AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL OF ABU DHABI

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH POLICY

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1. SCHOOL VISION

Australian School of Abu Dhabi (ASAD) fosters globally minded graduates through inclusive education, nurturing a sense of belonging, understanding, and respect. We empower students with skills, empathy, and awareness to contribute locally and globally.

2. SCHOOL MISSION

Australian School of Abu Dhabi (ASAD) provides a diverse curriculum with global perspectives to all students. We foster inclusion, embrace diversity, promote understanding, and empower students to excel academically and socially. Our commitment to inclusivity ensures every student feels valued and supported.

3. INTRODUCTION

Australian School of Abu Dhabi (ASAD) is committed to promoting and safeguarding the mental health and wellbeing of all students, in alignment with the ADEK *School Wellbeing Policy* and the ADEK *School Student Mental Health Policy*. Supporting students' mental wellbeing is essential to their academic progress, personal development, and long-term success. ASAD recognises its responsibility to create a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where students feel valued, connected, and able to seek help when needed. This includes fostering mental health awareness, reducing stigma, increasing mental health literacy, and ensuring that appropriate supports are available for students experiencing mental health challenges or at risk of poor mental health outcomes.

This policy outlines the minimum requirements and expectations for promoting mental wellbeing, delivering mental health education, and providing access to mental health support services within the School. It should be read in conjunction with all relevant ADEK wellbeing and safeguarding policies and standards.

4. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to guide ASAD's approach to promoting, supporting, and safeguarding student mental health and wellbeing in alignment with ADEK requirements. Specifically, the policy aims to:

- Ensure that student mental health and wellbeing are prioritised and embedded across all aspects of ASAD's culture, environment, and operations.
- Promote a whole-school and community-wide approach that strengthens mental health awareness, reduces stigma, and encourages positive wellbeing among students, staff, and families.
- Establish clear and consistent systems for the early identification of students who may be experiencing mental health challenges, ensuring timely, appropriate, and effective intervention.
- Build the capacity of school staff to recognise and respond to student mental health needs through ongoing training, guidance, and professional learning, as required by ADEK.
- Ensure students have access to high-quality mental health support services, including counselling, referrals, and coordinated care, in line with ADEK wellbeing and safeguarding policies.

5. SCOPE

This policy applies to all students enrolled at ASAD and to all staff involved in promoting, supporting, or responding to student mental health and wellbeing needs. It covers whole-school wellbeing practices, mental health education, early identification processes, and the provision of mental health support services, in alignment with ADEK wellbeing and safeguarding requirements.

6. DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
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.
Behaviours 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 personalised 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.).

7. POLICY

7.1 Student Mental Health Policy

7.1.1 Policy Requirements

ASAD maintains a comprehensive and proactive approach to student mental health, emphasising prevention, early identification, and early intervention in alignment with ADEK wellbeing and mental health policies. ASAD promotes mental wellbeing through structured education, accessible support services, and a nurturing school culture. Mental health support is delivered respectfully, confidentially, and inclusively for all students. The Student Mental Health Policy includes the following components:

1. **Student Mental Health Awareness and Education**

   ASAD promotes mental health awareness across the entire school community through a consistent whole-school approach. The school fosters an environment in which students feel safe, respected, and supported in discussing mental health concerns and seeking help when needed. Awareness is reinforced through:

   - school-wide wellbeing initiatives, assemblies, and campaigns
   - age-appropriate awareness activities aligned to the ASAD's wellbeing calendar
   - visible messaging that reduces stigma and encourages empathy
   - opportunities for student leadership groups to promote wellbeing and peer support
   - pastoral and advisory programmes that normalise conversations about mental health

   This whole-school approach strengthens students' sense of belonging, helps reduce stigma, and supports early identification of wellbeing concerns in alignment with ADEK wellbeing expectations.

2. **Student Counselling**

   ASAD provides students with access to confidential, culturally appropriate, and age-appropriate counselling services. Counselling support focuses on early intervention, emotional wellbeing, and assisting students in managing personal, academic, or social challenges.

   Counselling services include:

   - individual and small-group support
   - brief solution-focused interventions
   - wellbeing check-ins and follow-up sessions
   - guidance on help-seeking and coping strategies
   - referrals to external mental health specialists when required

   All counselling services are delivered by a qualified school staff or licensed specialist and follow ADEK's *Counselling and Safeguarding Guidelines*. Sensitive or high-risk cases are managed in consultation with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and through appropriate external services when needed. *For more details, see Section 7.3: Counselling and Support Services.*

3. Referral Pathways

ASAD maintains clear, confidential, and accessible referral pathways to ensure that students can receive timely and appropriate mental health support. Referral options include:

- Self-referral through direct contact with specialist staff or via a confidential request form
- Teacher or staff referral through the internal wellbeing referral system
- Parent referral through direct contact with the specialist staff or the Principal
- Immediate safeguarding referral to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in cases of suspected harm, risk, or urgent mental health concerns

Referral procedures are communicated to students, staff, and parents through orientation, handbooks, and school communication channels. All referrals are handled sensitively and in line with ADEK's *Student Protection and Wellbeing Policies.* *For more details, see Section 7.4: Referral Pathways.*

4. Support During Vulnerable Phases

ASAD implements additional support for students during high-stress periods or significant transitions within the school year. These supports include:

- stress-management and study-skills workshops during exam periods
- advisory lessons focused on wellbeing leading up to major assessments
- targeted support for students transitioning between cycles or year levels
- reintegration meetings and tailored academic support for students returning from extended absence
- increased check-ins and counselling availability following community or family crises

Staff receive guidance on recognising early signs of distress and how to alert the specialist staff or DSL promptly. The school prioritises preventative care and timely intervention to reduce escalation. *For more details, see Section 7.5: Support During Vulnerable Phases.*

5. Wellness Resources

ASAD maintains dedicated wellbeing spaces and resources to support students' emotional regulation and general wellbeing. These include:

- a Student Wellness Room for calm, supervised breaks
- private counselling offices for confidential support
- access to physical activity and recreational areas that promote healthy routines
- wellbeing materials such as self-help resources, mental health information, and mindfulness tools

These spaces are monitored to ensure they are used safely and supportively, and access is coordinated by wellbeing staff when required.

6. Inclusion

ASAD ensures that students of determination and those with additional learning needs receive tailored mental health and wellbeing support, aligned with the ADEK *School Inclusion Policy* and Federal Law No. 29 (2006). ASAD:

- collaborates with the Inclusion team to integrate wellbeing strategies into Individual Education Plans (IEPs) when required
- provides targeted interventions such as social-skills groups or emotional-behaviour support
- ensures that wellbeing content and activities are accessible through accommodations or differentiated materials
- offers staff training to build awareness of how learning needs may affect mental health and how to respond appropriately

Support for students of determination is coordinated between the key staff including the Head of Inclusion, teachers, and parents to ensure continuity and consistency. *For more details, see Section 7.6: Support for Students with Additional Learning Needs.*

7.2 Student Mental Health Awareness and Education

7.2.1 Educating Students About Mental Health

ASAD provides structured, age-appropriate instruction that teaches students about mental health, positive wellbeing, and healthy, balanced lifestyles. This curriculum-based learning focuses on increasing protective factors and developing coping mechanisms that support students' emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing. Classroom and programme content includes:

- mindfulness and grounding techniques
- emotional regulation and resilience-building
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
- stress management, time management, and organisational skills
- promoting empathy, inclusion, and stigma-free attitudes
- encouraging safe and appropriate help-seeking behaviours

All health and wellbeing education aligns with the National School Health Screening Guideline (MoHAP, 2003) and the School Screening Standard (DoH, 2023) and supports the ADEK *School Student Mental Health Policy* requirements.

7.2.2 Additional Requirements for Cycle 2 and Cycle 3

In alignment with ADEK expectations, ASAD provides students in Cycles 2 and 3 with additional wellbeing education that addresses more complex mental health topics in an age-appropriate manner. These topics include:

- Awareness of common mental health difficulties, such as anxiety and depression, and healthy coping mechanisms
- Challenges related to changing family circumstances, including parental separation or divorce
- Substance use (misuse, abuse, and addiction), its risks, prevention, and available support
- Eating disorders, including contributing factors, warning signs, and how to seek help
- Digital gaming addiction and strategies for maintaining healthy technology habits
- Suicide and suicidal ideation, including recognising warning signs and seeking immediate help
- Maltreatment concerns and the importance of identifying and reporting unsafe situations
- Understanding how and where to access mental health support within the school and through community services

Content is delivered sensitively, in accordance with ADEK wellbeing and safeguarding standards.

7.2.3 Parental Awareness

ASAD ensures that parents are well informed about the school's Student Mental Health Policy, wellbeing programmes, and mental health initiatives. To strengthen the partnership between school and home, ASAD:

- Provides accessible information and guidance materials to parents
- Offers regular engagement opportunities, including workshops, information sessions, and awareness campaigns

- Shares resources that help parents understand and support their child's mental health needs
- Encourages parent participation in mental health and wellbeing surveys conducted by ADEK or other relevant authorities.

7.3 Counselling and Support Services

7.3.1 Access to Counselling and Wellbeing Support

ASAD provides all students with access to mental health and wellbeing support as required. ASAD ensures that all interactions, follow-up actions, and key steps in the counselling or support process are recorded and documented in accordance with ADEK reporting requirements and ASAD's internal record-keeping procedures. Documentation remains confidential and is handled in line with data protection regulations.

7.3.2 Provision of Counselling Services

ASAD ensures that students have access to appropriate counselling and wellbeing support as required. ASAD provides students with opportunities to discuss personal, social, or emotional concerns in a confidential and supportive environment. Where specialised or therapeutic intervention is needed, ASAD arranges access to approved external services in accordance with ADEK and Department of Health (DoH) requirements.

ASAD ensures that any professional delivering counselling or specialised support meets the qualification and licensing requirements outlined in the ADEK *School Staff Eligibility Policy* or the ADEK *School In-School Specialist Services Policy,* as applicable. In addition to providing counselling and wellbeing support, specialist involved in counselling services at ASAD will:

- collaborate with teachers, parents, and relevant school staff to address students' needs, respecting confidentiality requirements
- liaise with external bodies (such as psychiatric centres, child protection specialists, Family Care Authority, or other relevant agencies) to coordinate support, in line with confidentiality expectations
- support early identification of wellbeing concerns through observations, student self-reports, and referrals
- provide guidance on coping strategies, emotional regulation, and safe help-seeking
- maintain accurate, confidential records in line with ADEK reporting and safeguarding policies.

7.3.3 Appointment of a Social Worker

ASAD appoints a licensed social worker as part of the ASAD's student support system. The social worker serves as a key link between the school, students, families, and the wider community. ASAD ensures that:

- the social worker meets the requirements outlined in the ADEK *School Staff Eligibility Policy*
- the social worker operates within the scope of their professional licence and competence

In alignment with ADEK requirements, the social worker:

- contributes to multidisciplinary processes that assess student needs, root causes, and the impact of social or environmental factors on wellbeing
- supports students' personal, social, emotional, and mental health needs through school-based assistance and coordination with families
- engages with students, parents, teachers, school staff, and relevant community resources to promote wellbeing and success in the classroom
- facilitates connections between the school and external agencies when needed

- does not provide therapy or counselling, in accordance with ADEK policy, but may provide general support and referral guidance.

7.3.4 Mental Health Committee or Lead

The Mental Health Lead or Mental Health Committee at ASAD is responsible for promoting mental health awareness, coordinating wellbeing initiatives, and supporting the implementation of social and emotional learning across the school. At ASAD, the Student Mental Health Committee forms part of the broader Student Wellbeing Committee and is overseen by the Designated Student Wellbeing Lead. A suitably qualified internal specialist may be assigned to this role in accordance with ADEK requirements.

The Mental Health Lead or Committee:

- promotes mental health awareness across the school
- coordinates wellbeing initiatives, campaigns, and whole-school awareness events
- supports the integration of mental health and social and emotional learning practices within the school environment
- monitors internal processes for identifying and supporting students with wellbeing concerns
- collaborates with school leadership to ensure alignment with ADEK wellbeing and safeguarding requirements.

7.3.5 Confidentiality

ASAD maintains strict confidentiality in all counselling and wellbeing processes, in accordance with Federal Decree Law No. (45) of 2021 on Personal Data Protection, the DCD Social Care Professionals Code of Conduct & Ethics (2020), and relevant ADEK guidelines.

The designated and qualified student support professional is authorised to share information with relevant stakeholders (e.g., school leadership, parents, or other authorised personnel) when this is required to protect the best interests of the student or to meet legal obligations.

In cases of suspected maltreatment or potential significant harm, the appointed student support professional informs the Child Protection Coordinator (CPC) or a member of the Child Protection Team in accordance with the ADEK *School Student Protection Policy.*

In situations involving imminent risk, such as suicidal ideation or severe substance-related concerns, the designated professional immediately notifies school leadership to activate appropriate safeguarding measures.
Before offering structured support, the limitations of confidentiality are explained to students in developmentally appropriate language.

7.3.6 Parental Consent

ASAD seeks parental consent when providing regular or structured counselling sessions. If parents decline counselling, they must confirm their decision in writing and acknowledge their responsibility for supporting the student's wellbeing.

Parental consent is **not** required:

- for unstructured, informal, or spontaneous student interactions with specialist staff including counsellors or social worker (e.g., brief check-ins or drop-ins)
- when informing parents may place the student at risk, in which case the school acts in the best interest of the student under safeguarding protocols

If ASAD determines that regular support including counselling is necessary to prevent significant harm and parents refuse consent, ASAD will report this as neglect to the Child Protection Specialist or the Child Protection Unit, in accordance with the ADEK *Student Protection Policy.*

7.4 Referral Pathways

7.4.1 External Referral

ASAD refers students to external, specialised support services when a need is identified that falls beyond the professional qualifications or scope of ASAD's internal wellbeing support team. Referrals are made only to Department of Health (DoH)-licensed and ADEK-approved external providers, in line with relevant policies and safeguarding procedures.

7.4.2 Development of Referral Pathways

ASAD maintains clear and structured referral pathways that outline how students may access internal or external support. Referral pathways are designed in accordance with the ADEK *School In-School Specialist Services Policy* and the *ADEK School Inclusion Policy*, and include:

a. Procedures for Self-Referral and Referral by Others

- students, parents, and staff may initiate a referral for wellbeing concerns
- any staff member may report signs of behaviour of concern through the school's internal reporting system
- students identified as young caregivers are reported to the Family Care Authority (FCA) and referred for appropriate support

b. Procedures for Informing and Engaging Parents

- ASAD informs parents when signs of concern are identified, taking into account the best interests and safety of the student
- communication with parents follows a clear, sensitive, and confidential process
- decisions about timing and method of communication prioritise student wellbeing

c. Procedures for Collecting Information

- ASAD collects information to monitor student wellbeing in alignment with the National School Health Screening Guideline (MoHAP, 2003) and the School Screening Standard (DoH, 2023)
- information gathered is used for early identification, planning of support, and safeguarding where necessary.

7.4.3 Communication of Referral Pathways

ASAD communicates its referral pathways to all relevant stakeholders, including students, staff, and parents. Referral procedures are published in the Parent Handbook and are introduced during student and parent orientation programmes.

7.4.4 Confidentiality

All information reported through the referral pathway is handled confidentially and in accordance with Federal Decree Law No. (45) of 2021 and relevant ADEK safeguarding and data protection requirements.

7.5 Support During Vulnerable Phases

7.5.1 Structured Support During High-Stress Periods

ASAD identifies periods in the academic year when students may experience heightened stress or emotional vulnerability, such as assessments, transitions between grade cycles, or university application periods. ASAD implements structured measures to reduce stress and promote wellbeing during these times. These measures include:

a. **Study Leave**
   A designated period of authorised absence for students preparing for board or pre-collegiate examinations, for up to four weeks annually, in line with the ADEK *School Assessment Policy.*

b. **End-of-Semester Office Hours**
   Short, one-on-one in-person or online sessions between teachers and students at the end of each semester or term to provide feedback, guidance, and support.

c. **Wellbeing Workshops**
   Individual or group workshops designed to build coping skills, manage stress, and equip students with strategies for emotional resilience during vulnerable phases.

These measures may be expanded or adjusted based on student needs and ADEK requirements.

7.6 Support for Students with Additional Learning Needs

7.6.1 Collaboration and Safeguarding

ASAD ensures that the Head of Inclusion works collaboratively with teachers, specialists, parents, and relevant support staff to promote and safeguard the mental health of students with additional learning needs. All Documented Learning Plans (DLPs) are developed holistically and take into account the student's level of functioning and individual needs, in accordance with the ADEK *School Inclusion Policy.*

7.6.2 Reasonable Accommodations

ASAD offers reasonable accommodations to support the mental health needs of students with additional learning needs. Depending on identified needs, accommodations may include:

- adjusting timetables to provide shorter school days or scheduled break periods for students experiencing high levels of anxiety
- allowing flexible uniform arrangements for students with sensory sensitivities
- implementing close monitoring strategies for students at risk of teasing, bullying, or social exclusion.

Accommodations are reviewed regularly and implemented in collaboration with families and relevant staff.

8. COMPLIANCE

ASAD complies with the ADEK *School Student Mental Health Policy* and all related wellbeing, safeguarding, and inclusion requirements. ASAD ensures that all procedures outlined in this policy are implemented consistently and in accordance with ADEK and DoH regulations. ASAD:

- adheres to all mandatory reporting, documentation, and confidentiality requirements
- follows safeguarding procedures immediately when concerns arise
- ensures mental health education, support processes, and referral pathways meet ADEK standards

- stores all wellbeing records securely in line with Federal Decree Law No. (45) of 2021
- engages only licensed and approved external specialists when required

All staff are responsible for following this policy within the scope of their roles. Failure to comply may result in corrective actions and may affect the school's regulatory standing. ASAD recognises ADEK's authority to intervene in cases of non-compliance.

9. REFERENCES

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10. RATIFICATION AND REVISION HISTORY

Document Title	Student Mental Health Policy
Version	v.2
Ratification Date	9th November 2028
Next Review Date	November 2028
Ratified By	Director: Mr Adel Salman