

AAESS Anti-Stigmatisation Policy on Mental Health

2022-2023

Next review date: July 2023



This policy has been read and adopted by AAESS Board of Directors and Executive Principal:

Signed:

Handwritten signature of Metin A. McCauley in blue ink.

For and on behalf of AAESS Board of Directors

Date: July 2022

Signed:

Handwritten signature of Mr Andrew Thomas in blue ink.

Mr Andrew Thomas, Executive Principal

Date: July 2022

AAESS Anti-stigmatisation Policy on Mental Health

Purpose

Al Ain English Speaking School is committed to fostering an environment where our students and staff are protected from any stigma, particularly associated with mental health. Our school seeks to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity; this includes those struggling with mental health and those who support others with mental health issues.

Aim

AAESS aims to improve public awareness and understanding, where people think and feel differently about mental health issues for children and adults, where there is less fear and where stigma and discrimination are tackled.

What is mental health?

Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences cognition, perception, and behaviour. It also determines how an individual handles stress, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. Mental health includes subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence, and self-actualisation of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others.

What is stigma?

Stigma refers to when someone is viewed with disapproval because of a particular characteristic, such as having a learning difficulty or mental health issue.

Stigma relating to mental health means that people with a mental health condition may be viewed negatively, have assumptions made about them or discriminated against because of their mental health. It can also result in people with mental health concerns feeling shame, guilt, and being afraid to tell others about their experiences. This can make it hard for them to access support and help.

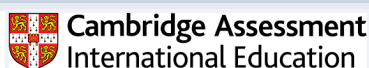
Asking for help or confiding in someone about worries can be a challenge and the fear of stigma and not being believed is a huge barrier. The Anti-stigma policy seeks to remove those barriers and make it easier for students and staff to ask for help. It also seeks to ensure that when a person asks for help, they are not judged or rejected by the adults and peers they have approached.



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Acts of discrimination and stigmatising will not be tolerated. Anyone who is found to be stigmatising another individual may be subject to action related to the school's behaviour policy or disciplinary procedures. Types of behaviour and acts that contribute to stigma include:

- Prejudicial attitudes and discriminating behaviour directed towards individuals with mental illness.
- Trivialising or belittling people suffering from mental illness.
- Insulting people who are suffering from mental illness.
- Patronising people who are suffering from mental illness by treating them as if they are not as good as other people.
- Ostracising people who are suffering with mental illness, or their friends and supporters.

Scope

This policy applies to all current students and staff.

Roles, responsibilities and guidance

Senior Leadership

The Senior Leadership of AAESS is responsible for providing all students and staff with a psychologically healthy and safe environment, free of stigma, discrimination or harassment.

The Senior Leadership of AAESS will ensure that this policy is applied in a timely, consistent and confidential manner, determining whether or not allegations are substantiated and determining what corrective action is appropriate if required. To support a stigma-free environment AAESS leadership will:

- Provide mental health awareness training and education.
- Regularly monitor organisational practices and systems for barriers to achieving a stigma-free school.
- Provide an effective and fair complaints process.
- Lead by example.

Middle Leaders

Line managers are responsible for fostering a stigma-free school environment and setting an example of appropriate behaviour. This includes communicating the policy and procedures for bringing forward a complaint, addressing situations which they become aware of in a timely fashion, and taking appropriate action in a sensitive and confidential manner for all employees.

Staff

All AAESS staff are responsible for treating colleagues and children with respect, bringing forward complaints and cooperating with investigations into complaints. Staff are also responsible for treating all students, parents and situations in a sensitive and confidential manner.



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Guidance for students and staff

- Stop stigma by sharing accurate up to date approved information and countering misinformation.
- Ensure information about students & staff who have been diagnosed with mental health conditions remain confidential and is only shared with authorised colleagues such as the School Nurse, HR, Head of Year & Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The same protocol also applies to all medical information relating to students and staff.
- Avoid stereotyping people. Children can easily generalise negative statements to others in their classes and community. Appearing suspicious of individuals and making inappropriate comments and innuendo about communities can create a stressful and unsafe learning environment for innocent groups of people. Be clear about your statements and biases, and help children understand their own prejudices.
- Speak up if you hear, see, or read discriminatory comments made by students or staff. Teachers must interrupt bias by speaking up against prejudice consistently. Additionally, educators should explain why the behaviour or statement was offensive and how it may be interpreted by others.
- Counter judgmental behaviour with affirmative responses. Affirmations are subtle acknowledgements to help individuals feel valued and included. These include acknowledging that prejudice may have occurred, supporting individuals when they tell you they have been targeted, and visibly confronting inequitable, hostile, or biased behaviour.
- Model compassion and acceptance of differences. Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid making negative statements about mental health. Reach out to your students and colleagues who might feel at risk because of their mental health.
- Provide useful approved and up to date information on mental health to students and staff. Use language that is developmentally appropriate for children especially if they are POD. Make sure all information is factually true.
- Stop any type of discrimination and stigmatising. Make it clear that such behaviour, in any form (in person, online, social media) is unacceptable. Talk to the children involved about the reasons for their behaviour. Offer alternative methods of expressing their anger, confusion, or insecurity.
- Empower others to seek help. Teachers should encourage students including those who are POD to tell a trusted adult or speak out against stigmatising (if they feel safe doing so).
- Ensure that staff are respected and protected as well. Students may not be the only individuals at risk of experiencing overt bias from peers or students. Make sure staff know their rights, what an appropriate response may be in the face of such behaviour, and how to communicate a concern to school leaders.
- Remind Students and Staff that harassment, discrimination and stigmatizing have no place in our school or community.



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The following represent concerning reactions that should be monitored in students and staff and may indicate anxiety, depression, grief, fear, anger, and isolation-

- Isolation or refusal to attend school.
- Withdrawal from peers or social activities
- Withdrawal from extracurricular activities at school or in the community
- Reporting to you they have been stigmatised in the community, or on social media due to mental health.

Training

AAESS is committed to providing mental health and anti-stigma awareness training to all Sr. Leadership, line managers and staff members within our organisation. Our school will develop, implement and maintain the awareness training program so that all staff are familiar with the signs and symptoms of mental health as well as all of our policies and procedures related to prevention, reporting, intervention and return to work. The SLT requires that all employees are involved and participate in this training program.

Evaluation

AAESS is committed to Anti-stigmatisation of mental health. The Anti-stigmatisation policy and procedures will be evaluated at planned intervals and reviewed with the joint Health and Safety Committee and wellbeing committee.



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