



**MIND MATTERS is the bccc professional newsletter, where we share information, thoughts, ideas and reflections.**

**In this edition, we will be:**

- Introducing our team.
- Thinking about what the past year has looked like and what our plans for the future are.
- Sharing the reflections of two young people on their experience of therapy.
- Introducing our new Family Outreach Programme.
- Offering some ideas and resources to promote mental and emotional well-being for primary and secondary pupils.
- Giving tips on how to have a conversation with a young person about suicide.

## INTRODUCING OUR TEAM

We would like to introduce you to our therapeutic team at **bccc**. We are a dedicated group of professionals with a wide range of training, expertise and experience between us. The team consists of three child and adolescent psychotherapists, three child and adolescent counsellors, two psychotherapists, nine counsellors, four play therapists, two art therapists, four clinical supervisors and five social workers.

***“We are a dedicated group of professionals with a wide range of training, expertise and experience between us.”***



## COUNSELLORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

There are many ways that counsellors and psychotherapists work. Some are non-directive and fully child-led, whereas others may work in a more directive manner. Some of our therapists work in an integrative way, which means that they use a variety of different approaches to work with a child, whereas other therapists have specialisms in a particular approach, and they will work mainly through this model. A common theme between most therapists is that the relationship between the child and the therapist is central to the work, and all therapists will work hard to create trust and safety between them both. This gives the child or young person the opportunity to feel comfortable enough to engage in therapy. Many of our counsellors and psychotherapists will work using creativity with children as well as talking, using a variety of ways to engage with the child, for example through art, play, sand tray, puppets, music or role-play.

# PLAY THERAPISTS

Play therapists on our team offer a therapeutic approach through the medium of play. One of our therapists described their work by saying, “I help children to feel safe, to explore difficult feelings, in which ever way they choose, using imaginative play and creative methods such as using a sand tray, puppets, music, role-play, art and more.”

Some of our play therapists work mainly as non-directive practitioners where the child leads the play, whereas another therapist sometimes uses a ‘play therapy dimensions model’ which allows for more directive play when required.

Play therapists work hard to maintain an accepting attitude towards the child so the child can feel safe enough to play freely and to be themselves.



***“Play therapists on our team offer a therapeutic approach through the medium of play.”***

# ART THERAPISTS

Art therapists use art media as the main method of expression and communication. For many children and young people, it can be easier to use a non-verbal form of communication such as art to help them make sense of their experiences in a way that they feel most comfortable.

***“Art is used as a means to address emotional issues.”***

Art therapy therefore uses art as the medium to address emotional issues which the child or young person may be struggling with, and the therapist will help the child explore what their art means to them. Throughout this way of working, many forms of creative techniques will be available, such as drawing, painting, collage, clay and more.

The child or young person does not need to have any expertise or proficiency in art, because it is not an art lesson or a recreational activity, but instead, is used as a means to express oneself.



***“For many children and young people, it can be easier to use a non-verbal form of communication such as art to help them make sense of their experiences.”***

# SOCIAL WORKERS

The social workers at **bccs**, work therapeutically with children, young people, families and adults in a holistic way. Between them, they have experience and specialisms in a wide variety of areas, for example, child and adolescent work, family work, experience in the field of child protection, looked after children, adoption and more.

They use what one social worker has described as, “advanced listening, with the belief that children, young people, adults and carers truly need to know that they are being listened to and are understood before any progress in therapy can be made”. This is a simple idea, but so powerful.



# CLINICAL SUPERVISORS

Our clinical supervisors work with each therapist on the team, helping the practitioner reflect on their work with each child, assisting them to think things through in greater depth. This helps to maintain professional standards and helps the practitioner work to their best ability and to feel supported in their work.

Our clinical supervisors also work with schools, where members of staff may want to unpick and understand their encounters with a certain child. This support and guidance from the supervisor enables the staff member to have a greater understanding of what may be happening during the interactions with this child.

Whilst we as individuals have different titles, and work in different ways, we very much work as a team, and we all have the common aim of delivering a robust mental health and emotional wellbeing service for children and young people, families and schools.



***“Our Clinical Supervisors also work with schools where members of staff may want to unpick and understand their encounters with a certain child.”***

# Our Provision

## Then and now...

We wanted to talk a bit about what the past year has looked like before we concentrate on our plans for support in the future. We hope you know that we endeavour to be forward thinking at all times. This affords us the luxury of being responsive and attuned, rather than reactive and short sighted within our provision.

You will be aware that we have two main areas of support within our schools-based work: one is to support students by providing therapy, process groups, group therapy, art therapy and lots more. The other is to support staff, such as yourselves, who are working tirelessly to educate, and care for the emotional wellbeing of your students and themselves, all at once. We have learned a lot over the past year about the effects of lockdown and are now providing bespoke support to schools to help them support children and young people settle back in full time education.

- **Therapy Sessions**
- **Process Groups**
- **Group Therapy**
- **Art Therapy**
- **Support Staff**

Our work as therapists is heavily based in theory. Our job is to seek to understand the unconscious processes presented to us by a child or young person and to offer support, comprehension, and context within the therapeutic journey. There is a theoretical process called Containment. A child or young person's uncontained experiences and resulting feelings, can cause worry, fright, and a psychological angst. Containment comes in many forms but can essentially be described as the

process of tolerating, experiencing, momentarily holding and digesting the feelings of a child or young person: we bear their unbearable emotions. We break them down into thinkable, manageable feelings. We aren't overthrown or overwhelmed by them. They don't damage us. We are consistent, available and altogether present when we sit with a child, young person, or family.

We have never provided so much support to school staff and we're delighted to be able to do so. You have been working flat out, under enormous pressure, for a significant period of time. You, the school system also provides Containment to children and young people and you do this by being consistent, by caring and by having clear expectations of your students. As parents, we offer containment by doing the same things – we care, we set expectations and we are consistent. The process of Containment is a vital experience for a child's psychological wellbeing.

***“We bear their unbearable emotions.”***

Therapeutically, we have not been able to offer containment in the way we normally would, throughout lockdown. Typically, we seek to influence the therapeutic setting: we provide the same room, with the same objects and toys, we work at the same time each week, and we see that a child or young person is free of burden and emotion when they leave us, and the room we have shared, to go back to their day-to-day activities.



Throughout lockdown, we have noticed the impact of working remotely and via a screen. We have lost control of the environment in which therapy occurs and this has felt less safe for children and has felt de-skilling at times for us as therapists.

We can't ensure the environment is calm, ordered and belongs entirely the child or young person because they have been working with us within their home settings, some of which are dysfunctional and chaotic. We can't contain their therapeutic experience with us in the usual way, because we can't sit alongside them in the way we would in a room and we have had to work with them within the setting which has, in some cases, caused anxiety or worry or feelings of anger. This has been far from ideal.

We are also hearing that schools have noticed an increase in challenging behaviours in school since the return of students to your care, and so we have been analysing this with them. Some children and young people have come out of lockdown full up and burdened by their experiences. They are acting out – in the therapeutic world this is known as Projection. They present as challenging, aggressive or rejecting. They also present as withdrawn, retreating from social interactions, and quiet.

***“We are working through a period of repairing the unconscious processes of every child, young person, family, teacher, senior leader in our care. We never tire of this.”***

These students are experiencing the same emotions but presenting them in a different way. Why? They have also been without the vital Containment of the school setting for a significant period of time. They have not felt necessarily connected to it, and their connections have been, as have ours, via screens. You, within your setting, have not been able to set the tone, in the way we haven't been able to create the right environment. You have not been able to capture your students within the forums of school Masses, Assemblies, Chaplaincy support and your students will have been affected by this. The challenging behaviour is an unconscious test of you/the school's care and consistency. It is Attachment based and is best responded to calmly, and with care and understanding. We have been working hard with our schools to support them to understand and address this.

As always, our schools never fail to amaze us with their commitment to providing the right kind of support. Your students are calming. We heard this week that a student at the point of exclusion had benefited from some one-to-one sessions with one of his teachers, who was being supported by us from behind the scenes. The teacher introduced a therapeutic narrative to the boy's destructive presentation, and he is calm, engaged in learning and relieved to be back within the school.

Staff are leaning on us for support and we are, of course, providing this. We have, in short, learned how vital our work is. We do not take that responsibility lightly. We feel the weight of responsibility about the wellbeing of students, families, and our school staff. We continue, passionately, to rise to the challenge but our work now is reparative. We need to understand and to reframe the experiences of our children and young people, both in terms of lockdown but in what they present us with now. And then our therapeutic work can really begin. We are working through a period of repairing the unconscious processes of every child, young person, family, teacher, senior leader in our care. We never tire of this.

# YOUNG PERSON'S VOICE

Two young people write about their experience of therapy...

## Rowan

*A lot of people around my age tend to refuse help from people, which is understandable. Perhaps it's hard for someone to feel validated or maybe they do not want a bruised ego and the walls they build up around them become indestructible. It's important to find a counsellor who is there for you, that you can easily feel comfortable with and most importantly someone who has your best interest at heart.*

***“The support during this journey was amazing.”***

*I am coming to the end of my appointments, and I feel that with my counsellor I have come a long way. I have managed to come to terms with my feelings, understand them, realise who I am as a person and I have learned ways to deal with my emotions in a healthy way.*

*I am not going to say that this whole experience was easy, it was not. When unpacking emotions and memories that you have held in for a while, and making sense of them, it's super tiring. However, the support during this journey was amazing, my counsellor has been so understanding and I have always felt comfortable around them.*

***‘I have learned ways to deal with my emotions in a healthy way.’***

*The outcome of my journey, I believe, is worth it. Looking back, seeing the change and how much knowledge I've gained, I am so thankful for the guidance and support. I would recommend to anyone who is thinking about getting help, to get it.*



# Jasmine

*When going into counselling the initial reason was to have someone to talk to. My mum was diagnosed with depression and I was there to listen when she needed me. It's difficult to admit but sometimes it became too much trying to look after my mum's well-being as well as my own. I sought the advice of my head of year and was added to the counselling waiting list just before the lockdown in March. Therefore when I actually started counselling my mum had just finished a course of CBT which she received throughout lockdown. The CBT worked as well as my family had hoped for and things were looking brighter at home.*



***'I never thought that in such a short space of time, I would be in such a happier place.'***

*The pressure started to ease off me and I had hoped my well-being would improve in turn. I had been so focused on improving my mum's mental health that I lost touch of mine, everything that I had chosen to ignore started to re-surface. For the past two or so years I had been dating my best friend. No one knew, even my sister who I share everything with, telling people would mean I had to come to terms with my own sexuality. The weight of carrying this secret began to make me feel isolated because I felt I was being dishonest to those around me but once I fell for my girlfriend, it didn't feel wrong to be in love.*

*When things in my life were hard, it's one thing that felt right - even though I was told it's not. Having never told anyone, when coming to counselling I had no intention of sharing this, but I felt that I had connected with my counsellor and it was time to start to work on me. As I began my journey of working to feel more confident about my sexuality, I felt respected. My counsellor didn't just respect my sexuality but my religious beliefs too. I never once felt judged, which was a free space as I had judged myself for so long. Without even realising, I often created scenarios in my head where I wouldn't receive support when coming out. I was able to address these and break down my thoughts of why I was creating particular stories.*

*Before counselling I had never thought deeply about my sexuality as it would mean bringing it to the surface. But something about the session gave me a sense of relief that I could finally open up. After working with my counsellor, I am proud to say I have told my siblings, parents, friends and other family members about my relationship. To my surprise I received so much positivity. I'm still with my girlfriend and we are stronger than ever with amazing supporters around us. Although, I am still on my journey to becoming more comfortable in who I am; I never thought in such a short space of time I would be in such a happier place.*

***"My counsellor didn't just respect my sexuality but my religious beliefs too."***

*I am soon to leave school and head to university with a more positive mind-set and I honestly don't think I could have done this without my counsellor. I'm forever grateful for what she has done for me.*



# FAMILY OUTREACH PROGRAMME

## What is the project?

We have recently introduced a new arm to our service. We are now providing focused support and intervention for hard-to-reach families. We will tap into our specialist Social Work experience within our team to work alongside those hard-to-reach families to strengthen and bolster the system around the child which will, in turn, allow the child to thrive.

## How do we engage?

Schools tend to bear the responsibility for children where the system of support around a child is failing, but therapy isn't always the most appropriate or beneficial provision for a child. We provide extensive 1:1 therapy to children and young people, but sometimes it is the system of support around a child which needs strengthening, and that is where our social workers can work to their strengths.

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS FOR HARD-TO-REACH FAMILIES?

- Loss of control
- Being judged
- Distrust of the system
- Generational pattern of professionals letting them down
- Intergenerational distrust of professionals

*“Sometimes it is the system of support around a child that needs supporting.”*

Our aim is to provide tailored support to families and be the liaison between school and home with the sole aim to build bridges, encourage autonomy within parents/carers, and ensure there is joined up thinking around a vulnerable child/family.





# What can we do?

- We want to provide in-home, tailored and structured support for parents while their children are at school.
- We want to carry out an assessment and observe the parent/s in the home setting so that we get an accurate insight into the dysfunction and chaos within the home.
- We want to observe routines; see what is and isn't working.
- We want our support to ensure that the parent/s don't give up and give into the feelings of being overwhelmed.
- We want to be an ally. Our presence in the home allows us to observe, discuss, share, validate.
- We want to be the supportive observer.
- We want to support the introduction of appropriate routines, discipline, structures and ensure the children's home life feels calmer and more predictable. This can be done through early morning or after school home visits – to be there when we are most needed.

***“Our main focus will be on identifying and working to build and strengthen the system around a child, so that the system can operate with confidence and autonomy.”***

## How do we ensure our work is sustainable?

We will be supporting families who have generational feelings of failure in professionals and whose home lives and parenting suffers as a result. Our assessment will allow us to understand the context of the dysfunction and to pinpoint where our intervention is best placed. We will be able to analyse what is working well, what needs to go under the microscope, and how we best use our skillset to ensure positive outcomes for a family.

Our main focus will be on identifying and working to build and strengthen the system around a child, so that the system can operate with confidence and autonomy.

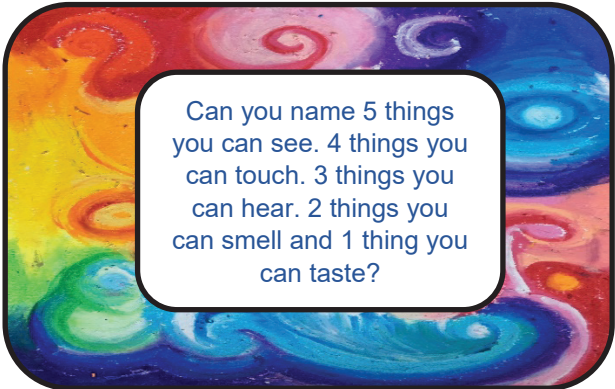


# RESOURCES AND IDEAS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

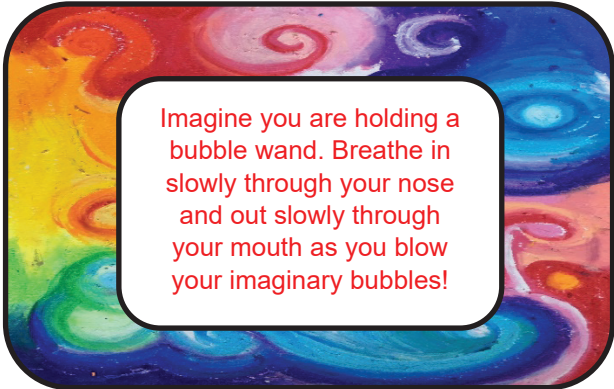
To help your students express how they are feeling, why don't you create a "How are you feeling today?" box in the classroom. Beside the box could be slips of paper where the children could fill in how they are feeling, and they could put the slip in the box. This will help to flag up if anyone is struggling and whether they might need someone to check in with them.

Emojis are a great way to help a child to express their feelings and there are a large number of emojis which allow for a range of feelings to be acknowledged. You could ask the pupils to record their feelings in a journal using emojis.


Here are some ideas to help your pupils to regulate their emotions.




Can you name 5 things you can see. 4 things you can touch. 3 things you can hear. 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste?



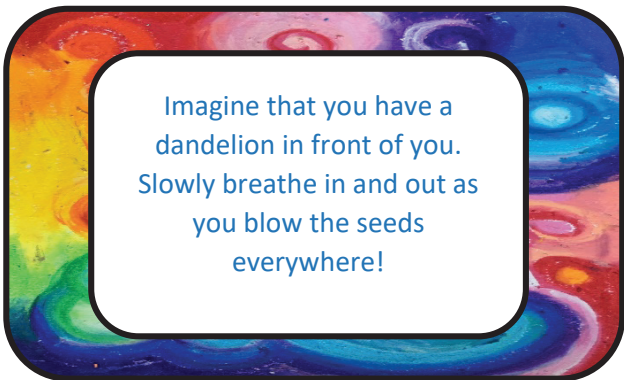
Imagine you are holding a bubble wand. Breathe in slowly through your nose and out slowly through your mouth as you blow your imaginary bubbles!



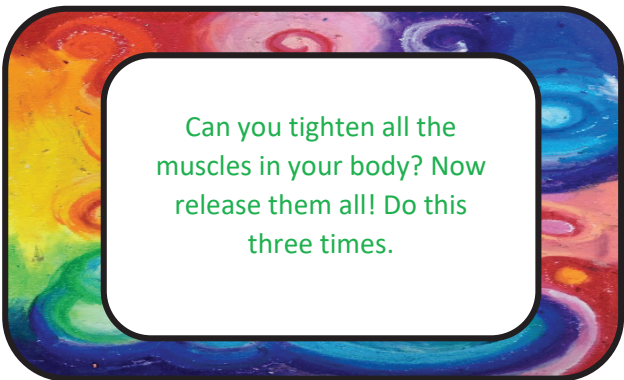
Imagine your favourite cookie! Take a deep breath in to smell the wonderful cookie! Now slowly blow out to cool that cookie down.



Put your hand on your belly. Slowly breathe in and out five times.



Imagine that you have a dandelion in front of you. Slowly breathe in and out as you blow the seeds everywhere!



Can you tighten all the muscles in your body? Now release them all! Do this three times.

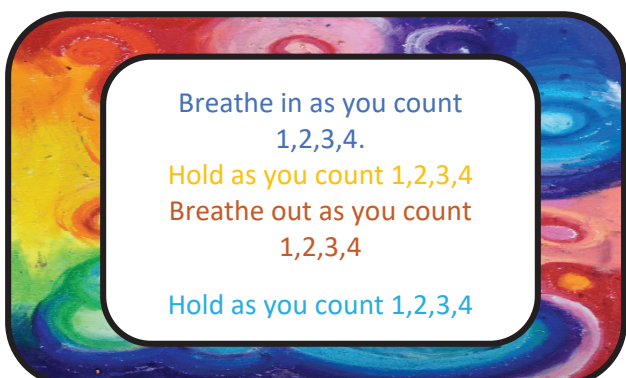
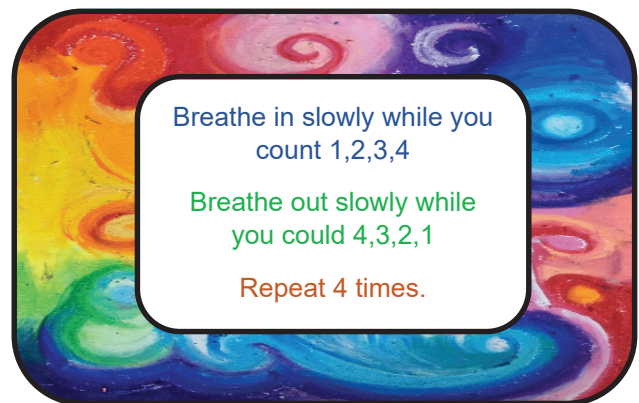
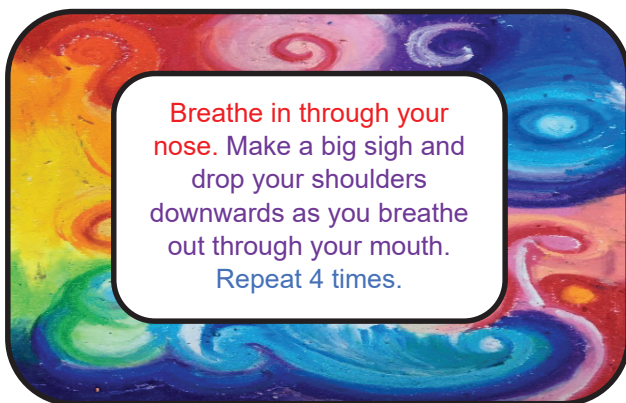
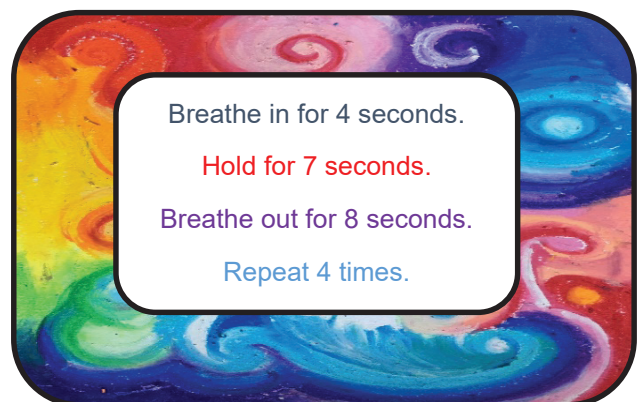
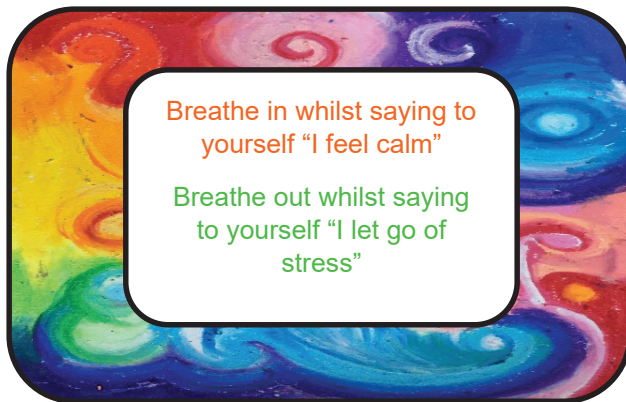


# RESOURCES AND IDEAS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

During form time, the student's names could all be put in a pot. Then each student pulls out a name and keeps it to themselves. The idea is that they then have to carry out a 'random act of kindness' to that person during the week. The following week, can the students guess who was being kind to them? Introduce the idea of how we don't know what people are going through in their lives, and how being kind to someone might make a huge difference to that person.

Perhaps your students could make a 'self-care plan'. They could divide their page into three. Label one section 'mental', one section 'physical' and one section 'emotional'. Then they could think of different ways they could look after themselves under the different headings.

## Here are some breathing techniques that might help anxious or stressed students to feel calmer.



# HOW TO...

Every member of school staff may be called upon to have a 'difficult conversation' with a student at some point. This can be a real challenge – you may be caught by surprise, not know what to say, or find that it triggers your own uncomfortable feelings.

In each edition of 'Mind Matters' we will be choosing a topic and giving you some top-tips on how to manage such situations. This edition looks at talking about suicide.

1. Even the word 'suicide' can evoke a strong reaction in most people. This is natural as it raises an alarm within us associated with death and disaster. Despite this it is possible to remain calm and safe in the knowledge that any mention of suicide or suspicion you may have, automatically triggers the school's safe-guarding procedures ie: you are not alone with this. It is important to be able to regulate your own emotions around this subject so that you can be fully attentive to the needs of your student.
2. There is a big difference between thinking about suicide (ideation) and planning it. Be aware of this and that one does not necessarily trigger the other. Most students who may have suicidal thoughts will not act on them.
3. Do not be afraid to say the word. If you are uncertain what a student is trying to tell you, tentatively ask them. We can sometimes feel that by saying the word suicide it will somehow plant a seed or trigger an action – it will not. You may start with something like, "I wonder if you are trying to tell me that you are feeling suicidal?" Or, "I may be wrong but I feel you are worried that you may hurt yourself?" Sometimes asking a student, "Should I be worried about you?" can open up a conversation allowing you to gently ask more questions.
4. Most students are not looking for you to fix things for them. The fact that they have chosen to talk to you is a really positive one. You don't have to know the answers – you just need to listen attentively and offer them some validation that their feelings are real and clearly hard for them. You may say something like, "I can hear that you feel really awful right now and I am happy for you to talk to me."
5. Always reassure a student that they have done the right thing in telling you and that you will be talking to other people in order to get them the right help. If you are concerned that a student is not safe at that moment in time, stay with them and telephone your DSL for help. If they are safe to leave the room, make sure that they know the next steps you are going to take.
6. Be aware of your own feelings and be kind to yourself. We all have defence mechanisms in place to protect ourselves from overwhelming anxiety when faced with talking about things that feel unacceptable or even frightening. This conversation may well have been really difficult for you so take a little time to consider your own thoughts and feelings, talk to a colleague, have a cup of tea – whatever it takes to re-ground and to make sure that you are feeling okay.

We hope you have enjoyed our first edition of Mind Matters. If you need any further support or help, please use the contact details below.

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