

An Induction to Boarding for International Schools

Module Four – Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Boarders

Introduction

In this module we will consider how we might assess and meet the needs of the boarders.

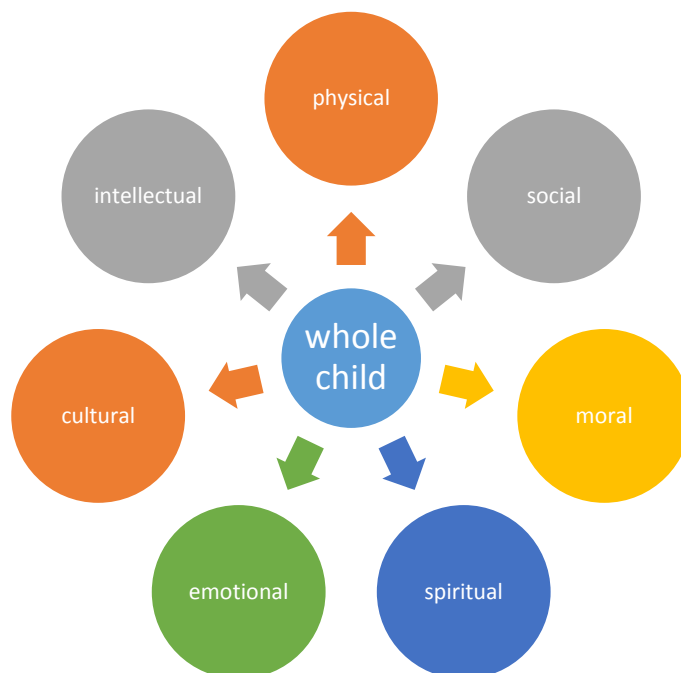
Boarders' needs

The care given to boarding pupils is increasingly examined, so, it is important that boarding house staff are aware of the needs of young people as they grow and develop throughout their time in the school. Staff need a clear framework and sense of purpose for meeting these needs, and providing pastoral care that meets today's high standards and levels of accountability.

The organisation of the boarding house, the deployment of staff, the development of the physical environment of the house, together with the systems, structures and procedures (both school-wide and house-based) all need to be implemented with clear objectives and outcomes in mind.

A useful model

It is common in boarding environments for staff to focus on the 'whole child'; staff are aware that a student/boarder who feels safe, is happy and healthy and enjoying school is much more likely to succeed academically and fulfil their full potential. It is however, quite useful to consider the separate needs of students in order to better understand how we can best meet these needs. A handy model which the BSA uses throughout its staff CPD identifies the following seven needs.



The information in this programme was current in August 2015.

Whilst EduCare Learning Ltd. have made every effort to ensure that the programmes and their content have been devised and written by leading experts who have ensured that they reflect best practice in all aspects, EduCare Learning Ltd. exclude their liability of the consequences of any errors, omission or incorrect statements to the fullest extent permitted by law and EduCare Learning Ltd. make no warranty or representation as to the accuracy, completeness or fitness for purpose of any statements or other content in the programme.

No part of this material may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing by EduCare Learning Ltd.

- **Physical needs** include: shelter, sleep, water and sanitation, protection from harm, food.
- **Social needs** can be identified as: opportunities to develop friendships; a sense of belonging and identity.
- **Moral needs** includes an understanding of 'right and wrong'.
- **Spiritual needs** would include an exploration and appreciation of the nature of life and understanding of what lies beyond the immediate world.
- **Emotional needs** including access to a stable and loving environment, opportunities to be listened to and respected, and a respect for privacy and confidentiality. A sense of worth and being valued by others.
- **Cultural needs** would entail a knowledge of and respect for own language, religion and culture.
- **Intellectual needs** includes access to quality education and stimulation, a recognition of and respect for emerging competencies; being able to develop cognitive talents and creative potential.

Many of the arrangements in boarding, such as the physical security of the boarding house, the provision of food and showers, the sleeping arrangement in dorms, and the organisation of social events are directly tied into meeting the various needs of the individual as well as the community. A boarding house will wish to provide opportunities for the development and growth of the pupils in their care so that all aspects are covered.

For example:

- the weekend activity programme
- prep
- visits
- sport
- religious events.

These activities all help to meet specific aspects of boarders' physical, social, spiritual, intellectual and cultural needs.

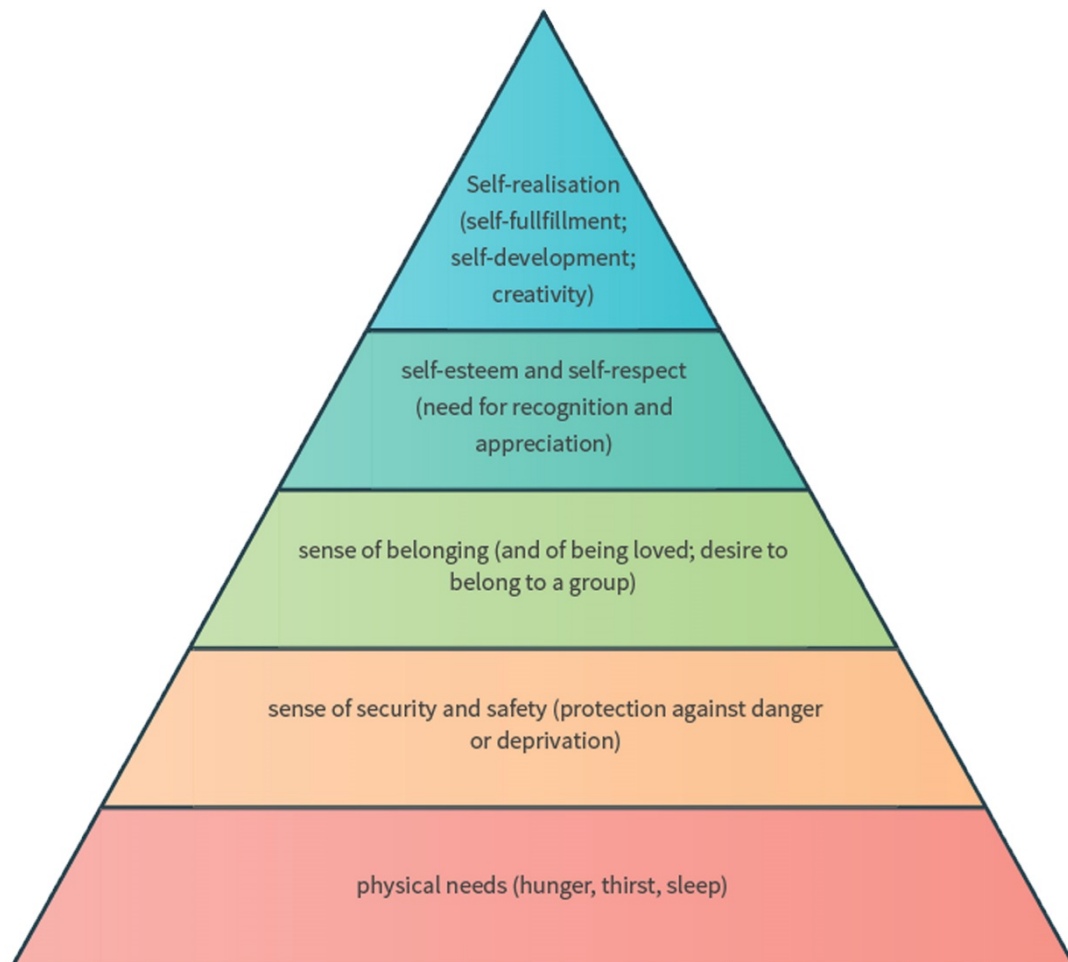
Today the majority of boarding settings have international students from a wide mix of cultures and religions. Staff need to be very aware of their different backgrounds, experiences and knowledge, when they are identifying how best to meet their various needs. Indeed it can be difficult to meet some of their needs, eg the cultural or spiritual needs of some of the minority groups.

Reflection: Consider how the expectations and experiences of the different cultural groups in your boarding house impact on how you set boundaries, rules and restrictions. For example, bed times, no smoking/alcohol or access to outside facilities. Do any cultural groups have greater difficulty accepting such restrictions? Do you have to vary your approach to help them understand the importance of such arrangements for the whole boarding community?

The Maslow model & boarding

While it is useful to focus on the individual needs, this can result in an imbalance of provision, ie too much focus on one aspect and a neglect of others. For example, academic colleagues may only be interested in the educational progress of their students and not recognise the importance of taking full account of the other needs. Boarding staff will understand that a student that is not eating healthily or sleeping well is unlikely to make best progress in their academic studies. Boarding staff by necessity understand the interplay between the various needs and why it is essential to focus on the whole child.

The theorist A. H. Maslow defined human needs on five levels and his model is a very handy way to better understand our approach as boarding staff.



Maslow's premise is that the lower order needs must be met before we can consider meeting those higher up. Boarding houses obviously meet the first two levels of need, in their basic provision of accommodation and the pupils' physical environment. Staff need to create the right atmosphere, climate and conditions to meet the final three levels, which can be so much more easily met when there is a strong, supportive and tolerant community, and where the talents and aspirations of all its members are valued.

The information in this programme was current in August 2015.

Whilst EduCare Learning Ltd. have made every effort to ensure that the programmes and their content have been devised and written by leading experts who have ensured that they reflect best practice in all aspects, EduCare Learning Ltd. exclude their liability of the consequences of any errors, omission or incorrect statements to the fullest extent permitted by law and EduCare Learning Ltd. make no warranty or representation as to the accuracy, completeness or fitness for purpose of any statements or other content in the programme.

No part of this material may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing by EduCare Learning Ltd.

Case study

Jo, aged 13, is new this year, and to start with seemed very outgoing, quite gregarious and lively, perhaps even a bit of a show-off at times. Two weeks into term, he was suddenly and painfully homesick. He now feels no-one likes him. His parents live abroad, and the guardians, a quite elderly uncle and aunt, live over 100 miles away. Jo has been coming to you regularly complaining of a bad cold, sore throat, headache and anything else he can think of.

Homesickness is an indication that a boarder does not feel safe, secure, or indeed that they belong. As Maslow's model of human need suggests, we need to address the lower order of needs and most significantly the 'sense of belonging' in the first instance. Boarding schools fully understand the negative impact of homesickness and will place considerable effort on the successful induction of new boarders. Successful and quick integration into the boarding house will go a long way to meeting their social needs and creating a real sense of belonging.

A recent study identified "happiness as being equated with feeling good about oneself, having positive relationships with significant others."

(Rae, 2014)

Once the individual is feeling happy and part of the boarding community then staff can work on helping them develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. This will help ensure they grow and develop in line with the school's aim, their own and their parents' expectations.

Reflection: Identify a student that was homesick; what did you and the boarding team do to help?

Issues relating to the emotional needs of boarders are often those that most challenge boarding staff. Whether it relates to homesickness, bullying, exam stress, social exclusion, or is perhaps more extreme in nature, eg self-harming behaviours or disordered eating, boarding staff must advise, support and guide students through them.

As we have seen, friendships are a key part of meeting the emotional and social needs of boarders and boarding staff make great effort to get arrangement of dorms and bedrooms right. However they "need to be aware of boarders who may not be part of an established peer group, and who may suffer isolation. Such isolation may be the first step towards bullying, and is more likely to affect newcomers, or children who are recognisably different in some way from the rest."(DoE, 1989)

Reflection: what systems does your boarding house have in place to ensure that boarders mix and integrate well? How do you help the less confident student become part of the boarding family?

The big challenge

The biggest challenge for boarding staff often lies in resolving the conflict that can arise between the needs of an individual (say, one who needs a good deal more sleep than average) and the needs of the community (who may all be accommodated in shared dormitories).

This will frequently become acute when dealing with pupils whose behaviour is a cause for concern. Should an offence which would normally warrant a well-understood and accepted response be dealt with in the same way if a pupil; for example, has just suffered a major disappointment or even bereavement? The whole question of the fairness and consistency of sanctions and punishments must be rationalised in terms of the pupils concerned so each case will need to be treated on its merits.

“This represents a real challenge for boarding staff who will, from experience, recognise that the different aspects of typical development will occur at different ages and stages in any given child, and that abnormalities in development may not be easy to spot.”

(Bee, 2011)

For example, when a child starts boarding at a young age, say between ages of 8-10, their ability to reason and deduce is still in its early stages of development, and the physical changes of puberty may still be some way off. However, their social and moral development may be reasonably well advanced. By senior school age, many children are well into the traumas of adolescence, and social and emotional development often take a new turn, with many of the frustrating symptoms of adolescence. The ability to reason and make moral choices is clearly more advanced, and arguments about the rights and wrongs of decisions and the actions of others are often hotly debated.

The cultural needs of international boarders

Moving from a familiar to an unfamiliar setting can be traumatic, particularly when this means leaving home as well as changing schools and losing friends.

“Moving to a different society may cause a deeply uncomfortable re-examination of cultural attributes as; for example, values previously assumed to be universal, are challenged or contradicted.”

(Greenfield, and Hardaker, (2015)

Cultural shock can have a devastating effect on a student's mental, intellectual and even physical wellbeing. Boarding staff need to understand what causes such reactions and how they can best help with the essential cultural adjustment. Indeed cultural confusion may lead to perceived misbehaviour or inappropriate behaviour.

Staff need to be very aware of the background of all of their boarders and how they are likely to act or react in and around school.

Consider the differences arising from students':

- variable language abilities and their understanding of instruction whether verbal or written
- social customs
- diet
- behavioural norms
- learning styles
- relationships with responsible adults.

Equipping all students with the necessary knowledge and coping skills to deal with such traumatic change will smooth the transition and help them to integrate into the boarding community.

Reflection: Does your school have any specific programmes or activities in place to support the induction and integration of international students? How can you improve your cultural awareness of the different groups in your house?

Outcomes for boarders

Much of what your school has in place to support the welfare and wellbeing of boarders and other pupils is designed to help support the development of the whole child. In other words, the provision of pastoral care, medical support, activities and events programmes, staff supervision, catering, and the whole plethora of support provided in a boarding school seeks to help meet the various needs of each and every child.

Boarding schools now identify, in far more detail, the outcomes which boarders can expect to achieve during their time at school. These will depend on the age range and circumstances of the school/boarding house, but might include some or all of the following:

- developing spiritual and moral awareness; promoting clear expectations of positive behaviour, and a sense of right and wrong
- cultural development, involving an appreciation of one's own culture, as well as those of other ethnic groups and nationalities
- making decisions, perhaps through house or school councils, taking initiative, learning from mistakes
- developing responsibility for themselves, others, and the environment, understanding the benefits and demands of increasing independence
- development of leadership opportunities
- developing a sense of service, and of making a positive contribution to the house, school and wider communities
- preparation for the next stage (senior school, college, career or gap year)
- developing and examining relationships, the effect of exclusion or loneliness
- developing positive attitudes towards others of; for example, different gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation
- learning to lead a healthy life style, the importance of exercise, diet and sleep, the effects of substance abuse
- discussing sexual development and sexuality
- learning to respect privacy.

(Hawkes & Holgate, 2001)

The information in this programme was current in August 2015.

Whilst EduCare Learning Ltd. have made every effort to ensure that the programmes and their content have been devised and written by leading experts who have ensured that they reflect best practice in all aspects, EduCare Learning Ltd. exclude their liability of the consequences of any errors, omission or incorrect statements to the fullest extent permitted by law and EduCare Learning Ltd. make no warranty or representation as to the accuracy, completeness or fitness for purpose of any statements or other content in the programme.

No part of this material may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing by EduCare Learning Ltd.

Schools are now providing an end of term or year boarding report which highlights the outcomes boarders have achieved. It is still common for some teaching staff to only focus on their particular and specialist role, but pastoral care and boarding staff are all too aware of the critical links between one aspect of child development and the others. Meeting all of a boarder's needs means, in Maslow's terms, that they are more likely to achieve their full potential and leave your school '**ready for life**'.

Consequently your role is to ensure that issues such as inadequate sleep, homesickness, bullying or low self-esteem, which will all undermine academic progress, are quickly and effectively addressed.

Reflection: Do not underestimate the very positive impact great boarding provision can have on individual students. Review the school's (or your boarding house's) 'mission statement' and your role in meeting the needs of the boarding students to ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes as a result of their boarding experience.

In summary

This module has considered how we can assess and meet the needs of the boarders. This concludes your programme and we trust you have found it informative and useful.

A final word

Schools need their staff to be able to grow and develop alongside their pupils. In addition to the induction and ongoing continuing professional development available in your school, you may wish to consider accessing training and development through the Boarding Schools' Association or one of the other school associations.

You are now ready to complete the corresponding questionnaire. Click '**Questionnaire 4**' to begin the questions.