. Where a parent refuses to give consent and the counselor and school determine that access to a counselor is a necessary measure to prevent potential significant harm to the student, the school shall report this as neglect to the Child Protection Specialist and/or Child Protection Unit, in line with the [BRS Student Protection Policy](#).

4. Referral Pathways

- 4.1 External Referral: Where it is determined that a student requires specialized support beyond the professional qualifications of the school counselor, the school shall require students to seek help from external professionals.
- 4.2 Development of Referral Pathways: The school shall design and develop referral pathways that outline the following, in line with the *BRS In-School Specialist Services Policy* and the *BRS Inclusion Policy*:
1. Procedure for referral by self and others to school counselors, social workers, and external professionals. This includes the procedure through which students and teachers can report signs of concerning behavior in students to the school administration. The school shall identify and report students who are young caregivers to the Family Care Authority (FCA) and refer them for counseling.
 2. Procedure for informing and engaging with parents, including the procedure through which the school administration needs to inform parents when signs of concerning behavior are identified and reported. The decision to inform parents and the choice of the means to inform them shall be made taking into consideration the best interests of the student.
 3. Procedure for collecting information from students to monitor their mental health.
- 4.3 Communication: The school shall communicate their referral pathways to all relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, staff) and shall publish the referral pathways in the Parent Handbook.
- 4.4 Confidentiality: The school shall ensure that all information reported through the referral pathway is treated confidentially.

5. Support During Vulnerable Phases

- 5.1 Support During Vulnerable Phases: The school shall identify specific periods during the academic year when students are prone to increased stress and emotional vulnerability such as the time of examinations, university applications, transition between grade cycles, etc. The school shall take structured measures to reduce the chances of, and where applicable, alleviate students' stress and enhance their mental health. Such measures shall include:
1. Study Leaves: A period of absence that is authorized by the school for students to study for board/pre-collegiate examinations for a maximum of 4 weeks annually, in line with the *BRS Assessment Policy*.
 2. End-of-Semester Office Hours: Brief one-on-one online or offline sessions between teachers and students for sharing feedback, both positive and constructive at the end of each semester/term.

3. Workshops: Individual or group workshop sessions with students to equip them to cope with stress and emotional vulnerability during vulnerable phases.

6. Support for Students with Additional Learning Needs

6.1 BRS ensures that the Head of Inclusion works alongside all relevant stakeholders such as teachers, specialists, parents, and school counselors to safeguard the mental health of students with additional learning needs. The school shall ensure that all Documented Learning Plans (DLP) are holistic and take the level of functioning of the students with additional learning needs into account, in line with the *BRS Inclusion Policy*.

6.2 The school shall offer reasonable accommodations to support the mental health needs of students with additional learning needs. The school considers adopting the following measures to accommodate the specific needs of students with additional learning needs:

1. Adjusting the school timetable to shorten it and accommodate break out timings for students experiencing high levels of anxiety.
2. Making the uniform norms flexible for students identified to have sensory needs.
3. Close monitoring of students who are identified as being at risk of teasing or bullying.

7. Compliance

7.1 This policy shall be effective as of the start of the Academic Year 2024/ 25 (Fall term).The school will be fully compliant with this policy by the start of the Academic Year 2025/ 26 (Fall term).

Approved By:

Dr. Rishikesh Padegaonkar
Principal
Bright Riders School



Next Review: AY 2026-2027