

MENTAL HEALTH

OVERVIEW

SEMH (Social, Emotional & Mental Health) is a term introduced in the Special Educational Need and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice in 2014 as one of four specific categories of special educational needs. i.e.

SEND areas of need

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- social, emotional and mental health difficulties
- sensory and/or physical needs.

Learners with SEMH needs experience a breadth of difficulties that adversely affect their ability to access education and training. This could include experiencing high levels of anxiety and feelings of being unable to cope with demands of daily life such as dealing with changes and understanding what is required in different situations. Learners with SEMH needs often experience low self-esteem and find interactions with others difficult. This can result in withdrawal and social isolation. Difficulties experienced in managing emotions can result in challenging behaviour.

Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have an increased likelihood of having SEMH needs. According to Mencap, the rate of mental health problems in people with a learning disability is double that of the general population (Mencap 2016). A danger for this

guide for practitioners and managers on ways learners can be supported to manage SEMH

linear fashion of the day's structure and ties between activities.

Now and Next Boards are very simple visual aids, typically divided into a left-hand side entitled 'Now' and a right hand side entitled 'Next' to which pictures, symbols or text can be added to explain what is currently happening and what is coming up next.

Social Stories share information in accessible and personalised ways. They are written according to [social story criteria](#) and aim to diminish anxiety through providing clarity and establishing predictability. The National Autistic Society provide [training on writing social stories](#).

Talking Mats are used to support conversations with people with communication difficulties. They use visual representations, which can be placed on a physical mat or selected on a digital device. As Talking Mats do not necessarily require the individual to communicate verbally, they can be useful in supporting sensitive conversations.

Talking Mats can be a helpful thinking tool to support learners with understanding options, and as an expressive tool for exploring more complex topics e.g. how someone feels they are managing different elements of their daily lives, what is going well, what they are worried about or what they need.

What happens in one talking mat conversation can be used to inform further discussions on further talking mats. For example, a talking mat could lead to learners identify strategies others can use to support their mental health and engagement.

Talking mats can be used proactively for regular check-

SECTION 2: A MENTALLY HEALTHY CURRICULUM

Both the curriculum and extra-curricular activities are effective vehicles to support learners SEMH needs. Many learners with SEND will have personal targets or goals within their programmes of study, e.g. the development of social and communication skills which will contribute to improved mental health. Additionally, using dedicated timetabled sessions to build self-awareness and resilience alongside facilitating access to extracurricular clubs and groups can all support overall wellbeing and mental health.

Examples include:

Dedicated personal wellbeing sessions within timetables used to build understanding of how to recognise feelings and connections between different triggers and emotions ([see the](#)

St John's College's wellbeing and relaxation groups

Wellbeing therapy groups

Groups of learners from tutor groups or who have similar therapeutic needs, meet once a week for a 60-minute timetabled session that focuses on ways to promote problem solving and peer to peer interactions. Topics covered include emotional regulation and understanding information we receive from our 5 senses as well as discussing interoception (understanding what is going on in your own body), proprioception (understanding how your body is orientated), and vestibular awareness (balance and body control).

Learners are supported to understand and label emotions and identify related physical body sensations. The group discusses recognising bodily sensations, how they feel and how that understanding can help us manage situations e.g. recognising that feeling very excited has a similar bodily sensation to feeling very anxious.

Relaxation lunch club

Learners can choose to spend time during lunch breaks in a drop in relaxation club where low lighting, relaxing m c

Derwen College's Safer Places project

The College Student Union led a piece of research called the safer places project which resulted in the senior management team understanding how different areas of the campus made learners feel. The project commenced as a piece of work undertaken within timetabled Students' Union sessions and explored the concept of 'feeling safe'. Participants then developed a research model that was rolled out across the college. Work commenced with members of the Council being asked to draw circles around images of people feeling safe, and around activities people may do if they are feeling safe. A 'click and drag' activity was then produced using PowerPoint for learners to drag different coloured arrows to different areas in photos to represent how those spaces made them feel.

The following week the exercise was repeated through physically walking the campus and recording feelings on an iPad. Learners said it was easier to comment about different spaces

Aurora Boveridge College's tailored admission process

New learners and their families are supported to engage in and influence the process of transitioning into college to help them feel in control and support safe and successful transitions. This focused and structured

