



9th May 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: Mental Wellbeing Update – May 2022

In February we surveyed all students in school about their mental wellbeing, their feeling of belonging at school and who they felt comfortable talking to about their mental wellbeing, both in and out of school. We also asked them to share their views on social media and its effect on their worldview.

On the whole, student responses indicated a clear feeling of belonging to the school community, though this decreased slightly with age. This trend is likely due to the increase in workload, exams stress and beginning the process of transitioning to adulthood, and we recognise the need for continued support during this challenging time.

Most students told us they felt happy discussing the topic of mental health with their peers and had a healthy scepticism about the lives of influencers and celebrities online.

Students told us that areas where they would like some more support include dealing with pressure caused by comparisons with peers, body image, time management, job prospects and exam pressure, as well as encouraging students to identify at least one adult, in or out of school who they can talk to if they need support.

Coming out of 2 years of disruption and isolation some of us will have noticed a difference in our own behaviour or that of someone close to us. This school year, we are focusing on coping mechanisms and understand the importance of talking.

We all have a head, we all have mental wellbeing. How well we cope with stress and our emotions is where we differ. We cannot read minds – ask for

What experts are saying:

“As a rule, stress is not bad for children and teenagers”
Dr Joshua Harwood from Harwood Child Psychology.

“As parents, we don't wish stress on them but it is really important. Wrapping them in cotton wool is not healthy as it doesn't give any of the opportunities for your teenager to learn coping skills. These experiences help them to update the core belief that ‘they can do it’ even when they're stressed and anxious. I do see children whose parents have essentially rescued them for a lot of their life. This means their children don't have the skills to cope with stress and anxiety because all their problems have already been solved. There are situations, for example bullying, where parental involvement is needed, but I would say, as a rule, the avoidance of stress is fuel on the fire.”



“It’s no surprise that if we’re stressed or anxious, it can take us longer to get to sleep.”
‘Sleeping Better’ a programme by Dr Faith Orchard

Here are a few suggestions to support your child’s mental health (and yours!):

- Stop the napping. “The worst thing they can do if they want to sleep at night is to nap in the afternoon. It takes away the pressure to sleep (sleep homeostasis) that builds up during the day. A nap means there’s not time for the body to build up enough pressure again to get to sleep at bedtime.
- Reducing technology use before bed is key to promoting sleep. The latest research has looked at not just the blue light levels emitted from a device but also the types of material being accessed as having an impact on being able to drop off. The general rule seemed to be no technology 30-60 minutes before sleep.
- No long lie-ins at the weekend. Sleep patterns at weekends should be similar to those during the week to maintain good sleep habits. “No more than a two-hour lie-in is recommended so that your body doesn’t get confused.”

Our mental wellbeing programme for May

All students from Year 7-12 will have 4 assemblies followed by a form time discussion:

1. Basic coping strategies and an introduction to the mental wellbeing team at Riverside. We are here to talk to you, nothing is taboo.
2. Stress, why we get stressed, what happens in the body/mind and how to manage it effectively. Look stress in the eye and say bye.
3. Social media, devices and algorithms. How to use social media and your devices healthily. Be in control of your devices not the other way around.
4. Mindfulness and meditation, learn how to create a practice that serves you and your circumstances. 3 minutes a day could keep the psychiatrist away.

Apps and Youtube channels:



Calm



Headspace



Mental wellbeing for next school year 2022-23

Next year we would like to involve parents in the conversation:
Is there something you think we are missing in terms of mental wellbeing?
Can we support parents in some way to support your children?
Would you like to learn how to meditate or just learn more about it?

Yours sincerely,

Mr Ramsing
Associate Assistant Headteacher

