



Effective From	AY 2024/25 (Fall term)
Compliance From	AY 2025/26 (Fall term)

SCHOOL POLICY

on

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH



Introduction

As set out in the [ADEK School Wellbeing Policy](#), wellbeing is fundamental to student progression and success. Schools have a responsibility to nurture and sustain the mental wellbeing of their student community, and to identify and support students at risk of poor mental health. This policy sets out the basic requirements for schools in relation to the education of students about mental wellbeing, and the provision of mental health support services. It should be read in conjunction with the ADEK wellbeing policies.

Purpose

- Ensure that mental health is prioritized and integrated in all aspects of the school environment.
- Encourage schools to adopt a community-wide approach to promote mental health through awareness campaigns and initiatives aimed at all stakeholders.
- Support early identification and intervention by establishing systems and protocols for identifying and addressing mental health concerns early.

Definitions

ADEK Wellbeing Policies	The group of ADEK policies that relate to student and/or staff wellbeing includes the following policies: • ADEK School Digital Policy • ADEK School Educational Risk Policy • ADEK School Extracurricular Activities and Events Policy • ADEK School Health and Safety Policy • ADEK School Inclusion Policy • ADEK School In-School Specialist Services Policy • ADEK School Physical Education and School Sports Policy • ADEK School Staff Wellbeing Policy • ADEK School Student Behavior Policy • ADEK School Student Mental Health Policy • ADEK School Student Protection Policy • ADEK School Sustainability Policy • ADEK School Wellbeing Policy
Additional Learning Needs	Individual requirements for additional support, modifications, or accommodations within a school setting on a permanent or temporary basis in response to a specific context. This applies to any support required by students of determination and those who have special educational needs and/or additional barriers to learning, access, or interaction in that specific context (e.g., dyslexic, hearing or visually impaired, twice exceptional, or gifted and/or talented). For example, a student with restricted mobility may require lesson accommodations to participate in Physical Education and building accommodations to access facilities but may not require any accommodations in assessments. Equally, a student with hearing impairment may require adaptive and assistive technology to access content in class and may also require physical accommodations (e.g., sit in the front of the class to be able to lip read) to access learning.
Behaviors of Concern	A significant change in behavior (observed in relation to academic performance, interests, social activities, or ability to perform familiar tasks) with the potential to negatively affect an individual's wellbeing or that of others. This also includes “any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning, wellbeing, physical safety, and/or engagement in pro-social interaction with peers and adults” (Smith & Fox, 2003) and includes risky or illegal habits.
Confidentiality	A professional's promise or contract to respect a counselee's privacy by not disclosing anything revealed during counseling, except under specific, agreed-upon conditions (Glosoff & Pate, 2002).

Coping Mechanism	Any conscious or nonconscious adjustment or adaptation that decreases tension and anxiety in a stressful experience or situation (APA, n.d.).
Counseling	Highly personalized therapeutic support provided to an individual by qualified professionals to promote their wellbeing by addressing their academic, career, and social-emotional development needs.
Cycle	A stage in the primary and secondary educational process and is classified in Abu Dhabi as the following: Kindergarten (Pre-KG/FS1-KG2/Y1), Cycle 1 (G1/Y2-G5/Y6), Cycle 2 (G6/Y7- G8/Y9), and Cycle 3 (G9/Y10-G12/Y13). Private schools teaching UAE Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum may follow MoE cycles: KG, Cycle 1 (G1-G4), Cycle 2 (G5-G8), and Cycle 3 (G9-G12).
Documented Learning Plan	A plan which outlines any personalized learning targets, modifications to curriculum, additional support, or tools for learning which are agreed by school staff, parents, and students (where appropriate), including Individual Educational Plans (IEP), Individual Support Plans (ISP), Individual Learning Plans (ILP), Behavior Support plans (BSP), Advanced Learning Plans (ALP), etc. This may be to address any specific identified academic, behavioral, language, or social and emotional need.
Emotional Regulation	A measure of an individual's ability to appropriately feel, identify, reflect, and act on their emotions/ emotional states to internal as well as external stimuli, dependent on time, place, and circumstance.
Mental Health	A state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to their community (WHO, 2022).
Neglect	Failure of a parent or any adult supervising a student to provide for the basic needs and rights of a student towards their physical safety, development, and wellbeing, which may lead to a failure to thrive in the context of the resources reasonably available to the parent. Such failure causes or has a high probability of causing significant harm to the student's health and/or physical, social, educational, mental, spiritual, or moral integrity.
Parent	The person legally liable for a child or entrusted with their care, defined as the custodian of the child as per the Federal Law No. (3) of 2016 Concerning Child Rights (Wadeema).
Protective Factor	Behavior or characteristic that reduces the likelihood or impact of negative outcomes on an individual (e.g., having social support networks).
School Counselor	A social care professional who provides social, emotional and academic support, guidance, and counseling to students by designing,

	implementing, evaluating, and enhancing programs and initiatives related to academic, social, and emotional wellbeing.
Social and Emotional Learning	The acquisition and application of knowledge and skills that enable self-awareness, emotional regulation, meaningful social relationships and interactions, constructive choices, and resilience.
Social Worker	A professional who supports individuals, families, or groups of people (including children, the elderly, and People of Determination) with social problems, by conducting an assessment of their needs, causes and impact, and working with them and/ or their caregivers to identify, coordinate and manage appropriate solutions to enhance their personal, social, and economic competencies (DCD, 2020).
Suicidal Ideation	Thoughts about or a preoccupation with killing oneself.
Wellness Space	An area in the school that is accessible to all students and is designated for the purpose of recuperation and the promotion of calmness and mental and emotional health.
Young Caregiver	A student who tends to the needs and concerns of their parents or other family members with short-term or long-term limitations due to illness, injury, or disability (John Hopkins Medicine, n.d.).



Policy

1. School Policy on Student Mental Health

- 1.1 Policy Requirements: Schools shall develop and implement a Student Mental Health Policy, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention, in line with the ADEK wellbeing policies. The policy shall include, at minimum, the following elements:
1. Student Awareness and Education: A clear approach and plan ensuring that students learn and understand how to live balanced and healthy lives, including activities to promote and maintain mental health.
 2. Student Counseling: The provision of in-school or outsourced qualified specialist services to students who may require additional support or counseling (see [Section 3. Counseling and Support Services](#)).
 3. Referral Pathways: The procedures through which individuals can refer themselves or others for the mental health support services offered by the school (see [Section 4. Referral Pathways](#)).
 4. Support During Vulnerable Phases: Step-by-step approach to support students in managing and alleviating stress during vulnerable phases of the academic year (see [Section 5. Support During Vulnerable Phases](#)).
 5. Wellness Resources: The provision of appropriate resources, such as a wellness space, that provide opportunities for students to focus on their wellbeing (e.g., reduce stress and anxiety).
 6. Inclusion: Tailored, needs-led services for students with additional learning needs, in line with the [ADEK School Inclusion Policy](#) and the Federal Decree Law No. (29) of 2006 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its amendments, and planned programs and initiatives to promote inclusion in schools (see [Section 6. Support for Students with Additional Learning Needs](#)).

2. Mental Health Awareness and Education

- 2.1 Educating Students About Mental Health: Schools shall teach students about mental health and living healthy, balanced lives, with a focus on increasing protective factors and developing coping mechanisms. This shall include mindfulness, social and emotional learning (including emotional regulation and resilience), stress management, time management and organization, and the importance of creating a receptive environment for those seeking mental health support and avoiding actions that can lead to stigmatization.
1. Schools shall ensure coverage of health education requirements as per the *National School Health Screening Guideline* (MoHAP, 2003) and the *School Screening Standard* (DoH, 2023).

2. In addition, for students in Cycles 2 and 3, topics should also include other types of mental health difficulties (e.g., depression, anxiety) and related coping mechanisms (e.g., surrounding parents' separation/divorce), substance use (misuse, abuse, and addiction) and its prevention and treatment, eating disorders (including causes, indicators, and treatment), digital gaming addiction, suicide and suicidal ideation, any maltreatment concerns, and ways to access help.

- 2.2 Parental Awareness: Schools shall inform parents of their students' mental health policy, and initiatives, and offer engagement opportunities, including facilitating and disseminating awareness materials/resources, holding workshops, and encouraging parent participation in surveys on mental health issued by other stakeholders.

3. Counseling and Support Services

- 3.1 Mandatory Provision of Counseling: Schools shall provide all students with access to counseling as required and ensure each step of the counseling process is documented as per requirements in line with the [ADEK School Reporting Policy](#).

- 3.2 Appointment of School Counselors: Schools are authorized to employ school counselor(s) internally as a staff member or through Department of Health (DoH)-licensed centers via the in-school specialist system, in line with the [ADEK School In-School Specialist Services Policy](#), in order to provide students with access to counseling to address their mental health.

1. Qualifications: Schools shall ensure that:
 - a. Counselors hired internally by the school as staff members meet the requirements specified in the [ADEK School Staff Eligibility Policy](#).
 - b. Counselors employed through DoH-licensed centers as in-school specialists meet the requirements specified in the [ADEK School In-School Specialist Services Policy](#).

2. Counselor Responsibilities:
 - a. Schools shall require the counselor to conduct the following duties in addition to providing counseling services and in line with their professional qualifications:
 - 1) Work with relevant stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, to cater to students' counseling needs, as appropriate and in line with confidentiality requirements (see [Section 3.5. Confidentiality](#)).
 - 2) Liaise with external bodies (e.g., psychiatric centers, child protection specialists, Family Care Authority, etc.) to ensure the provision of necessary support to student(s), as appropriate and in line with confidentiality requirements (see [Section 3.5. Confidentiality](#)).

- 3.3 Appointment of Social Worker: Schools shall appoint a social worker as a member of staff to support students (and their families) as an integral link between the school, home, and the community in helping students succeed.

1. Qualifications: Schools shall ensure that:
 - a. Social workers hired by the school as staff members meet the requirements specified in the [ADEK School Staff Eligibility Policy](#).
 2. Social Worker Responsibilities:
 - a. Schools shall require the social worker to conduct the following duties in line with their professional qualifications:
 - 3) As part of an interdisciplinary team to help students succeed, play a crucial role in evaluating needs, causes, and impact and providing assistance through support services to students inside a school setting.
 - 4) Work with students, parents, teachers, school staff, and the wider community to support the personal, social, mental, and emotional health needs of students with the goal of providing emotional and behavioral support to enhance competencies and enable them to be successful in the classroom.
 - 5) Social workers are not authorized to provide therapy/counseling.
- 3.4 Mental Health Committee or Lead: Schools shall appoint a committee or lead to promote awareness of mental health and social and emotional learning. In cases where counselor(s) are appointed internally as a staff member, it is recommended that the counselor take on this role.
- 3.5 Confidentiality: Schools and counselors shall adhere to confidentiality requirements as per Federal Decree Law No. (45) of 2021 Concerning the Protection of Personal Data, the DCD Social Care Professionals Code of Conduct & Ethics in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (DCD, 2020), and other relevant government authorities.
1. Schools shall authorize school counselors to share information with relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, principal, and vice principal) where the school counselor deems this is required to protect the best interests of the student or where this is required legally.
 - a. In case of suspected maltreatment or potential significant self-harm, the school counselor shall share information with the Child Protection Coordinator or any member of the Child Protection Team, in line with the [ADEK School Student Protection Policy](#).
 - b. In cases such as suicidal ideation or severe substance abuse, the school counselor shall immediately inform school leadership to take further action.
 2. The school counselor shall explain to the student the limitations of confidentiality in age-appropriate terms.
- 3.6 Parental Consent: Schools shall seek consent from parents if regular or structured counseling is provided to a student. Where the need for counseling is identified but parents refuse to give consent, schools shall require them to indicate their decision in writing, with an acknowledgment that they will take responsibility for the wellbeing of the student.

1. Parental consent shall not be required when a student interacts with the school counselor(s) in an unstructured or irregular manner (e.g., a spontaneous conversation regarding daily life, or unplanned drop-ins).
2. Parental consent shall not be required if the counselor deems it to be in the best interest of the student, i.e., in situations where informing parents may adversely affect the wellbeing of the child.
3. Where a parent refuses to give consent and the counselor and school determine that access to a counselor is a necessary measure to prevent potential significant harm to the student, schools shall report this as neglect to the Child Protection Specialist and/or Child Protection Unit, in line with the [ADEK School Student Protection Policy](#).

4. Referral Pathways

- 4.1 External Referral: Where it is determined that a student requires specialized support beyond the professional qualifications of the school counselor, schools shall require students to seek help from external professionals.
- 4.2 Development of Referral Pathways: Schools shall design and develop referral pathways that outline the following, in line with the [ADEK School In-School Specialist Services Policy](#) and the [ADEK School Inclusion Policy](#):
 1. Procedure for referral by self and others to school counselors, social workers, and external professionals. This includes the procedure through which students and teachers can report signs of behaviors of concern in students to the school administration. Schools shall identify and report students who are young caregivers to the Family Care Authority (FCA) and refer them for counseling.
 2. Procedure for informing and engaging with parents, including the procedure through which the school administration needs to inform parents when signs of behaviors of concern are identified and reported. The decision to inform parents and the choice of the means to inform them shall be made taking into consideration the best interests of the student.
 3. Procedure for collecting information from students to monitor their mental health, in alignment with the *National School Health Screening Guideline* (MoHAP, 2003) and the *School Screening Standard* (DoH, 2023).
- 4.3 Communication: Schools shall communicate their referral pathways to all relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, staff). Schools shall publish the referral pathways in the Parent Handbook.
- 4.4 Confidentiality: Schools shall ensure that all information reported through the referral pathway is treated confidentially.

5. Support During Vulnerable Phases

5.1 Support During Vulnerable Phases: Schools shall identify specific periods during the academic year when students are prone to increased stress and emotional vulnerability such as the time of examinations, university applications, transition between grade cycles, etc. Schools shall take structured measures to reduce the chances of, and where applicable, alleviate students' stress and enhance their mental health. Such measures shall include:

1. Study Leaves: A period of absence that is authorized by the school for students to study for board/pre-collegiate examinations for a maximum of 4 weeks annually, in line with the [ADEK School Assessment Policy](#).
2. End-of-Semester Office Hours: Brief one-on-one online or offline sessions between teachers and students for sharing feedback, both positive and constructive at the end of each semester/term.
3. Workshops: Individual or group workshop sessions with students to equip them to cope with stress and emotional vulnerability during vulnerable phases.

6. Support for Students with Additional Learning Needs

6.1 Schools shall ensure that the Head of Inclusion works alongside all relevant stakeholders such as teachers, specialists, parents, and school counselors to safeguard the mental health of students with additional learning needs. Schools shall ensure that all Documented Learning Plans (DLP) are holistic and take the level of functioning of the students with additional learning needs into account, in line with the [ADEK School Inclusion Policy](#).

6.2 Schools shall offer reasonable accommodations to support the mental health needs of students with additional learning needs. For instance, schools can consider adopting the following measures to accommodate the specific needs of students with additional learning needs:

1. Adjusting the school timetable to shorten it and accommodate breakout timings for students experiencing high levels of anxiety.
2. Making the uniform norms flexible for students identified to have sensory needs.
3. Close monitoring of students who are identified as being at risk of teasing or bullying.

7. Compliance

- 7.1 This policy shall be effective as of the start of the Academic Year 2024/25 (Fall term). Schools are expected to be fully compliant with this policy by the start of the Academic Year 2025/26 (Fall term).
- 7.2 Failure to comply with this policy shall be subject to legal accountability and the penalties stipulated in accordance with ADEK's regulations, policies, and requirements, notwithstanding any other penalties imposed by Federal Decree Law No. (31) of 2021 Promulgating the Crimes and Penalties and its amendments or any other relevant law. ADEK reserves the right to intervene if the school is found to be in violation of its obligations.



References

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- John Hopkins Medicine. (n.d.). What is a Caregiver?
- Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP). (2003). *National School Health Screening Guideline*.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). Mental Health: Strengthening Our Response Factsheet.

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Department of Education and Knowledge, Abu Dhabi (ADEK)

This policy applies to Private and Charter Schools in Abu Dhabi. However, any circular issued prior to this policy or issued specifically for Charter Schools thereafter supersedes the requirements of this policy.

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