**MANAGING UNPLANNED ENGAGEMENTS**

**This Best Practice Guide is designed to help you to respond to unplanned student engagements at the point of need.**

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| **PLAN** |
| When students, parents, or staff arrive in your Ethos room—or when you encounter them around the school—in distress and in need of immediate attention, it's important to be prepared, even though these situations are unplanned. Here’s how to approach these moments with care and effectiveness:   1. **Listen Actively**: Give the person your full attention. Listening without interruption shows that you care and allows them to express their feelings. 2. **Validate Their Feelings**: Acknowledge their emotions without judgment. Let them know it’s okay to feel the way they do, which can provide immediate comfort. 3. **Set the Tone**: Maintain a calm and reassuring demeanour. Your composure will help to de-escalate the situation and make the person feel safe. 4. **Promote Positive Thinking**: Gently guide the person towards positive thoughts or solutions, helping them to see a way forward through their distress. 5. **Have a Routine**: Establish a simple routine for handling these situations. This could include finding a quiet space, offering a comforting word, or following a basic set of steps to ensure the person feels supported. 6. **Emphasize Safety Measures**: Ensure that the person knows they are in a safe environment. If necessary, remind them of the support systems available within the school. Follow Safeguarding processes at all times. 7. **Encourage Flexibility**: Be ready to adapt your approach based on the individual’s needs at that moment. Flexibility in response is key to providing effective support. 8. **Be Kind**: Approach every situation with kindness and empathy. A simple act of kindness can have a profound impact on someone in distress. 9. **Know When to Get Help**: Recognize your limits and know when it’s appropriate to involve other professionals, such as school counsellors or senior staff, to provide the necessary support. 10. **Look After Yourself**: Remember that your well-being is important too. After handling a distressing situation, take a moment to check in with yourself and seek support if needed.   By following these best practices, you can ensure that you are prepared to provide compassionate and effective support when unexpected situations arise.  **REMEMBER**   * Always pass safeguarding concerns on and log them on your School system. * Always log the engagement for your impact report. Even if it is just a tick in a notebook to log you have had a meaningful conversation. They add up over time. |

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| **DO** |
| **Providing Emotional First Aid in three steps**  First of all, STOP what you’re doing and attune with the one who is giving the emotional signals of panic and distress.  You may need to act swiftly to remove anyone else in the vicinity/room or if they are able and cooperative, offer to walk with them, supporting them to move away from the situation to find a space to stop and breathe.  Then follow the 3 steps:   * Breathe * Drop or Walk * Listen   **1. Breathe**   * Together - if your person is not handling their own breathing move close to them and help them to regulate their breathing. 'Breathe with me.........slowly in, 2, 3, 4 and out 2, 3, 4, 5 6'. Do this a number of times. * Ask them to watch their chest/stomach moving out and in as you breathe together. It can help to encourage them to blow out their breaths slowly so that they can also hear their breathing.     **2. Drop or Walk**   * **Drop** – if they continue to feel overwhelmed it can be helpful for them to sit on a chair or even on the floor so that they can feel a solid surface underneath and behind them (leaning against a wall). Continue the slow deep breathing. * **Walk** – if they want to get out, offer to walk together or follow them if they are in ‘flight’ mode and running off. Remain calm and steady as you walk/follow them as this will ease and not aggravate their agitation. Continue to promote slow, deep breathing.     **3. Listen**   * Let them talk/shout/process their emotions with you as you remain present with them. You can put a hand on their arm or shoulder if you know the physical touch will be calming for them. This isn’t a time to try and fix or see the bright side, it’s a time to hear, accept, understand, be curious and just be present with them. Encourage them to keep breathing this will help them to regulate their emotions. Say ‘I’m hearing you’. * If you are concerned by their state of mind to the point of thinking they are unsafe for themselves or others, follow your organisation’s safeguarding procedures.   *Source: Emotional First Aid (TLG Transforming Lives for Good)*  **Connecting With Students**  When sitting down to talk to a student consider the following tips.  **Choosing a setting**   * Make a hot drink or grab a glass of water. It’s a great way to ask someone a quick ‘how are you’ and ask for a private meeting. * Meeting outside the workplace in a neutral space such as a café might feel less intimidating. * Give yourself plenty of time so you don’t appear to be in a hurry—10 minutes may be enough but if you need longer then go ahead. * You don’t want to be disturbed so turn your phone off or onto silent.   **Talking tips**   * Keep the chat positive and supportive, exploring the issues and how you may be able to help. * Keep your body language open and non-confrontational. * Be empathetic and take them seriously. * Do not offer glib advice such as “pull yourself together” or “cheer up”. * Take into account cultural differences in communication styles, e.g. how much eye contact is appropriate.   **How to listen**   * Give the person your full focus and listen without interrupting. * Listen to their words, tone of voice, and body language— all will give clues to how they are feeling. * Accept them as they are * Respect the person’s feelings, experiences, and values although they may be different from yours. Do not judge or criticise because of your own beliefs and attitudes. * Get on their wavelength * Place yourself in the other person’s shoes and demonstrate to them that you hear and understand what they are saying and feeling. * Listen non-judgementally * Be genuine—show that you accept the person and their values by what you say and do. * Ask open Questions   *Source: Mental Health First Aid England* |

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| **REVIEW** |
| **After the Engagement**   * Follow up with any Safeguarding concerns immediately following school protocol * Make a note of the engagement – Many Ethos Teams keep a tally in a notebook   **Follow up With the Student**  If the initial issue required a safeguarding referral, please do the following in connection with the Safeguarding team and only where appropriate.   * **Reach Out Personally**: A personal touch goes a long way. Let the person know you care and wanted to check in. * **Keep It Casual**: Approach the follow-up in a relaxed and non-intrusive manner. A simple “How have you been feeling since we last spoke?” can open the door for them to share without feeling pressured. Check with Safeguarding where needed. * **Offer Continued Support**: Reiterate that you are available if they need to talk or need further assistance. This helps them feel supported beyond the initial encounter. * **Reinforce Positivity**: Encourage any positive steps they’ve taken since the incident, no matter how small. This can help build their confidence and reinforce their progress. * **Check In Again Later**: If it feels right, consider another follow-up in the future. This continued support can make a significant difference in their ongoing well-being. |