HeadStart Kent Safe Space Guidance

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What is a Safe Space? A Safe Space is a place young people can go to when they need some extra support, or a place they can go to that feels safe and comfortable to them. It can be used just to relax and calm down, have a chat with a staff member (who has been trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid and Mindfulness) or a place to access peer support through trained peer mentors.

What it is:

- ✓ A space for young people to unwind and relax
- ✓ A room for young people to take a short time out so that they can reintegrate back into lessons once calm
- ✓ If a young person is feeling stressed or overwhelmed, they can go there to be mindful
- ✓ A place where young people can feel safe
- ✓ A place where young people can access information on wellbeing strategies
- ✓ A place where young people can be signposted to appropriate services
- ✓ A place where young people can have access to peer mentors

What it isn't:

- ✗ It is not an area for young people to be isolated
- ✗ It is not intended to be a space for disciplinary time out.
- ✗ A sick bay
- ✗ A counselling office

Why not?

It is HeadStart's intention that Safe Spaces maintain a positive environment.

Do we have to call it a 'Safe Space'?

Not at all! Your Safe Space should be named by the young people and this can be asked during the survey.

Co-Production

When surveyed, young people in Kent told us that they need the following;

My wellbeing is not impacted by pressure to achieve and 'be perfect'

There is always someone for me to talk to

People around me understand wellbeing and how to promote it

A Safe Space is an ideal place for conversations and support to happen.

For Safe Spaces to be co-produced, young people need to be involved in the identification of needs, preparation, design, set-up and evaluation of the safe space.

Location

Safe Spaces must be accessible to all, and in a place that young people go to or pass by. It needs to be somewhere they feel comfortable going and not somewhere they may view negatively. Blinds or similar could be used to offer confidentiality and the Space can be located within a confidential area for when a young person is upset or does not want to be seen e.g. if with a mentor or staff member.

A Safe Space does not have to be a room for this purpose; it can be flexible, as long as young people know when it is available to them. Some Safe Spaces in primary schools have been in playgrounds, as they recognise that free time can potentially have more friendship difficulties and conflict so young people need somewhere to go where they feel supported.

Environment

A Safe Space must be welcoming and feel like somewhere young people are comfortable to be. Some things to consider to help make the Space feel more comfortable are; soft furnishings, lighting, mood lamps, use of colours and sensory activities.
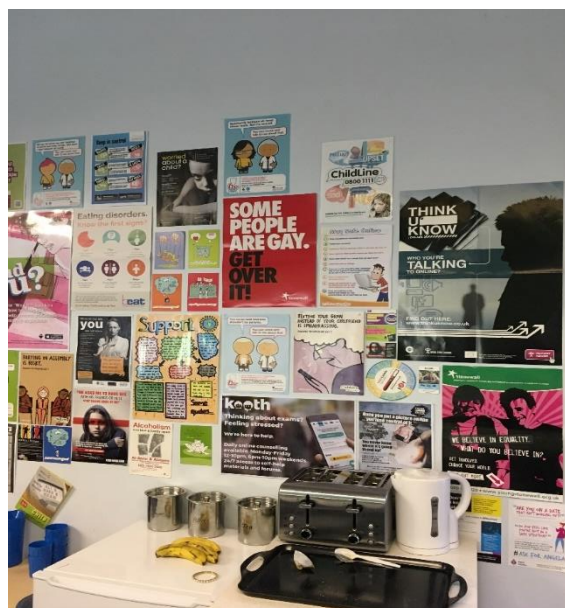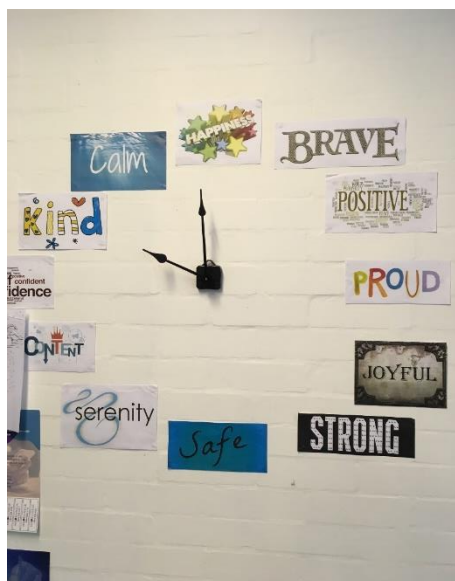
It would be beneficial to include information leaflets available which signpost and inform, such as local wellbeing services, Kooth online support and mentoring; as there could be young people who are not ready to talk or ask for help, so they may see something that encourages or gives them the confidence to ask.

Consider positive messages or posters which signpost or give information about services to reassure that they are not alone. Resources which offer distraction techniques or coping strategies could be used e.g. puzzles, drawing, colouring, mindfulness etc.

Surveying Students' needs

Gathering information to work out what your safe space should look like:

We recommend putting together a simple survey to ascertain what young people feel will benefit them in their safe space.

First – what area do you have? Is it a room available, or do you require it to be portable? Either is fine.

Consulting with youth - We ask that young people be surveyed to ascertain what their wants and needs are for this space, to encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility for the area.

Example Survey Questions

- What makes you feel safe?
- Where do you feel safe in your school/hub?
- What things would you have in your safe space?
- What would your safe space be called?

Example Survey Results

A school in Folkestone were surveyed in a very simple way. They were asked to write on a post-it note what they would have in their safe space at school.

The most popular items were 'friends and people to talk to, trust' with 31 people individually writing this, and beanbags with 24 people opting for this. This was a useful and simple exercise which gave an idea of what colours the space may be, what young people would like to see and what they would want the environment to be like.

Ideas for your Safe Space

HeadStart funded Safe Spaces can be equipped with branded resources such as Stress Balls, colouring books and pencils and notepads.

But these items can easily be supplied by the school or even made by students.

Top tip: Use soft pastel colours for decor. Blue, green, grey and purple are calming colours.

Top Tip: Laminated posters or cards with simple breathing exercises can help a young person to relax and reduce anxiety.

Top tip: Posters with motivational quotes and happy thoughts will promote a safe and positive environment.

A Safe Space must suit the needs of the young people using it. Some suggestions for your safe space:

- Soothing music- classical, nature CD's
- Vibrating cushions
- Fibre optics
- Mirror balls
- Bubble tubes

- Water features
- Tactile walls
- Disco lights
- Lava lamps
- Blankets
- Beanbags

- Soft mats
- Ear defenders
- Gym balls
- Mini trampoline
- Rollers
- Books

Why not make a coping pack? Items could include:

- Stress balls
- Calm jars
- A whistle with the pea removed for hard blowing
- Unbreakable mirror
- Scented lotions
- Fidget toys
- Bubble wrap
- Appropriate materials for ripping and scrunching
- Art materials
- Mindfulness colouring in book

- Mindfulness techniques printed on to cards
- Bottle of bubbles
- Rain stick
- Small puzzle
- Weighted vest
- Stretchy resistance bands
- Book of yoga poses or printable yoga cards
- A kaleidoscope
- Books to read
- Egg timer

- Activity book including dot to dot activities and word searches
- Stress balls
- Play dough
- Rubik's cube
- Whiteboard/ chalk board
- Blindfold/ Sunglasses
- Pipe cleaners to twist and bend
- Threading beads/ making bracelets
- Laminated motivational cards

Be resourceful: What can your young people produce for the safe space?

Safe Spaces are a great setting for calming activities, here are some ideas:

Real Examples

'Place to be' in Ashford:

A primary school in Ashford has set up their safe space – 'Place to be' – which is now open for the whole school to use.

Children can use the space as a place to go when they need to calm down or take some time out.

The space features soft furnishings, worry monsters, relaxing lighting, games and resources for the children to use. As you can see from the photos the space is very calm and welcoming and the children love their new space!

A different Safe Space

At one of our HeadStart Secondary Schools in Ashford they identified they did not have a suitable place to have a designated Safe Space for young people. They instead got Cooper the dog. Students can request time with Cooper throughout the day if they are anxious or just need a bit of time out.

Cooper attends 1:1 meetings with professionals and the students. Cooper is excellent at helping students focus during these meetings and offers them comfort and cuddles.

The students take him for walks during the school day. This works well for walking and talking, for students who struggle to communicate how they are feeling in a traditional 1:1 situation.

For more information on Safe Spaces contact your local HeadStart team or HeadStart@kent.gov.uk