

## Blue Smile For Teachers

### Working together to support a child

Blue Smile is a Cambridgeshire children's charity that provides expert arts-based, longer term therapy and mentoring in schools to improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people aged 3 to 13.

We work using proven arts-based therapies which engage children and young people in a non-threatening way, helping them to cope with challenging family situations or life experiences and to manage complex feelings and anxieties.

Research shows such specialist support:

- ★ builds self-esteem and confidence
- ★ increases self-control and emotional regulation
- ★ improves concentration
- ★ develops the ability to form better relationships

So far 1000 children have been helped towards better coping strategies and school performance, and away from problem behaviours and later mental health difficulties. Supporting them helps their class too.

Blue Smile works to the highest practice standards, has robust policies and procedures, recruits practitioners at a higher training level than most other agencies and is an organisational member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

**"Blue Smile offers a much-needed provision of counselling and mentoring for children which benefits families and their peers at school. Advice and support is also available for staff. It is an invaluable service!"**

A Cambridgeshire Headteacher

Schools with programmes directly improving student's social and emotional learning demonstrate 11% higher results in exam results. Report – Public Health England, 2014

The charity operates across Cambridgeshire and surrounding areas, with a core group of 9-10 Partner Schools. Within Partner Schools, teams of practitioners build on their expertise and experience in order to develop into lone-workers in our Outreach Service. This Outreach Service was created to meet the growing need for mental health support across schools in Cambridgeshire and surrounding areas.

Our Outreach Menu of Services offers flexible, in-school support, from 1:1 arts-based therapy through to group work, staff mentoring and bespoke training packages, all delivered by highly-skilled practitioners to fit each school's individual needs. Outreach practitioners are now operating in over 30 schools and many more schools are in the process of commissioning the service.

### Supporting the child's Blue Smile journey

Referrals are generally made by the school Head, SENCO or senior member of staff, and are based on clear referral criteria provided by Blue Smile. We can also provide support with CAMHS referrals.

Consent is obtained from parents/carers by the school using a consent form provided by Blue Smile.

Referral meetings with referring staff and Blue Smile managers then allow important background information to be given so that a suitable practitioner can be allocated to the child.

Parent meetings are held before the start of work to gather further background information to determine whether the child's difficulties can be addressed within the Blue Smile model. These meetings also allow for the completion of outcome measures and build confidence in the work being undertaken.

Teacher meetings are also held to add to this information, to collect outcome measures, and to develop a good working relationship.

Sessions lasting 50 minutes now begin with the child. Whenever possible in the same room and at the same time each week, fitting around important commitments within the school timetable, this offers a sense of safety and security.

Review meetings are held once or twice termly with parents, and on a regular basis with referring staff and class teachers, for updates and feedback.

Endings to the work at a suitable time are agreed between Blue Smile, the school, the parents and, where possible, the child.

### Confidentiality and safeguarding

Specific details of sessions are confidential, which is not only a therapy requirement, but also gives a child a sense of safety in undertaking what can be challenging work. However, the practitioner and their manager will give regular feedback on general themes and progress in the work.

Child protection concerns override confidentiality requirements, so if there is ever the slightest suggestion of a safeguarding concern within a session, the practitioner (and/or manager) immediately raises it with the school's Designated Person (DP) for Child Protection.

The practitioner completes both Blue Smile's and the school's Cause for Concern forms and the school's DP then agrees the level of concern and takes any necessary actions. Blue Smile supports the DP in pursuing these actions and monitors outcomes as part of its 'exemplary' safeguarding process, which includes access to a Child Protection Consultant.

## A model of in-school mental health support

Figure from **Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing: A whole school and college approach**, Public Health England, March 2015



## Teacher tips for success

The relationship between the child's teacher and the practitioner can have an indirect effect on the outcome of the child's sessions. Good working relationships are vital for success.

Because teachers and teaching assistants are with children all through the week, they are in a unique and valuable position to:

- ★ provide a safe environment in which children can practice new skills and understandings gained from therapy
- ★ observe and feedback changes in children's behaviour, including any setbacks
- ★ realise that a solution is not immediate, since problems may be long standing and need time to be understood and addressed
- ★ recognise that a child's behaviour may appear to get worse before it improves, because the work involves identifying difficult emotions, memories, events and behaviours and change may feel frightening.

Teachers and teaching assistants should also:

- ★ avoid using therapeutic sessions as a punishment for 'poor' behaviour or reward for 'good' behaviour, as it is often those children most in need of support who express their distress in challenging behaviours.
- ★ keep hold of the fact that a child learning to manage anxious feelings and difficult memories, and learning to understand the feelings of others, will begin to have benefits for the whole class and learning environment through better concentration and relationships.

## Working collaboratively: a whole school approach

Blue Smile believes that it is very important to work alongside other significant adults in a child's life. Teachers and parents or carers are seen as important allies in the work with the child and often have valuable insight into their behaviours.

Needless-to-say, the support of teachers for the therapy and mentoring provided by Blue Smile is key to positive outcomes for children. A report of these outcomes is provided to the school for feedback to Governors, Pupil Premium reports and OFSTED.

Blue Smile believes in a whole school approach to children's mental health and in addition to offering advice, assemblies and information sessions to school staff and governors, our Menu of Services provides support tailored to individual schools.



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