

## EPA Guidance Notes

### Mental Health Problems

#### Purpose

This document is designed to provide EPA Members and Aspirant Members with guidance on some key considerations to take into account when compiling organisational policy and operating procedures pertaining to team members with mental health problems on overseas expeditions.

#### Background

*"1 in 10 young people will experience mental and emotional health problems"* CAMHS

Overseas expeditions by nature create a challenging environment for young people. For many, the challenges are what shape their experience and help them grow. However, for some, exposure to new places, new people, strange situations etc. may trigger an unpleasant response and for those with an existing proclivity for stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health problems the experience may be altogether a step too far.

As with all medical conditions it is important that Providers highlight the importance of declaring any information that may be relevant to an individual's safety and well-being on an expedition

#### Key Operational/Safety Considerations

##### Fitness to travel

The Provider has a responsibility to obtain and screen all team members with regard to pre-existing medical conditions and to determine whether the expedition might exacerbate the problem. Psychological conditions fall into this category and must be followed up thoroughly.

- Mental health is an important consideration in deciding whether an individual is 'fit' to participate. Are they a risk to themselves or others?
- Seek additional information e.g. What are the triggers? When was the last episode? What makes them feel better or worse?
- An individual risk assessment should be completed to determine the level of risk. Where possible, this should be done in conjunction with the school.
- A written report from an appropriate specialist may be sought to support the individual's fitness to travel

Factors that reduce risk	Factors that increase risk
No recent history Strong report from relevant agency Not taking medication Irrelevant trigger Familiar support	Recent history of episodes Regular medication or recent withdrawal Relevant triggers Lone traveller

## Insurance

Providers must ensure that parents and schools are fully informed about the limits of any insurance policies and have carefully checked the insurance status of the individual concerned. For example, acts of self-harm are usually excluded from all forms of insurance cover.

- All parties must be aware of what is and is not covered under the relevant insurance policy. Many group travel policies do not cover mental health and it would be essential to check the details of the policy thoroughly.
- Additional policies may be purchased and a copy of this must be received by the expedition provider and shared with the Expedition Leader.
- What evidence will be required to activate the insurance for repatriation? E.g. Do they have to be admitted to a facility? This may prove difficult if there's not an appropriate facility available.

## Impact on Expedition Team

The potential benefits of travel to the young person with a mental health problem must be weighed against the potential negative impact on the wider team. The effect of an individual's manifestations may have a detrimental effect on the experience of the other's travelling.

- What training or experience does the Leadership Team have? Many teachers and Expedition Leaders may not feel 'qualified' or confident in supporting mental health concerns.

## Cultural Considerations

Providers should investigate the cultural considerations related to particular mental health problems in the proposed destination including:

- How are mental health problems viewed and catered for in the proposed destination? Some cultures have a very harsh opinion of mental health.
- What provision for appropriate mental health care and support is available. It is likely that suitable options will be limited in many developing countries.

## Undisclosed Mental Health

Despite the Provider's best efforts, it is likely that some mental health problems will not be declared in advance and will be discovered while on expedition often when

symptoms manifest. Providers should ensure that there is a process in place to manage the team member on these occasions.

- Listen – Do not judge
- Be honest – Do not promise to keep information confidential
- Treat any physical injuries
- Seek further advice

It is important that once the immediate practical issues have been managed that thorough consideration is given to the appropriateness of the team member remaining on expedition. The same risks and benefits should apply as if the problem had been disclosed prior to departure.

### **Expedition Triggers**

The nature of an expedition or an element of an expedition may well be the trigger for an individual that has not previously been affected by a mental health problem. For example, a road traffic accident or other traumatic incident.

Providers should ensure that Expedition Leaders have the ability to address these acute psychological events appropriately and access to additional support as required.

### **References and Resources**

British Standard 8848 – *Section 6.7.3 Venture elements*

OEAP National Guidance – *7q Overseas expeditions*

Mental Health First Aid England [www.mhfaengland.org](http://www.mhfaengland.org)

World Health Organization – *Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers*

Young Minds [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Head Meds [www.headmeds.org.uk](http://www.headmeds.org.uk)

NHS England <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/youth-mental-health/Pages/Youth-mental-health-help.aspx>