

# Guidance to support students to make positive choices

## Introduction

After the disruption of Covid-19 and lockdown, it is likely that all of our students will struggle far more to adjust to the routines and self-discipline that college life requires than they might have without the events of the last few months.

We also know that adolescent mental health services have seen unprecedented referral levels and we also know that Childline and domestic abuse charities have seen an exponential rise in demand for support.

So for some of our new and returning students there may be greater need for our support and care in helping them adjust.

On top of this, there are now new requirements, expectations and rules about how we all operate. Some students will adapt quickly and be used to wearing face masks and others will need more time and reminders of what is expected. Our starting point needs to be that we *expect* students to struggle with these new expectations at first, as we all have at times.

## Creating a supportive environment

Our students need to feel welcome, that we have their best interests at heart and that we want the best for them. This is crucial and will set the scene for really positive engagement and for students to feel a sense of belonging and buy-in to the college.

Students also need predictability, consistency and stability. We can provide this with:

- A learning environment which is calm, welcoming, predictable and helps them feel safe
- Teachers and support staff who they can get to know and trust
- Clear communication and respectful relationships
- A timetable which will give them structure and sense of purpose
- Rules which are clear, consistent and easy to follow

## Being a role model

Our students will need your support, your guidance and your patience as they settle back into college life. They have been out of education for 6 months and have developed a completely different routine which has not included college. They will make mistakes and it is our responsibility to support our students to make the right choice. It is important that you:

- Lead by example
- Stay in control
- Are consistent

## All behaviour has a function; it happens for a reason

Sometimes students use their behaviour to:

- **Communicate**, e.g. in place of verbal communication if they have a learning disability or difficulty
- **Escape** from a situation or to **avoid** doing something, e.g. to get out of a lesson
- Get something that they want, e.g. social attention from an adult or their friends
- **Distract** attention if they are feeling insecure or out of their depth

## Tips for supporting our students

Some of our students will forget the new health and safety measures and most of them will need reminding. It is our responsibility to support and guide them from the moment they step foot on the campus to the moment they leave. We want all our interactions with our students to be positive even when we are supporting them to make the right choice (doing what we need them to do!). Try some of the following ideas when you need to speak to a young person about their behaviour:

- Stay **calm**
- **Smile** and be friendly
- Approach **slowly** and with confidence
- Speak clearly and ask **politely**
- Say your name and ask for theirs
- Speak to the person with **respect** and as an adult (even if they don't treat you with the same respect)
- If possible, speak to one young person at a time. Avoid a whole group if you can
- Speak clearly and ask **politely**
- Keep an even tone ('quiet if possible') with **open body language**. Avoid pointing, putting hands on hips and getting into people's personal space
- Try not to patronise, don't use sarcasm or make jokes at a young person's expense
- Try not make assumptions about what has taken place if you are not sure and don't know first-hand
- Explain the reason for the request
- Use simple language
- Assume that the person is going to follow your request. Carry on with what you were doing. **Wait**
- Give them **time to 'take action'**; e.g. put a lanyard on or walk to the smoking area
- Stay **in control**. Don't raise your voice
- If they don't respond, calmly explain the benefits to them (it is for their personal safety). **Wait**
- Don't get drawn into an argument particularly if there is an 'audience'. **Be quiet**
- If a student walks off, let them. **Give them space and time** to make the right choice

## Hidden disabilities

- Some of our students have **hidden disabilities**, such as autism, ADHD and anxiety. If a young person is wearing a sunflower lanyard and/or an “**exempt card**”, this is to let you know that the individual has a communication need, a learning disability or difficulty or high anxiety.

## Seriously unsafe conduct

If students behave in a way that threatens the safety of others (and this includes serious and deliberate breaches of Covid-19-secure practices) then this will invoke the Student Management Process. It has been agreed that there will be a far clearer ‘send home’ process as a means of enabling a cool off period where the next steps can be considered. If possible, college managers should be contacted but any member of staff is authorised to send students off site should there be a immediate need.

**Please note:** *students with SEND/SEMH and Looked After Children should not be sent home. Please contact the Learning Support Manager and/or Head of Inclusive Learning*

## Parent/carers engagement

It is vital that strong links are built with parents/carers to share positive feedback to reinforce and boost the confidence that we know many of our students need. It is also important to share any immediate or early concerns about student conduct, attendance and punctuality with parents/carers so that they can also help their young people adjust.

## Support for you

If you are concerned about a young person, their behaviour or if they are putting themselves or others at risk, then contact their head of curriculum, Learning Support or Safeguarding.

Our wellbeing team and safeguarding managers are here to support directly with students and to provide support for staff. There will be daily virtual drop-ins over the lunch breaks with a wellbeing mentor during the first few weeks of term to support staff and students. In an emergency they can be contacted using the safeguarding mobile number.

Campus community officers have been employed to support our students and ensure that our campuses remain safe. In an emergency they can be contacted via reception.

## Being a team

It is essential that we all work together to make our college a safer place for all of us. Please do let your local assistant principal know if you have ideas or thoughts about what can be done to improve campus safety.