

# Supporting roles with high levels of emotional content

**It is generally accepted that teaching requires a relatively high degree of emotional engagement and emotional work. Across the workforce, there is growing evidence of increased stress, anxiety and depression<sup>1</sup>.**

Within schools and colleges there are particular roles that may absorb an even higher proportion of emotionally demanding encounters or events.

**These roles include:**

## **Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL)**

The designated safeguarding lead is the person appointed to take lead responsibility for child protection issues in school. The person fulfilling this role must be a senior member of the school's leadership team, and the DSL role must be set out in the post holder's job description.

## **Dedicated pastoral care roles**

Pastoral care is the provision a school makes to ensure the physical and emotional welfare of pupils. It is the essential foundation upon which learning can take place. There can be a range

of pastoral roles in schools. These are staff who are well placed to deal with issues facing pupils such as eating disorders, anxiety, depression, bullying and stress.

Whether or not they have a specific responsibility in this area, every teacher recognises the important pastoral role they have to play.

## **Special Educational Leads**

Special Educational Leads are responsible for the identification of children with special educational needs, co-ordinating provision for children with special educational needs, liaising with parents of children with special educational needs and liaising with other providers, outside agencies, educational psychologists and external agencies.

It's important that school leaders take time to reflect on the distribution of emotional demand across the staff team and where appropriate, to put additional support mechanisms in place for those staff members.

<sup>1</sup>. Teacher Wellbeing Index (2020), Education Support.

Available at: <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/research-reports/teacher-wellbeing-index-2020>

# Top tips to get you started



## Introduce the conversation into inductions

Acknowledging that these roles absorb an even higher proportion of emotionally demanding encounters or events, and talking about the support staff will need to process this, as part of their induction process is important. Make sure staff understand the types of things they may be dealing with, the possible impact this might have and the avenues for seeking support when needed.



## Encourage the use of Wellness Action Plans

*Wellness Actions Plans* (WAPs) are an easy, practical way of staff supporting their own mental health at work and, if you are a manager, helping you to support the mental health of your team members. For these roles in particular, a WAP can be helpful to identify when a staff member's mental health might be being affected by what they are dealing with. We encourage the WAP to be reviewed on a regular basis between staff and their line managers.



## Offer space to de-brief with line managers

Staff in these roles may require more time to de-brief with their line manager, to discuss some of the issues coming up and to talk through any challenges they are facing. These discussions may focus solely on working through a particular issue or concern, rather than talking about the impact of the work on the staff member, but the important thing here is making time available for conversation.



## Managers for mental health

Good managers don't try and do too much and do not try to be therapists. They are conscious of the signs of poor mental health, clear on the support available and 'check in' with individuals at appropriate times. As noted above, with these roles those 'check-ins' may need to happen more regularly. They encourage safe disclosure and employee led ideas for adjustments. Make sure your managers have the right training to do their job properly - deliver sessions for line managers on how to have an important conversation, with a particular focus on mental health, and make sure that these roles are explored properly as part of the training.



## Peer Support

Peer support comes in many forms. Providing the time and space for staff in these roles to talk to other peers in similar roles can be incredibly helpful. Staff may feel more comfortable talking to peers outside of their school, so consider how you might connect staff with other staff across schools in your region, as well as setting up internal peer support mechanisms.



## Reflective practice

Reflective Practice is an essential part of developing new skills, but at a deeper level it grows the capacity of the individual to respond to challenges, make timely decisions, manage emotions, conduct productive relationships and cope with stress. Providing opportunities for staff in these role to process reflect and recognise their own stressors (incl. spotting patterns and possible interventions) is an important step in supporting their mental health and wellbeing.

Education support are launching e-learning modules on reflective practice and setting up support structures. This may provide a first step for staff who don't currently have any other support in place. If you would like to receive notification when this free resource is launched, please e-mail [teachershub@edsupport.org.uk](mailto:teachershub@edsupport.org.uk).



## Professional Supervision

Professional supervision is not widely used in schools. The 2020 Teacher Wellbeing Index confirmed that **only 8% of education professionals reporting having access to supervision.**

Professional supervision allows staff to focus on the personal impact of professional experiences on them. Professional supervision space offers a reflective space within which the individual will have the opportunity to process any burdensome emotional load which may impact them negatively. Staff in emotionally demanding roles should be offered professional supervision, in addition to line management supervision.



## Signpost to support

Use our signpost to [support template](#) to make sure that staff in these roles know how to find out more about mental health and accessing mental health support, either through services provided by your school, or more widely in the local community/nationally.



You can also signpost staff to Education Support's 24hr free, confidential helpline on 08000 562 561.