



YMCA **Wales** Community College



Mental Health Policy





YMCA Wales Community College is committed to supporting all learners to achieve and this document provides guidance for tutors to enable them to feel more confident in dealing with learners facing mental health issues.

Learners with mental health problems

There is widespread misunderstanding and prejudice about mental health, despite the fact that about one in five of the population experience some form of mental ill health at some stage in their lives. This prejudice in itself will have an impact on learning.

Depression, stress and anxiety are the most common types of mental illness. Learners may lack confidence and have low self esteem. Learners may have the same full range of intellectual abilities as the population as a whole.

Impact on learning

Learners with mental ill health may experience greater anxieties about learning than other learners. Some may take medication that affects their concentration, memory and their ability to participate. Short-term memory may be especially affected.

For many people their mental health may be variable, with good and bad days. This may affect their attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Some learners may be unable to engage in the learning process until relevant emotional issues are resolved. Progress will be variable and regression can be common.

Success can mean that some learners may be reluctant to “move on”.

Assessment, particularly when it is formal, such as written tests, can be stressful and cause the person to perform below standard.

Approaches to consider

- Establish a good relationship and give plenty of encouragement and positive feedback. Deal sensitively with personal information and focus on what is needed to help the learner to learn.
- Enable learners to have immediate successes in learning.
- Some learners may experience changes in behaviour that may create an uncomfortable situation in the learning environment. It is better to allow learners to withdraw, if they wish to, rather than feel obliged to ‘manage’ the behaviour which could lead to confrontation. This behaviour is more likely to be caused by external circumstances rather than the current learning situation.

- Allow sufficient time for learners to settle down and demonstrate their skills to the full.
- Plan flexible programmes of learning to respond to variations in capacity to learn, attendance etc.
- For these learners, it will be particularly crucial to design learning sessions that include a variety of activities.
- When designing learning programmes and learning support, consideration should be given to maximising access to “catch up” activities when sessions are missed. (This applies equally to all learners with attendance difficulties)
- Provide practice, reassurance and possibly extra time for formal assessments and consider alternative assessment approaches when appropriate.
- Encourage a supportive environment and activities that can accommodate individuals when they find social interaction problematic.

Technology

Learners with mental ill health may have poor muscular control, which is sometimes related to drug therapy. Instead of a regular mouse, a roller ball with single click function can be a great help. High resolution PCs avoid distressing flickering and anti-glare screens give added protection.

Professional Boundaries

Discussion of personal issues can occur in classes and tutors should avoid taking on the role of other professionals, such as counsellors. If learners introduce inappropriate topics or wish to discuss matters not directly related to learning, tutors should explain that they are unable to cross professional boundaries. However tutors can signpost learners to the advice and counselling services listed in the Student Support Services guidance. Please contact the College if you are in any doubt about when and how to refer on learners.

Further Information

Please contact the College if you have any concerns about a learner or you would like further information on how best to accommodate learner needs.