Focus: Privacy

The emotion needs audit asks this question: Can you obtain privacy when you need to?

In the ASE SOS Pilot Study (May 2021) being able to have privacy ranked one of the highest in the emotional needs audit (ranked 2 out of 10). From the pilot study data (Nov 2020), if a teacher responds with scores 1-3, being unable to obtain privacy is in the top three. Therefore, being able to obtain privacy is a key factor in teachers suffering emotional distress or having mental health issues.

What does this mean?
Defined as alone time to reflect and consolidate, privacy is an important part of our emotional needs that relies on space and time away from others. We have a situation here, where most teachers in the SOS studies feel they do get enough privacy, but those with mental health issues, often in the same science department, do not feel they get enough privacy. This could be to do with conditions in their private life, or conditions within work that affect their mental health.

Life
Teachers need privacy out of school. This can be a quiet sit down with nobody around, to 'decompress,' then transition into the next stage of their day. It may be time in front of the TV, reading a book, playing a computer game. Those with busy family lives find opportunities for private time on the journey home. Living in shared housing or in busy families can be difficult to get privacy and increase stress levels. As will all things, life changes and there are crunch points in life that can reduce opportunities for privacy e.g. new baby, parents moving in, new lodger/ house guests. These all require people to adjust and find new ways to find privacy.

Work
It is often difficult to gain privacy at school, but teachers can often grab some time, even it is ten minutes within the school day. Indeed they should be encouraged to do so. However, this is often achieved by sitting in a cubicle in the staff toilet, sitting in a resource cupboard, or searching for an empty classroom. Teachers who need more privacy due to their personality or mental health issues will benefit from having opportunities and dedicated space for quiet, private time. This principle extends into our virtual lives, where emails and other forms of social media can end up making teachers feel on call all the time, with no privacy.

Interventions
Personal work space is a key factor that can allow space and time for privacy. Having your own classroom or office can make a huge difference to teachers' day to day lives. Shared work spaces such as open plan offices can provide opportunity for collaboration, but they can be a significant stressor at work. If your teachers work in open plan offices, try to provide a quiet room or space in school where teachers can go to be alone. Linked to privacy and the behaviours of those who are unable to find it easily, having signs on the inside of toilet cubicle doors that have a list of signposts for help and support within school as well as external organisations can support those who are finding time more difficult.

Promoting downtime: Leaders can promote downtime, encourage teachers to take an evening off, or do something different at the weekend. It is effective to lead by examples, but fiving permission to do so can be very powerful to your staff.

Promoting the setting of boundaries, particularly email and other forms of electronic communication: Many schools now have times when it is appropriate to send and receive emails, as well as shared understanding of when individuals will respond.

Relevant RISE tools and resources

Wellbeing / emotional needs

Supporting Sign-Posts

Supporting colleagues with mental health issues

Department meeting - improved well-being

Job Satisfaction

Work-Life balance analyser

Managing working relationships

Establishing support networks

Acknowledging staff achievements

Latham's One-to-Ones's – Guidance

Building effective relatinships with SLT

Career Intentions

Effective exit interviews

Ensuring your staff leave happy