

An Induction to Boarding for International Schools

Module Three – Working Effectively

In this module we will cover how to work effectively, including communicating and sharing information, listening to learners and advocating for them, as well as being a good role model.

Working effectively

There are several key components which, when combined, allow you to be fully effective in your pastoral role:

- the extent of your **knowledge** about the children and young people in your care
- your **understanding** of the processes of growth and development in children
- your **skills** when looking after children.

Getting to know the children in your care is a critical step to being able to provide timely and effective support. As Michael Marland states, *“Your specialist subject is the pupil and therefore it is incumbent on you to build up a full picture of pupils, not least so that you are able to spot when their behaviour is not in line with your or the school’s expectations”*.

Working with school age children requires an understanding of the processes of puberty and adolescent development, but also an awareness of their basic needs so that you can help the school, and the children, meet these needs.

What skills do boarding staff need?

There isn't a definitive list of critical skills for boarding staff. However, the following are key to ensure that you are able to fulfill your pastoral role.

- Communication – verbal and non-verbal skills.
- Recording and sharing information.
- Listening – critically, active listening skills are required.
- Being an advocate for your boarders.
- Being a role model for your boarders.
- Personal reflection – to allow you to review how you are doing and adapt to meet challenges.

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Communication and information sharing

A crucial aspect of everyday practice is effective communication. This includes both formal and informal means of communicating key information about and to children, parents and staff. If an unexpected incident occurs at school, good communication with parents becomes vital. Schools should have comprehensive contact details for parents in case they need to be alerted in an emergency. These should, of course, be regularly checked and kept up-to-date, and include home, work and mobile numbers.

Schools maintain a wide range of records and ensure that a number of issues are monitored. In addition to such formal information recording and sharing, you may also be required to observe, record and communicate information about the general wellbeing of children and their progress or otherwise. Boarding houses may adopt a formal system for exchanging such information such as a daily or weekly staff meeting, or use house diaries/calendars/journals. Such systems must be able to identify everyday occurrences and changes, as well as critical issues or problems associated with a single child or group.

Seven golden rules for effective information sharing

The school's safeguarding arrangements may well include specific direction on information sharing.

The seven golden rules will help support your decision making so that you can be more confident that information is being shared legally and professionally. If at any time, you are not sure of how to act or respond, you must seek advice from your supervisor, manager, or nominated person within your school.

1. **Remember that the confidentiality or data protection is not a barrier to sharing information** but provides a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.
2. **Be open and honest** with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
3. **Seek advice** if you are in any doubt, without disclosing the identity of the person where possible.
4. **Share with consent where appropriate** and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, that lack of consent can be overridden in the public interest. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case.
5. **Consider safety and well-being.** Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the person and others who may be affected by their actions.
6. **Necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate, timely and secure.** Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.
7. **Keep a record** of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.

2008 'Pocket Guide to Information Sharing' [DCSF 2008]

Active listening

Almost anyone can listen, but how often have you had a conversation with someone only to feel that you were not really heard? Active listening can be the key to providing effective support for children.

Active listening means alert and intentional hearing, interpretation, and demonstration of an interest in what a person has to say through verbal signal, non-verbal gestures, and body language.

Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 8th edition

This is a skill which takes time and effort to master. However it is one which will benefit your dealings with children, as well as with colleagues and parents.

Reflection: How good a listener are you? Could you be guilty of 'disinterested' listening when you do not give the child your full attention or 'competitive' listening where your story is better than the child's?

You are blessed with two ears and one mouth. Consequently you should do twice as much listening as talking when working with children! Next time you are chatting with boarders/children, reflect on how much time you have spent listening to them.

Advocating for children

There is a growing recognition of the importance of advocacy for children and young people when plans are being made for their lives. Appreciating the views and feelings of the young person helps them feel involved and can help everyone make better decisions. Best practice in pastoral care demands that young people must be treated with respect and this means, amongst other things, that young people must be listened to.

Reflection: Consider any child that has managed to place his/herself at odds with the school staff or peers, and reflect on why this has occurred and what might be done to help this child re-engage and develop more positive relationships within the school.

Being a role model

80 percent of learning in a school occurs outside the classroom or curriculum. In this respect there is one common role for staff whatever their formal duties and that is being a 'teacher' or role model.

Students are always watching, noticing and copying the behaviour, values and attitudes of those who are older. This places an obligation on all staff to model those qualities that are worthy of imitation. If students see support staff doing their duties faithfully, hear a conversation between maintenance staff that models good language or witness tolerance and compassion in their tutors, these qualities will be encouraged in their own lives. You should never underestimate the fact that you will be a 'teacher' at certain moments when working within a boarding environment.

Crises or Emergencies

Whilst boarding involves considerable management, planning and scheduling, the very nature of boarding and the care of children and young people means that staff will have to react to the unexpected at some stage.

Most schools will have protocols in place to assist staff when a crisis arises. Always check the staff handbook or house handbook in the first instance as your predecessors may well have encountered the same problem and left a guide for dealing with it. It may not always cover the exact circumstances you are facing and in this case always seek advice or help from more experienced colleagues.

Reflection: When you are next on duty, will you be able to respond to a minor or major crisis in a timely and effective manner? Check the procedures for events such as a fire alarm, minor injury or illness to a boarder, an emergency phone call from a parent, or a missing boarder. Do you know what to do and from whom you should seek help?

Reflecting on your practice

In a profession as challenging as boarding, honest self-reflection is key. That means that we must all regularly examine what has worked and what hasn't. You should then take your answers and turn them into positive statements that give you concrete goals on which to focus immediately and shape your future practice.

It is a good idea to maintain a professional journal which will allow you to:

- reflect over time on your role
- evaluate your effectiveness in supporting children
- consider how thorough you have been in identifying training and development opportunities to support your role.

Improving your knowledge or skills

In addition to attending school staff training, it is possible to better inform yourself about pastoral care matters and to develop your skills in supporting boarders. For boarding specific information, you can access the research materials and publications in the members' area of the BSA website.

In summary

This module has considered how to work effectively and the key elements that will support you in doing so.

You are now ready to complete the corresponding questionnaire. Click '**Questionnaire 3**' to begin the questions.