Courageous Conversations

Introduction

This guide has been written in response to the emerging need for courageous conversations in student placement settings so that both Practice Educators and other staff members can best support students with different needs. It is understood that it can be difficult to begin these conversations, and the main aim of this guide is to give you an idea of some of the things that may be helpful or unhelpful for marginalised groups that you may encounter with a student on placement. We have tried to cover as wide a range as possible, however, not all points of difference will be covered as the scope and range is so large.

It is our hope that by developing an understanding of the points raised in this guide they can be applied to other conditions and situations. The guide was constructed after sending a survey to a number of people with different conditions and challenges; for example, people with physical and sensory impairments, as well as people with mental health and intellectual conditions. We also spoke to a number of carers, ranging from Young Adult Carers to Foster Carers, to try to ensure that a large range of disabilities and challenges were covered. The participants were asked a number of questions to gauge what they found helpful or unhelpful when it came to working with Social Workers. They were also asked several questions about what kind of support they found helpful or unhelpful, and ways that people could make them feel more comfortable when discussing their situation or disability.

As stated above participants came from a range of different backgrounds with different disabilities and situations, including former Social Work Students who have experienced Social Work Placements. The aim was to collate the lived experiences of a range of individuals, to ensure that this guide is as current and relevant as possible; so that first-hand experience of disability and difference need not be an impediment to a student who is undertaking a social work practice placement.

Although the guide examines disabilities and situations in depth the overriding themes and key messages that came from the surveys were:

1. *Disabilities, impairments, and situations differ from person to person, so although someone is in the same group, a Young Carer for example, they will not experience things in the same way as someone else in that group.*

2. *Asking an individual about THEIR personal experience and what helps them individually, is key.*
3. *Sometimes the person with the disability or challenge is equally as worried about having a conversation with their Practice Educator and the rest of the staff so having a conversation early on is extremely important, in order to build trust.*
4. *Asking the individual how they would like their challenge or disability described to other people, so that you use the individual's own preferred language, is vital. This allows the individual to feel heard and validated.*
5. *The individual should be in full control of how their disability or challenge is disclosed to the rest of the team. Being in a specific situation or having a certain disability may sometimes leave the individual feeling like they have limited control over their decisions and what they can do, so listening to their wishes about what you tell the rest of the team is extremely important.*

It is understood that it can sometimes be difficult having these discussions with students, as people don't want to cause offence or use the wrong language. However, we hope that you find this guide useful and that it not only develops your understanding of different needs, but also provides you with the tools to be able to hold these conversations with future placement students and other members of your team.

Mental Health

1 in 4 people will have a mental health condition during their lifetime, with 1 in 6 people seeking active support for their condition. In this section we will not only discuss ways that you can support a student with their mental health condition whilst on placement but also highlight some of the signs that demonstrate when the student may be having some mental health issues. We appreciate that discussing someone's mental health can be challenging, however, participants of the survey stated that they felt most supported when mental health concerns were discussed with part of the team that they worked in. They stated that by having inclusive, honest conversations about how other team members were feeling allowed them to feel more comfortable; and able to open up about what is going on for them.

Firstly, here are some of the signs of mental health issues that your student may be experiencing; it is advised that if you notice any of this behaviour that you have a discussion with the student and discover first-hand what exactly it is that they are experiencing. Although not every sign of someone experiencing mental health issues will be covered, it is hoped that the signs which are highlighted may provide placement providers with a broad idea of the kind of things to look out for.

- A student becoming withdrawn- if your student was previously talkative and they've suddenly become a lot quieter.
- Changes in their appearance- if you notice a student neglecting their personal appearance, not taking care of their hygiene or the cleanliness of their clothing for example. This could indicate that the student is experiencing some kind of depression.
- Making up excuses not to participate in things- this could indicate that a student may be experiencing anxiety and has a fear of getting things wrong. To prevent this, they may wish to avoid participating in activities.
- Exhibiting signs of distress or despair- this could indicate that a student is experiencing depression or anxiety and struggling to cope with things.
- Saying things that sound nonsensical or strange could indicate that an individual has had a break from reality and could be experiencing the hearing of voices or another kind of delusion.
- Seeming tired or not arriving at work on time- because of anxiety it may be difficult for a student to leave the house, and this may impact them arriving at placement on time. Also, because of what they are experiencing it may affect their tiredness levels whilst on placement.

In the event of noticing any of the signs listed above it is recommended that you have a discreet conversation with the student about this. Participants of our survey stated that they felt most comfortable when this conversation was held away from the main office and conducted in a sensitive manner. This was achieved by the professional asking what the student was experiencing and how they were feeling. It may also be beneficial to involve the student's University Liaison to ensure more support for both you and your student.

What to avoid
We will now discuss things that are unhelpful when working with someone who has a mental health condition:

- Giving the student unexpected work that must be done quickly- for someone who has anxiety giving someone a new piece of work which has a short completion date can compound the anxiety which may result in them struggling to complete it.

- Although in a Social Work setting it is sometimes the nature of the work, it is beneficial to give the student as much time as possible to complete the work required. This could mean giving a student with a mental health condition

additional time to complete a task. Although in a Social Work setting it is sometimes the nature of the work, it is beneficial to give the student as much time as possible to complete the work required. This could mean giving a student with a mental health condition additional time to complete a task.

- Do not refer to their condition as a struggle- participants of the survey stated that although there were elements of their mental health condition which they may struggle with, other people referring to "mental health struggles" was unhelpful for them as they felt that this made their life experience seem extremely negative. Instead, they stated that they appreciated team members asking them how they defined their own mental health journey.

- Do not refer to their condition as a struggle - participants of the survey stated that although there were elements of their mental health condition which they may struggle with, other people referring to "mental health struggles" was unhelpful for them as they felt that this made their life experience seem extremely negative. Instead, they stated that they appreciated team members asking them how they defined their own mental health 'journey'.

- People using incorrect terminology and asking inappropriate questions- understanding what terminology that student uses to describe their condition is crucial as the student is the expert in their own experience, asking them how they refer to things validates their experience. For example, a participant who heard voices recalled a time when a Team Manager asked what the voices said about *them* (i.e., the Team Manager). This was an extremely distressing experience for the student who was trying to control their focus away from the voices that they were hearing. As a result of the Manager asking that inappropriate question the student felt isolated in their placement. They also felt like the manager was invalidating their mental health experience and turning the situation into a joke. This participant would have preferred the Manager to have asked them questions about how that individual experienced the suspicious voices.

How to help
We will now discuss what you may do that could be helpful when working with someone with a mental health condition:

- Checking that the student has properly understood the task- due to their mental health condition a student may find things overwhelming, by ensuring that they

understand the task you are setting you will significantly reduce feelings of anxiety that they may be experiencing.

- Setting clear expectations- sometimes individuals who have conditions such as borderline personality disorder (BPD) or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) find it particularly difficult to understand norms and expectations of new social groups. This may result in them demonstrating strange behaviours in order to fit into the team. When the student starts placement explain to them exactly what you expect. Develop a plan on how you will discuss evaluation of their work especially when discussing criticism.

- Some individuals with BPD or OCD experience
  criticism as a personal rejection, as they feel that they have done something wrong and worry that because of this they will be excluded from the group or fail their placement. However, criticism is one of the best ways for a student to develop, therefore, discussing how you will critique them will enable them to understand how the team and placement will work.

- Offer extra supervision- creating time for the student to discuss their anxieties and feelings is beneficial as it helps the student to feel validated and that demonstrates that their supervisor is listening to the experience. Participants stated in the survey that at times they were worried that a placement would view their mental health condition negatively and worried that their supervisors felt that this was an extra burden to take on. For best practice an honest conversation should be held between the student and their supervisor, where the supervisor takes the time to understand the student's needs. In one real-life situation, the student was asked what pre-existing coping strategies they had, such as breathing techniques when the student was experiencing a panic attack for example; then these needs were discussed with the rest of the team.

Physical Disabilities

It is important to note that making things accessible for people with physical disabilities is much more complex than ensuring that your building has a ground floor office or a working lift. To ensure best practice it is strongly advised that you have a conversation early in the placement, or at the Learning Agreement stage of proceedings. In this conversation you can discuss preferred room layouts, and other access arrangements

that will need to be made before the student begins placement. Also having a conversation about whether the student is a wheelchair user or uses crutches is vital for you to gain an adequate understanding of their mobility needs. It is also important to understand that because of an individual's physical disability it may take extra time for the student to get from place-to-place, which results in extra time being needed to get to visits, meetings and locations. The student may experience physical fatigue which will need considering when allocating assignments.

What to avoid
Here are some things that are not helpful for a student with a physical disability:

- Giving the student a short time span to get to different locations - due to their disability it may take additional time for the student to travel from different locations. To ensure best practice ensure that that there are local travel links or that the student has access to transport to enable them to get from place to place quickly. You could also try to ensure that meetings and conferences are held at the same location.

- Visits in Service User's homes- as it is impossible to risk assess every location it may be difficult for students with physical disabilities to have access to the service user's home. A work around this could be holding visits at the placement location or a safe place in the community.

- Furniture adjustments- as stated previously, ensuring an accessible workplace does NOT just mean having an office on the ground floor or a functioning lift. Other hazards for people with physical disabilities could also include doors not being wide enough for their wheelchair, or chairs and desks not being at the right height for them to work on. Again, for best practice it is important to have a conversation with the student before they arrive on placement to discover what works best for them.

How to help
We will now discuss things that are helpful for a student with a physical disability whilst they are on placement. In each case it is highly recommended that you speak to the student to understand their coping strategies. Remember the University Liaison is there to support you in facilitating a conversation with any student.

- Giving the student extra time to complete tasks- as certain activities may be more time consuming for a student with a physical disability allowing them extra time

may help with feelings of tiredness and allow the student more energy to complete the task.

- Do not compare them to non-disabled Social Workers - one of the survey participants stated that whilst on placement they were constantly compared to non-disabled Social Workers' capabilities. It was implied that this student would not be able to participate in the same way which the student felt made them sound inferior. Sometimes the student may not be able to work with a full case load because of their disability, but it is important to work to their physical capabilities to make them feel enabled.

- Work in an uncluttered workspace- ensuring that there are clear passages for an individual with mobility disabilities to move safely around the office. Cluttering may impact on space making it extremely difficult for a person with mobility issues or using a wheelchair to navigate the workplace.

Sensory Impairments

This section will discuss the challenges that a student with sensory impairments may face, discussing in detail both hearing and visual impairments. Remember that a person with a sensory impairment can also have other disabilities or more than one sensory impairment.

Depending on the individual, a student may experience very different levels of impairment and so it is important to establish early the student's specific needs. Although there are distinct barriers for visual and audible conditions it is useful to note that people with sensory impairments have not been 'compensated' with other stronger senses. However, an individual has had to rely more on those other senses and as a result they may be more developed. As a result of having to rely on other senses, an individual may at times feel overwhelmed with the amount of information they are having to interpret which could lead to them tiring more quickly than a non-disabled student. For best practice it is advised that you have a conversation with the student to understand any pre-existing strategies that they have developed to accommodate their needs.

Visual Impairment

When people are registered as Visually Impaired there are two ways they can be diagnosed. People can either be registered as Visually Impaired/Partially Sighted, or

Seriously Sight Impaired/Blind. In cases of Serious Sight Impairment, only 2% of people have no useable vision at all, the other 98% do have some useful vision although how much will differ from individual to individual. In each case what an individual can see differs greatly, and even within the same condition each individual's sight may differ. It is therefore crucial to ask what adjustments will work for that individual and how they define their own condition.

As there are so many different eye conditions this section is going to discuss Visual Impairment as a whole. For more information about your student's condition, it is advised you speak with them directly, as they will be able to describe it in a way which applies to them, and often in a more accessible way than you can find online.

What to avoid
Firstly we will address things that are not helpful for a person with a Visual Impairment:

- Asking how much a person can see - this is an extremely difficult question to answer as in some cases an individual will have had that visual impairment their whole life and have no comparison to what normal vision is like. Asking this question often makes people feel awkward and could make someone feel like they are in a hospital setting where their visual acuity is often tested, so asking this question may trigger thoughts about these experiences.

- Moving things around the workplace - when a Visually Impaired Person is learning to navigate a new setting it is vital that things are kept in the same place. If things are moved this can be extremely disorientating for the individual. Also, there may be landmarks and obstacles that the individual will identify with their guiding cane that, if moved, make it impossible for the person to know where they are in any particular room or building. When you meet the student ask how much orientation they want before, and during the placement. It may be the case that visiting the location beforehand to familiarize themselves with the layout helps them feel more comfortable orientating themselves whilst they are on placement.

- It takes time to learn particular routes and layouts and commit them to memory, so giving an individual a time limit to learn them puts unneeded pressure on the student. You could discuss this at the Learning Agreement stage of proceedings to develop your understanding of how the Visually Impaired Student approaches orientation and learning building layouts.

- Using phrases such as "it's over there" and "get that one" are vague and do not demonstrate to a Visually Impaired Person where you are indicating or what specifically you want them to retrieve. Giving clear instructions such as "over here directly to your left" for example are much more helpful.

How to help

Now we will discuss what Placement Providers can do to help facilitate Visually Impaired Students:

- Although asking an individual what they can see may be unhelpful, asking someone *how* they see is totally different. You will be learning about what the vision of the individual is like and gaining knowledge from their perspective. If a student has previously had useful vision or not will impact on how you describe visual things; someone who has been born blind may not understand what certain colours are whereas a person who has lost sight will have that understanding.

- Ask how the individual *defines* their Visual Impairment - ways that Visually Impaired people use to talk about their impairment differ from person to person so knowing what terminology an individual uses to describe themselves is extremely useful. For example, someone who is registered as Seriously Sight Impaired, may describe themselves as Blind, although they may have some useful vision. Each way an individual describes themselves is personal to them and understanding this will allow communication channels to be opened between yourself and your student.

- When you are talking to the student start by using their name, this will alert them that you are talking to them as otherwise they may assume that you are talking to someone else. Also let them know when you are exiting the room or space where you are talking to them. They may not always know this and may continue talking to you even if you are not there.

- State your name when you start talking to them- starting a sentence with "It's (insert name here) here", although a Visually Impaired person may learn your voice over time it can take a little while for them to familiarise themselves with everyone in the team. For best practice ask if the individual would prefer you to touch their arm to get their attention and if in fact introducing yourself by name would be beneficial to them or not.

- Talk about light- the type of lighting can sometimes really help a visually impaired person. Having a brighter lit area for example, may help them see things more clearly and if so ensure that there is a lamp on the desk that can directly shine onto any text. Also, an individual's vision may be impacted by bright light or by darkness, so by asking the individual how light affects them will also give you a clear picture about their needs.

- Talk technology- whether a Visually Impaired Person can read Braille or not, they will have ways to access information which are specific to that individual. In most cases they will be using some kind of technology, whether this be Voice-Over on their phone, Speech Software such as JAWS on a laptop or a braille device. There are lots of different technologies out there for Visually Impaired people and it's not expected that you will become an expert on them all. However, having a basic understanding of the kind of technology a Visually Impaired Student may use will be beneficial for both you and your student. Having a conversation about what kind of technology they use will also allow you to demonstrate that you want to better understand the student's access needs.

Deaf-Blind

Around 356,000 people in the UK are registered as Deaf-Blind. In these cases, an individual can have a range of hearing and sight loss. This could range from mild hearing loss to profound, and partial sight to total blindness. In cases where an individual has neither hearing nor vision, communication is achieved through a form of Sign Language in the hand. In this case an interpreter is provided. However, when working with a student who has an interpreter it is important to gain knowledge from the student on how they want you to interact. Bypassing the student and asking the interpreter illustrates that you are not working in a person-centered manner. The student is the expert in their own experience and can inform you on best practice.

Deaf and Hearing Impairments

When a person is born deaf it usually means that they have no usable hearing. An individual with Hearing Loss is most likely to be on a spectrum. The range of hearing loss ranges from Mild hearing loss to Profound and as you can imagine this has various impacts on the individual. In the cases of individuals who are born Deaf who may have developed techniques and strategies over time it is important to understand these and ensure that you are working in best practice for that individual. In both instances of

individuals who are Deaf or Hearing Impaired there are several things that can have a positive impact on your interaction.

What to avoid

We will now discuss things that are unhelpful for an individual who is Deaf or Hearing Impaired:

- Having your mouth covered (either by a mask or your hand) for an individual who is deaf is EXTREMELY unhelpful as they may use Lip Reading to help themselves understand what you are saying; by covering your mouth you are cutting off a vital means of communication.

- Speaking louder- firstly if an individual is deaf this will not help them to hear. however, if a person is hearing impaired and using hearing aids, it is important to understand that the hearing aids make *everything* louder so if you are competing with an increased volume in the room this simply means that all noise is amplified. Instead, if you are speaking to a person who is hearing impaired often taking them to a quieter area and being able to speak at a normal level is much more beneficial.

- Talk to the individual, NOT the interpreter- it is considered to be extremely rude to bypass the individual and ask questions to their interpreter as this sends the message that you are not interested in the individual. Although it may seem quicker just to ask them, they will not have direct knowledge of the person who they are interpreting for thoughts and feelings. The only person who has that knowledge is the individual themselves.

How to help

Things that are helpful for an individual who is Deaf or Hearing Impaired are:

- Speaking clearly- this is beneficial for both deaf people and those with a hearing impairment. Firstly, those who may lip read will be able to see the shape of your mouth when you are talking. Secondly, people who are hearing impaired find it difficult to hear when people mumble. Speaking clearly will enable individuals to be able to understand exactly what you're saying.

- Ask about preferred communication styles- sometimes deaf people will communicate by writing short messages rather than using sign language or an

interpreter. This can be achieved by either writing things down on a notepad or by electric communication such as by email or SMS message. The most opportune moment to discuss this is at the learning agreement stage of proceedings. Here you can discuss how the student communicates the best method of doing so for them. In the survey participants stated that when using this method of communication, they preferred to keep messages short so that this was a quick method of communicating.

- Learning Sign Language- participants of the survey suggested that it would be beneficial for teams to learn basic sign language. Although they did not expect that people would learn it in depth, they stated that by teams having a basic understanding of sign language made them feel more included. They thought that being able to ask them how they were feeling, whether they would like a drink, or a person stating their name were things that the team could ask them and indicated that the team were aiming for that individual to participate in their own terms.

- Understand whether the student uses hearing aids - at the Learning Agreement you can ask the student whether they use hearing aids or not. If they do, understanding whether they have them in both ears or just one is important as there may be a better side of the body to speak to the student on; if the student only had a hearing aid in their left ear it may be better for you to speak to that individual on that side as they may hear more accurately on that particular side.

Carers

Some people may have caring responsibilities to manage alongside their studies or work commitments. These may be for a parent, spouse, child, other family member, or friend due to them having an illness, disability, physical or mental health condition, or additional needs. Some things they may need to assist with could include personal care, dressing, cleaning, cooking or supporting them to access the community. Caring is an unpaid role so very different to being a carer in a formal care setting such as working in a residential facility. This is what is called being an unpaid carer; with people being either a Young Carer, Young Adult Carer or Adult Carer.

Many people have caring responsibilities that they manage along with their work commitments; however, some students may have additional caring responsibilities. In

these cases, they may need to have some reasonable adjustments from their placement provider.

Here are some things that people who are either Foster Carer's, Young Adult Carers or Carers stated could make things easier for them when on placement. It is important to note that although sometimes an individual's situation may sound extremely difficult, it is NOT helpful to express this as this is the individual's life and they have developed coping strategies. Telling them how hard the situation sounds is invalidating their life experience, and although empathy is a good thing, a carer wouldn't change their life or caring responsibilities.

What to avoid
First let's start with the things that carers stated were unhelpful and best not to say to them:

- People making assumptions about their situation - as stated above, no-one understands the full situation apart from the individual, so making assumptions about what they face is extremely unhelpful. If there are elements of a particular situation that surprise or distress, you then it is okay to ask questions. You may have had this reaction because of your own value base, and in this case, you could take your thoughts to any supervision you might have or develop understanding of this in any workshops or training that you undertake.

- Referring to people who care in the home as 'Informal Carers'- respondents to the survey stated that this was an extremely offensive turn of phrase. It gives the impression that the Carer isn't taking their role seriously and belittles the important role that they do perform. Instead ask the individual how they would describe themselves.

How to help
We will now discuss things that carer's stated WERE helpful, and ways that they can best be supported whilst on placement:

- Ask the individual how they define their own situation- learning how an individual discusses and describes themselves and the situation is the best way to gain an understanding about how they view themselves and their lifestyle. By asking them directly you can learn what terminology they use so as not to cause offence if you need to describe their situation to another team member.

- Having breaks - sometimes an individual may be tired because of their caring responsibilities, so asking and implementing extra breaks for a person who is a carer may be beneficial so that they can regain energy. Although it is not suggested that a person automatically needs extra breaks if they have caring responsibilities, having a discussion with them about whether this would be helpful illustrates that you want to be proactive in their wellbeing.

- Flexible start/finish times- due to an individual's caring responsibilities they may need to start later or finish earlier. Again, this is extremely important for the placement to discuss with the student so that this can be negotiated for best practice on both sides. This is not suggesting that the student will undertake any less work, but at the Learning Agreement stage gaining an insight into expectations to avoid future conflict is crucial.

- Arrangements regarding mobile phones- although in many workplaces the use of mobile phones is prohibited, a person who is a carer may need to have their phone on in case of an emergency with the person they are caring for. If this is the case, have a plan with the student of how they will take these calls, and what the procedure will be. This may help to avoid any awkward situations and both you and the student will feel more comfortable when a plan is put in place.

Additional Needs and Learning Difficulties

This section will focus on ways for best practice with students with Additional Needs and Learning Difficulties. As the spectrum of different conditions is vast, this section will focus on Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Chronic Health Conditions. However, it is recommended that you discuss the additional needs the student has, to develop best practice techniques. Strategies will differ from individual to individual even within conditions as different techniques will work for each person.

Autism and ADHD

One aspect to be mindful of when working with students experiencing these conditions is masking. Masking describes the process of hiding or suppressing certain behaviours, traits and symptoms whilst learning, practicing and implementing socially accepted norms to minimise difference. It is important to note that this process can be both a conscious and unconscious coping mechanism depending on the individual and situation they find themselves in. Masking has been referred to as a trauma response to

the stigma and negative perception of those with these conditions. Some examples of masking include pushing themselves to maintain eye contact with those they are conversing with, mirroring non-verbal behaviours such as returning smiles, developing social scripts for responses to questions and certain scenarios, managing how they discuss personal interests and remaining in crowded and noisy areas which cause sensory overload. They may also disguise their stimming (comfort) behaviours to appear more "normal" such as jiggling a leg instead of rocking so that it is less noticeable. Masking can be very taxing on individuals mentally and can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and burn-out.

Although totally different conditions, there were similarities in helpful and unhelpful strategies for people with Autism and ADHD. Participants in the survey stated that they preferred to work in quiet and peaceful working conditions and for others in the team to give clear, precise instructions.

How to help
Here are some things that individuals with ADHD and Autism said that they found helpful whilst on placement:

- To develop procedures about how to remember tasks - sometimes the importance of a task, or the deadline for the task to be completed, can be difficult for an individual with ADHD or Autism to hold in their mind. Instead, spending some time with that individual to discuss different strategies such as reminders on a person's phone could be used to make this easier.

- Allowing the student to complete one task at a time- participants of the survey also stated that having lots of different tasks could be disorientating, although individuals with ADHD stated that they enjoyed having different projects to pursue, they stated that sometimes this led to things not being completed. Having a clear system for the prioritisation of tasks can be helpful for students with ADHD or Autism, and students stated that they enjoyed understanding the reasoning behind the prioritisation.

- Quiet working space- sometimes for individuals with ADHD or Autism being in a loud, over stimulated environment can be overwhelming. In both instances there can be a lot of information to take in; visually, audibly and through other senses. Working in a quieter area will ensure that the student does not feel overwhelmed and that they can keep their concentration on the task in hand. It may also be

worthwhile developing a quiet area that a student can go to if they feel overwhelmed.

- Allowing extra time for them to process information - asking the student if they've understood will be beneficial as this will develop the culture for them to ask questions if they don't understand anything. Also, if they've had to listen to a lot of information, it may take extra time for students to process.

- Try to keep to the same routine- for individuals who have ADHD or Autism sticking to a routine is beneficial, as this gives a procedure to follow. When it comes to the case of lone working this will also allow the student to implement learned practice. Individuals with ADHD stated that they did enjoy a varied routine as they liked the challenge of change. However, both individuals with ADHD and Autism stated that they would like as much time as possible to understand any changes to their prearranged routine. Although we understand that this is not always possible due to the fast pace of many Social Work offices, please try to give students as much notice as possible.

Chronic Health Conditions:

For individuals with Chronic Health Conditions their health can fluctuate from day-to-day depending on a number of factors with may include diet, sleep or overall wellness. It can sometimes be difficult for the student to predict how they will be impacted by their health condition. However, some of the impacts may include:

- Tiredness
- Low or high blood sugar
- Dizziness
- Stomach issues, including nausea or sickness
- Issues with breathing
- The intake of information

We are aware that there are many different chronic health conditions that have many different presenting symptoms but if your student presents with any of these symptoms it could be an indication that they are having issues with a chronic health condition. It is important to note that not all students may feel comfortable discussing their health condition, as they may feel that discussing these issues could have negative implications on the impression they create on placement.

As stated in the earlier section about Mental Health, participants of the survey stated that they felt much more comfortable when an effort was made in the office to discuss things openly. They stated that when the work team was congruent about any health issues, the student felt more comfortable about discussing their own health needs as they felt that they were working in a tolerant environment.

They also stated that it would be beneficial to develop strategies for if they were having a bad day with their condition. It was also stated that referring to their chronic health condition as a struggle seemed demeaning, as often they had spent significant time developing coping techniques.

Dyslexia and Dyspraxia

Although Dyslexia and Dyspraxia are different conditions, impacting an individual in a number of different ways, we have chosen to write about them together here as there are a number of techniques that are beneficial if you have a student on placement with either of these conditions. It is important to note that because of the energy an individual with either of these conditions uses, you may find that the student experiences fatigue quicker than a student without these conditions. Cases of extreme fatigue may also have implications on the student's thought processes and may impact on things such as their comprehension of what you are saying and their own ability to converse. For best practice it is important to explore how this affects your student and develop a plan accordingly.

What to avoid
Here are some things that participants of the survey who had Dyslexia and Dyspraxia stated was unhelpful practice whilst on placement:

- Having lots of information to process quickly- this can be overwhelming for a student with Dyslexia or Dyspraxia to face as not only do they have to read lots of information but also process it. Giving the student extra time for reading may be beneficial as then you are giving them the time to process things properly, which will lead to them having a better understanding of the material.

- Giving unclear instructions- giving the student vague or complicated instructions also created confusion and anxiety for individuals with these conditions. They said that the ambiguity this caused exacerbated their condition due to them not understanding what was being asked of them. Creating an environment where the student feels comfortable to ask for clarification is extremely important so that they feel they can articulate if they don't understand something.

How to help

We will now discuss strategies that individuals with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia stated were helpful whilst on placement:

- Individuals with Dyslexia stated that the font and format of documents could be adapted to make the document easier for them to read. Having a different coloured background or a certain font gave the text clarity. For best practice check with the student whether they have a preferred format and how they implement it into everyday practice. Sometimes an individual may have a clear plastic sheet of a certain colour which they can lay over text and, in this case, may need you to print out material so that they can use this resource.

- Using Speech Recognition Software - for both individuals with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia, using software programs such as Dragon is extremely helpful for translating speech to text. It works by a person speaking into the microphone of the device which then inputs the dictation into text. Have a conversation with the student to ascertain whether this would help and, if so, what kind of software they use. Try to familiarise yourself with the basics of how the software works. Sometimes the software does not use the correct grammar, if so find out whether the student has a support worker who can make these changes or how the student does things.

- Have clear structures and procedures- for both people with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia having clear guidelines and steps to follow helps with their processing as they have a framework for how your organisation does things. In order to ensure this, have a conversation with the student early on in their placement to discover whether they understand any relevant policies and practice.

Working with Support Workers:

Students with certain disabilities are entitled to work with a Support Worker who is provided from the university and is there to assist the student with any elements of the placement that the student may find challenging as their result of their disability. The support worker is not there to complete alternative placement tasks.

How to help

Below are some tips for best practice in collaborating with your student and their support worker:

- Ask the student how they work with their support worker- finding out the kind of tasks that the support worker does will give you an understanding of how this will work on placement.

- Always be sure about who is conducting the work on placement - this should always be clear and defined by the student. However, if you feel unclear about who's undertaking the work this could mean that there is something that is not accessible about the tasks the student is conducting. This is an excellent opportunity to develop the best working practices for your organisation to ensure that all processes are accessible for the future.

- Do not give additional work to the support worker- one of the participants of the survey stated that in their particular placement, their support worker was asked to make hot drinks and clear the office after service users. Although this was something that the support worker did not mind doing, the support worker is there to support the student, NOT the placement. In that scenario it would have been good practice for the placement to develop ways that the student could have undertaken these tasks with the support of their support worker.

Conclusion

We hope that you have found this guide useful and that it has developed your understanding and confidence on talking to any student with a disability or additional needs. As there is a vast range of disabilities, conditions, and impairments we were unable to cover everything, but we hope that you will be able to apply the information provided to anything that your student may present with. The topics covered in this guide are to highlight the main things that individuals found both helpful and unhelpful for their condition which can be applied to any placement setting.

The main message that we hope that we have promoted in this guide is to work in a person-centred manner; your student is the expert of their own experience and will often have developed coping strategies and techniques for their disability or condition. Participants stated that they worked best in environments of tolerance and inclusion, where they could clearly see that a culture of acceptance was practiced throughout the whole team. This enabled them to believe that their own differences would be acknowledged and that adaptations would be made in order to promote best practice.

We would like to thank all those who took the time to participate in the survey; without them this guide would not have been the representative, valid piece of work that it is.

The information that the participants provided was invaluable for us to develop this guide to the extent that we were able to.

Finally, we would like to thank you. It is practitioners like you that make the difference in providing equal opportunities. We accept that having these conversations is not always easy but hope that after reading this guide you feel more enabled to do so. We would like to thank you for taking the time to develop a better understanding of disability to ensure better working practice for both you and your students.

Melissa Crowland and Nikita Somaiya

nikisomaiya93@gmail.com

Melissa.crowland@outlook.com