



**THE BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
ABU DHABI**

A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

# Student Mental Health Policy

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## Introduction

At British International School Abu Dhabi (BISAD), wellbeing is fundamental to student progression and success. We take seriously our responsibility to nurture and sustain the mental wellbeing of our student community, and to identify and support students at risk of poor mental health.

## Purpose

- Mental health is prioritized and integrated in all aspects of our school environment.
- We adopt a community-wide approach to promote mental health through a range of strategies like; awareness campaigns, PSME lessons, assemblies etc.
- We establish and feed a culture where students are supported and enabled to develop good mental health. All students have a trusted adult to go to, this can be their form tutor, class teacher or whoever they feel comfortable with. All staff are expected to be open and ready to support students who see them as their trusted person. In addition to this we have staff, parent and student self referral processes to support students who may need additional help. Other systems include two platforms that are used in the school for identification
  1. **You HQ**- Students across the school log into the You HQ app to rate their mood and check in on their well-being. If a student consistently records a low or very low mood, the app notifies their teacher, who then has an initial conversation with the student. Together, they explore and identify helpful strategies through the app. The teacher continues to monitor the student's progress over the next few weeks. If there's no noticeable improvement, the student is then referred to the school counsellor for further support.
  2. **CPOMS** - Any incidents observed or reported by a teacher, whether behavioural or challenging, are recorded in CPOMS and categorized accordingly. When the issue goes beyond a behavioural concern, a referral is then made to the counsellors for additional support.
  3. **Self Referral**- All students are informed of the self-referral process. This can include speaking directly to their form tutor or class teacher. They also have access to their school email and can email [jamnotok@bisad.ae](mailto:jamnotok@bisad.ae) where it will put them in contact with a member of the safeguarding team.
  4. **Mental Health First Aiders**- BISAD values the importance of mental health first aid. 16 members of our staff are qualified mental health first aiders. All students have information regarding these staff members and can contact them should they want to discuss a worry or concern. Students are reminded of these staff members on posters around the school.

## 1. School Policy on Student Mental Health

- 1.1 **Policy Requirements:** BISAD has developed and implemented a Student Mental Health Policy, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention and in line with the ADEK wellbeing policies.

The policy includes the following elements:

1. **Student Awareness and Education:** Through PSME lessons, school assemblies every week a clear approach and plan ensures that students learn and understand how to live balanced and healthy lives, including activities to promote and maintain mental health.
2. **Student Counselling:** The provision of in-school or outsourced qualified specialist services to students who may require additional support or counselling (see Section 3. Counselling 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:** At BISAD a step-by-step approach to support students in managing and alleviating stress during vulnerable phases of the academic year staff conduct workshops on topics related to how to have an efficient revision plan, stress and anxiety management workshops (see Section 5. Support During Vulnerable Phases).
5. **Wellness Resources:** At BISAD all students can access safe spaces when they feel overwhelmed, anxious, stressed or frustrated. There are identified rooms within the school that are appropriately staffed that provide a recovery space at the time it is required. Additionally, BISAD has several trained Mental Health First Aiders who are equipped to provide well-being support during crisis.
6. **Inclusion:** Tailored, needs-led services for students with additional learning needs, in line with the ADEK 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:** At BISAD students are taught through PSME lessons and assemblies about mental health and living healthy, balanced lives, with a focus on increasing protective factors and developing coping mechanisms. This shall include 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 includes 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:** we inform parents of our students' mental health policy, and initiatives, and offer engagement opportunities through regular parent wellbeing coffee mornings, our school newsletter and a range of workshops, visiting speakers and events throughout the year.

### 3. Counselling and Support Services

**3.1 Mandatory Provision of Counselling:** we provide all students with access to counselling as required and ensure each step of the counselling process is documented in line with the ADEK Reporting Policy.

**3.2 Appointment of School Counsellors:** We employ school counsellor(s) as a staff member, in line with the ADEK In-School Specialist Service Policy, in order to provide students with access to counselling to address their mental health.

1. **Qualifications:** We ensure that:

a. Counsellors hired internally by the school as staff members meet the requirements specified in the ADEK Staff Eligibility Policy.

b. Counsellors employed through DoH-licensed centres as in-school specialists meet the requirements specified in the ADEK In-School Specialist Services Policy.

**2. Counsellor Responsibilities:**

• Work with relevant stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, to cater to students' counselling needs, as appropriate and in line with confidentiality requirements (see Section 3.5. Confidentiality).

• **Liaise with external bodies** School Counsellors and DSL at BISAD liaise with (e.g., psychiatric centres, 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).

**BISAD** work with external partners to deliver counselling workshops, information on family therapy, counselling referrals. If an external agency is to come into school then ADEK pass approval is always sought.

**3.3 Appointment of Social Worker:** Schools 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:** We ensure that:

a. Social workers hired by the school as staff members meet the requirements specified in the ADEK Staff Eligibility Policy.

2. **Social Workers Responsibilities:**

- 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 a 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 behavioural support to enhance competencies and enable them to be successful in the classroom.

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

**3.4 Mental Health Committee or Lead:** At BISAD we have established a Mental Health Team who are all Mental Health First Aid trained. This group support the school in promoting and addressing positive mental health. They are qualified to deal with student and adult mental health issues.

**3.5 Confidentiality:** The counsellors at BISAD 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. BISAD requires school counsellors to share information with relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, principal, and vice principal) where the school counsellor 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 counsellor shall share information with the **Designated Safe Guarding Lead (DSL)** or any member of the Child Protection Team, in line with the ADEK Student Protection Policy.

b. In cases such as suicidal ideation or severe substance abuse, the school counsellor shall immediately inform **school leadership** or the **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)** to take further action.

2. The school counsellor shall explain to the student the limitations of confidentiality in age-appropriate terms.

**3.6 Parental Consent:** BISAD seek consent from parents if regular or structured counselling is provided to a student. Where the need for counselling is identified but if parents refuse to give consent, schools 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 counsellor(s) 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 counsellor 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 counsellor and school determine that access to a counsellor is a necessary measure to prevent potential significant harm to the student, schools shall report this as neglect to the Child Protection Specialist and/or Child Protection Unit, in line with the ADEK Student Protection Policy.

## 4. Referral Pathways

**4.1 External Referral:** At BISAD when a student requires specialized support beyond the professional qualifications of the school counsellor, schools shall require students to seek help from external professionals. This will be done collaboratively by supporting or signposting parents to the most suitable services.

### 4.2 Development of Referral Pathways

1. Procedure for referral by self and others to school counsellors, social workers, and external professionals. This includes the procedure through which students, teachers and parents can report signs of concerning behaviour in students to the most relevant school staff (Form teacher, year lead or senior leadership) as appropriate.

2. Relevant staff will submit a timely referral using their professional judgement on appropriateness. Staff member, where necessary will ensure the student (including parent/guardian) is aware of the referral being submitted.

3. Within the same school week in which the referral is made, a counsellor will review the referral and feedback to the referrer the timeframe in which the referral will be allocated. Safeguarding concerns fall outside of this process and will be acted on in response the severity and need.

4. Following the allocation of a counsellor the process of counselling support will be enacted as set out in the ANNEX 1.0

5. Further guidance: BISAD has policies in place for informing and engaging with parents, including the procedure through which the school administration needs to inform parents when signs of concerning behaviour 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.

5.1 Procedure for collecting information from students to monitor their mental health.

5.2 BISAD shall identify and report students who are young caregivers to the Family Care Authority (FCA) and refer them for counselling.

5.3 Communication: BISAD ensures to communicate our referral pathways to all relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, staff). Information on student mental health support is available for review in the Parent Handbook.

Counsellors ensure attendance during 'Orientation days' to provide parents direct guidance on BISAD's mental health provision.

6. Confidentiality: We ensure that all information reported through the referral pathway is treated confidentially.

## 5. Support During Vulnerable Phases

5.1 At BISAD students are supported during vulnerable phases: Staff are cautious and 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. At BISAD we support students to take structured measures to reduce the chances of, and where applicable, alleviate students' stress and enhance their mental health. Such measures including are:

1. **Study Leaves:** At BISAD we support students through 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 ADEK Assessment Policy.

2. **End-of-Term Office Hours:** At BISAD we offer a brief one-on-one online or offline session between teachers and students for sharing feedback, both positive and constructive at the end of each term.

3. **Workshops:** At BISAD we support students through individual and group workshops sessions to equip them to cope with stress and emotional vulnerability during vulnerable phases like time of examination, university application and transition between grade cycles.

4. At BISAD we use a professional online wellbeing and personal development tool to daily assess and identify 'those in need' (YouHq)

5. BISAD also has several trained Mental Health First Aiders

## 6. Support for Students with Additional Learning Needs

6.1 We ensure that the Head of Inclusion works alongside all relevant stakeholders such as teachers, specialists, parents, and school counsellors/social workers to safeguard the mental health of students with additional learning needs. We 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 ADEK Inclusion Policy.

6.2 At BISAD we offer reasonable accommodations to support the mental health needs of students with additional learning needs. For instance, the following measures are put in place to accommodate the specific needs of students with additional learning needs:

1. We adjust the school timetable to shorten it and accommodate breakout timings for students experiencing high levels of anxiety. Student's who feel overwhelmed or anxious at any point of the day are given a study pass/timeout card that they could use to excuse themselves from the classroom then relocating to a 'safe space'. Different areas of the school including Room no 301, Secondary Library and PA's office, are identified areas for safe space usage.
2. We make the uniform norms flexible for students identified to have sensory needs.
3. All members of Staff at BISAD closely monitor students who are identified as being at risk of teasing or bullying.
4. We also promote neurodiversity by educating children on neurodiverse needs through in class workshops and assemblies.

## 7. Compliance

7.1 This policy was effective as of the start of the Academic Year 2024/25 (Fall term).

## Appendix

### Additional Learning Needs

At BISAD we look at the individual requirements for additional support, modifications, or accommodations within our school setting on a permanent or temporary basis in response to individual needs. 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). 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).

### Confidentiality

All information shared by a student during a counselling session will always be treated confidentially. However, if the situation arises when someone is hurting the child, if the child is hurting him/herself or if the child wants to hurt someone then the information is shared with the schools DSL.

All information relating to individual safeguarding /child protection issues will be handled sensitively and confidentially in line with Nord Anglia safeguarding protocol. Information should be passed on to appropriate persons only at the discretion of the Principal /Head Teacher/Safeguarding lead and this should always be based on need to know.

### Coping Mechanism

Students are assessed on a case-by-case basis for adjustment or adaptation that can decrease tension and anxiety and alleviate stressful experience or situation.

### Counselling

A goal-oriented relationship between a professionally trained, competent counsellor and an individual seeking help for the purpose of bringing about a meaningful awareness and understanding of self and environment, improving planning and decision making and formulating new ways of behaving, feeling and thinking for problem resolution and developmental growth.

### Concerning Behaviour

A significant change in behaviour (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.

### **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), Behaviour Support plans (BSP), Advanced Learning Plans (ALP), etc. This may be to address any specific identified academic, behavioural, 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 contribute 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**

Behaviour or characteristic that reduces the likelihood or impact of negative outcomes on an individual (e.g., having social support networks).

### **School Counsellor**

A social care professional who provides social, emotional and academic support, guidance, and counselling 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

BISAD offers areas throughout the school that is accessible for all students during the day designated for the purpose of recuperation and the promotion of calmness and mental and emotional health. Students who require access to wellness spaces, are identified by staff and their wellbeing monitored accordingly.

## 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.).

## References

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- Department of Community Development (DCD), (2020). Standards for Education and Practical Experience – Licensing of Social Care Professionals (1st ed.).
- Federal Decree Law No. (29) of 2006 on the Rights of Persons with Special Needs.
- Federal Decree Law No. (3) of 2016 Concerning Child Rights.
- Federal Decree Law No. (31) of 2021 Promulgating the Crimes and Penalties Law.
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- Glosof, H. L., & Pate, R. H. (2002). Privacy and Confidentiality in School Counselling. *Professional School Counselling*, 6(1): 20-27.
- John Hopkins Medicine, (n.d.). What is a Caregiver?
- World Health Organization (WHO), (2022, June 17). Mental Health: Strengthening Our Response Factsheet.

# Annex 1.0

This Counselling Flow Chart is a guide for all school staff, parents and professionals informing the process of support from the school counsellors- referral to closure.

