

***To help make the most of an exciting, transformative
and sometimes very challenging two years – and beyond***



Where did this come from? It was kindly developed by a team of UWCGB '19 parents and helpers after a session on Mental Health & Wellbeing at the UK Orientation Weekend in July 2017 for UWCGB '19 families. It was then championed by UWCGB National Committee Welfare Team and updated after the Atlantic Coaching Pilot, with increasing support from International Office and pastoral care leaders throughout the movement.

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Remember, bouncing back is more important than working so hard to avoid failure that they become exhausted and burnt out. Prevention is better than cure and no-one is ever totally immune, so be proactive about reaching out.

Next? A searchable, online resource shared, updated and tailored for each college throughout the movement. Apologies for how dense it is in this format, but imagine it as a website with illustrations and embedded videos! Keep in touch for updates and help make that happen by **joining us in the Facebook Group “[UWC Parents for Wellbeing](#)”**. You do not have to be online ‘friends’ with anyone else to join in and it is a global, private space. Some alumni and others join us there also.

Still at selection stage? Please be honest with the Welfare Team about your young person’s needs. They cannot discriminate based on mental health but it will help guide them to the right college. This will be held in strict confidence. Research your college choices carefully and don’t be afraid to ask for as much information as you think you need. They are all different and some have more advanced pastoral care support than others.

We hope these suggestions are useful for you. Please get in touch with any feedback via the contact details below. Together we can shape the global village to help raise these young people.

Checklist - before leaving

Before departure there's a chance to strengthen resilience and relationships, help frame their UWC experience, and offer some basic tools to work with what might arise. Each parent, each student and each college will be different, but do err on the side of more not less contact, especially during key times like the first term, winter months and major assessment times.

Here are some suggested steps:

- ☐ Try to relax and enjoy doing things together. Listen and allow space in your life for conversations to naturally arise. Be available as much as you can and offer support with packing lists, seeing friends and family or whatever needs to be done to offer a smooth transition and rite of passage.
- ☐ Help take the pressure off your own or their expectations and the opportunity of “The UWC Experience”. See **Depressuring the Expectation** below.
- ☐ Talk about when they might feel low, any other concerns that they might have, what things they already know can help - and what else might help in their new environment.

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- ❑ Together create a plan to stay in touch and let them know it's okay to do so ANYTIME, even if it's only a two word text. If you are not going to be available, make sure someone they trust can be. If you see signs they might be struggling, you can create a special plan.
 - ❑ Explicitly decide on a means of communication that works for you – how will they reach you 24/7, if they need to? Whatsapp, Messenger etc.
 - ❑ Consider having a video conversation (Facetime, Skype, Google Hangouts, Facebook messenger) from time to time to help you really connect. This will help you assess how they are coping. *Test out the technology together before they leave.*
- ❑ Help them see that fluctuating moods are entirely normal, especially during adolescence, transitions and when there's extra pressure from school work, etc. Role model that talking about our concerns, feelings and issues are an important part of dealing with them.
- ❑ If there have been tensions in the family, as much as possible, let them go on the back burner, rather than trying to resolve everything before they move on.
- ❑ Give yourself extra resources. See **Student & Parent Resources** below.
- ❑ Build relationships with parents and other students going to the same UWC - you can then check in with them if you need more info about how your child is doing. See [UWC Parents for Wellbeing](#) Facebook group, search Facebook for one or start one for your school. We have one for [UWC Atlantic College 17-19](#) here. Suggest you timefence it to maintain focus, get a few other parents to co-host, and put a little energy into promoting it through school newsletter and hosting it. Here's an [article](#) to help.
- ❑ Build relationships with the pastoral care team (House Parents, Personal Tutors) and update them with any essential information.

Checklist - after arriving

Build a good connection with your young person and the college. This is to make sure you've got the right connections in place if they are struggling, not to surveil them 24/7. Getting organised early and building the key relationships will make this easier.

- ❑ Keep in touch with your young person regularly, at a level that is appropriate for them. This may be a brief message once a month, or may for others be a regular video chat. This is a time when your young person is transitioning into an adult and like most teenagers will want less contact with their parents. You need to give them the space to do this, whilst at the same time making sure you are available for them, if they need it.

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- ❑ Keep in touch with the Pastoral Care team if you have concerns.
- ❑ Regularly send packages with special food and items from home to show you care. You might like to include extras for those in their room or the whole house. Even very small and silly items can be lots of fun to share when you are a long way from home.

More information & help

If for any reason you are not happy with the level of care your young person is receiving, or have any concerns please contact anyone on the pastoral care team or if necessary, the Deputy Head or Head Teacher. You can also contact your Welfare Team at National Committee (eg. [Great Britain](#) here) or at the International Office if need be.

There is no shame in needing extra support and the more feedback schools and committees have, the better they can respond. They are there to help and want your child and your family to thrive.

Yes, UWC is a high status college to attend, but nothing is worth risking mental health and wellbeing. It can be a fine line to balance, but if you reach out, much help is at hand.

Depressurising the Expectation

Being accepted for UWC can create pressure on your child; look out for adding to this. You can use some of these talking points to help ease expectations - internal or external.

- Avoid creating or reinforcing YOLO (You Only Live Once) ideas like: "Best time of your life", "Best two years of your life". This is probably not true and adding pressure doesn't make it more likely.
- Despite some UWC trends, your child does not have to save or change the world. Remind them:
 - *"You are fine as you are. You don't need to save or change the world for me."*
- The whole experience of UWC is a powerful thing for your child, not just the academic results:
 - *"UWC is not just about academic results, this is about you learning about yourself."*

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- *"Your life is long -- there is lots of time and life to achieve everything."*
- *"Your dreams can be as big or as small as you want."*
- *"It is totally ok to go and work at the corner shop after UWC if you want to."*
- At times your child may suffer from mental strain. If they were spending two years doing high-intensity sports training, they'd likely get an injury or two. They'd then rest and repair. The same is true of their UWC Experience. They are spending two years doing high-intensity mental and emotional training, and at some point might suffer an 'injury'. You need to encourage them to pace themselves throughout and stop and rest when they really need to, not just push through and make it worse.
 - *"UWC is usually an intense experience. You'll need sleep, rest and physical exercise to study, to live and thrive and fully experience it."*
 - *"You'll learn about yourself in the UWC experience. You already have unique abilities and a capacity to do amazing things. You are becoming an adult and that means taking care of your body and your mind, learning about what you can and can't do and loving all of yourself."*
- **Your young person's happiness is key**
 - *"You don't have to compete/win/be top of the class/get 45 in your IB for me to love you"*
 - *"Your happiness is the most important"*

Parent Resources

Student resources will also be helpful for parents.

Recognising Mental Distress

Here are a couple of useful resources:

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/parents-guide-to-teen-depression.htm>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/family-health/Pages/worried-about-your-teenager.aspx#depression>

What can you do to support them?

- Listen - let them speak, understand their issues.

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- You don't need to have all the answers - you may even work it out together
- Don't transmit **your** anxiety to your child, but do acknowledge that you are concerned for them and that you are taking them seriously
- Look after yourself - speak with your partner / friends to gain support for yourself. Get coaching or counselling if you need it.
- Remember - "walking and talking" with a friend can really help both sides of your brain to work through the problem and find potential solutions
- Contact other parents within UWC group who may have other ideas too.
- If you are concerned about them, contact their house parents, personal tutor, college pastoral care
- Encourage them to speak with their friends for support

Connect and share

Connect with the [UWC Parents for Wellbeing](#) group on Facebook to find personal stories, resources and support. There are additional Facebook groups and resources listed at the end of this document to find out more and hear student voices direct.

Student Resources

The Basics

Take these as encouragement, not an endless list to achieve. Notice what's already going well when it is and grow from there.

Learn to listen to your needs, express them and have healthy boundaries	Get your own space, you need it, you deserve it. If you can't, ask advocates to help find it.
Learn to be mindfully in your body, not just your head or heart	Breathe deeply. Slow down. Reduce intensity.
Spend gentle time in nature	Eat regular, healthy meals, avoid excessive sugar and processed foods
Relax, away from technology.	Be kind to yourself, learn to love yourself, get help if that's hard
Set realistic goals and get help to reach them	Be around people that make you happy and treat you well

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Exercise daily	Drink 8 glasses of water a day
Keep toxins to a minimum (eg. alcohol and caffeine)	Aim for 8 hours of sleep every day (you can't catch up)
Know what consent means and practice it	If you smoke, get help to quit as soon as possible. The longer you leave it, the harder it is.
Do what you love	Learn to enjoy time alone
Get help to manage priorities	Whatever works best for you!

Sleep

Lack of sleep is a major cause of anxiety and poor performance. Everyone needs 6-8 hours every night and you can't catch up. Mental and physical strain can mean you need more. If there are issues in your room about the hours people are keeping, speak to your House Parent and agree a plan. This is a proactive practice at AC, for example. Eye masks and earplugs will help. **TURN OFF YOUR PHONE early and get another alarm clock.**

Your own mental health:

How to recognise mental health issues in yourself

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm>

How to look after your mental wellbeing

<https://patient.info/pdf/9174.pdf>

How to recognise mental health issues in your friends

If one of your friends is struggling with issues, one of the most important things for you to do is to listen to them. Allowing them to talk, helps them to order their thoughts, gain understanding and to start finding solutions.

You don't have to provide a solution to their problems. Be careful that you don't take on their problems yourself and add to the pressures that you are also under.

Please also consider:

- How to share your concerns for friends and to manage your sense of responsibility. (What are **your** support mechanisms?)
- Maintaining confidentiality is important but if things are getting really difficult for them and you, find out who they would be happy for you to share information with to gain more expert

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help.

- Are there times when you might need to break confidentiality?
 - If your friend is very distressed and you feel you do not have the skills to help them but they are not happy to let you speak to someone else you could consider speaking to someone else for support, but not mention your friend's name.
 - Sometimes, when people are really unwell they lose insight into their condition, their thought processes can become deranged and they may hold a fixed belief, which you are unable to change through logical discussion (This is called a delusion.) In this instance your responsibilities to care for their wellbeing outweigh the issue of confidentiality and you should get expert, professional help.
 - Remember, if they are really distressed, it is good to specifically ask them about suicide. Asking will not increase the risk that they might consider suicide. If they are speaking about suicide, this is not something you should carry the burden of alone. Find an adult you trust at college or home to talk to.

About Coaching & Counselling

Life / educational coaching or a counsellor / therapist can offer breakthrough support and enhancement of potential. Some schools will have people on staff or nearby to offer this. Many professional coaches (and occasionally some counsellors) are available in a suitable timezone over Skype. Some work globally and can work with students and parents.

Counselling: More and more families are accessing counselling for life skills, not just dealing with issues. High profile people are normalising it all the time. A web search or request for recommendations will help you find someone you and/or your young person can relate to. When the going gets tough, smart people are learning they do not have to suffer in silence. [What is counselling? How can it help?](#)

Coaching: Working mainly in the present moving forward, coaching helps people move through personal issues, learn core life skills and reach their potential. It is being widely adopted by individuals and leaders around the world. Contact resource pack lead [Libby Davy](#) for best practice on finding a suitable coach in your area or timezone. [What is coaching? How can it help?](#)

There are many other proven modalities that can also help, like hypnotherapy and massage. These will be further outlined in the Facebook group and future versions. All suggestions welcome.

Other Resources

General information websites

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandyouthinfo.aspx>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Body image / eating disorders

<https://www.b-eat.co.uk/>

Drugs and alcohol

<http://www.talktofrank.com/>

Online resources for managing mental health

<http://www.lltff.com/>

<https://moodgym.com.au/> (both evidenced-based but mood gym is not free)

Sexual Consent

<http://pauseplaystop.org.uk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh4w2WTVQfk>

The famous Tea Parody!! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8&t=20s>

Books & Audio

["Mindfulness: A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world"](#). Dr Mark Williams, former professor of Clinical Psychology at Oxford et al.

Acceptance & Commitment Therapy: [Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens: A Guide to Living an Extraordinary Life \(An Instant Help Book for Teens\)](#) "Evidence based, highly recommended"

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Serious mental illness

Some young people may develop what is called “serious mental illness” (SMI); such as severe depression, eating disorders, psychosis, and a risk of committing suicide. This can happen at home, but moving away from home, perhaps to another country, may be an added risk factor, and is harder to manage when far away.

It is common for young people (and adults) with SMI to downplay and hide their problems. They often fear being stigmatised, being judged negatively and branded. They often have a sense of shame and worry about disappointing their parents, themselves and those who supported them financially, as well as fearing poor school references.

Furthermore, the very nature of many forms of serious mental illness leads to a loss of self insight and/or motivation, making it harder for sufferers to seek help for themselves.

It is difficult – even for non-specialist health professionals - to “diagnose” serious mental illness. One cannot assume that all counsellors at all schools have the expertise to diagnose and refer. Easy access to expert screening and seamless, safe referral to expert care does not always exist.

Some UWC colleges are better equipped than others to deal with SMI. In the absence of extensive training for staff and counsellors, children’s distress on the basis of SMI can be seen as a “normal” effect of living in a highly demanding and achieving academic environment and treated as a performance or disciplinary issue.

It is important that parents follow their own judgment and don’t feel shy or embarrassed to seek help.

UWCGB and many others are developing better support mechanisms for parents and students. We want to help the global UWC movement make all UWC colleges as safe as can be. This is work in progress.

Alumni and students have taken the lead with their survey and blogs on [UWC Mental Health Reform](#) and [UWC Voices](#). Further input from us all is crucial to make this a success.

Please let us know your experiences and suggestions.

UWC Parents for Wellbeing

An ever-evolving community space on [Facebook](#) with additional resources, including a reassuring and informative video message from an experienced parent and resources from the Orientation Weekend on “hopes and fears” from students and parents. All very welcome. You don’t need to be friends with anyone on Facebook to join and it is a private, closed group.

You can also share your positive and challenging experiences, and potentially connect with parents and students from your young person’s college. If you don’t find all the people you want in that space, invite them in and co-create it with us as a supportive community. Please also add any other resources you have found useful and want to share. Contact admins in the group for advice if need be and feel free to use an alias to protect privacy if you wish.

UWC Coaching Pilot

“It was so nice opening up, especially with such a diverse group. And the moderators really helped us go through the entire thing. It was just so nicely put together, and it was such an open space. Especially as most of us were strangers. It’s really weird, because I never open up to people, but there’s a first for everything.” AC First Year

Atlantic College supported a coaching pilot project in September 2017, with 10 professional coaches working with over 200 students, primarily first years in groups. The emphasis was on resilience, self care, purpose and whatever people brought in. Staff also received a training session on coaching skills and some second years and staff had 121 coaching.

“Students often confuse pressure and stress. They need to be able to be able to work out their priorities and move forward to get the most out of themselves. While counselling is often about looking backwards, coaching is looking forward and re-framing. This is very attractive in many ways and helps develop resilience,” said Sarah Hamilton, Head of Student Life at AC.

“I’ve learned to tackle my problems, and be less afraid of humiliation and to be more accepting of when I face difficulty.” AC First Year

Over 50% of first years responded to a confidential survey which is summarised below. Similar comments are expected from almost any UWC college, more or less. Second year responses are usually similar but tend to be around stress from the IB and choosing university and other pathways.

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Issues	Outcome if options not explored	Potential support
Asking for help Body image Choosing extra-curricular activities Communication Eating habits Finding privacy Fitting in / being accepted Focus/Concentration Future Career/Pathway Identity Life Purpose Mental Health Organisation Positivity, Optimism Procrastination Relationships Resilience	Become unwell Being unhealthy Hurting myself, dying Increased stress Loneliness Miss out on opportunities Perform poorly at school Unhappiness Waste time and effort Withdrawal Issue (cont.) Respect Self-Confidence Self-Esteem Self-loathing Sleep	Coach Doctor Family Friends Houseparents Peer Helper Roommates School Staff Second Year Students Teachers Therapist / Counsellor Issue (cont.) Stress/Overwhelm Suicide - self / other Time alone Time management

It was initiated by [Libby Davy](#) FRSA (AC Parent '19, Purpose-Led Coach / Organisational Development) with an outstanding, generous group of professional coaches, including co-lead Nishe Patel. Also supported by educational specialist [Helen James](#) / [Helen Gormley](#) FRSA and Libby's supervisor [Hetty Einzig](#) FRSA (Founding Director of Parenting UK and author of *The Future of Coaching: Vision, Leadership & Responsibility in a Transforming World*). A case study, written by professional journalist and coach Suzi Butcher, will be shared soon in the [UWC Parents for Wellbeing](#) Facebook group and other places.

The longer term plan is to share coaching more widely within the UWC movement to enhance wellbeing, clarity of purpose, and maximise its positive impact. We aim to do this via schools and direct to students, parents and alumni on a sliding scale via a social enterprise.

More Resources, Student Voices

Students have asked again and again that their concerns be heard and addressed. We are all working together to do so. Connect direct with the [UWC Mental Health Reform](#) campaign and [UWC Voices](#).

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Credits & Support

- Libby Davy FRSA (AC '19 Parent) - Ongoing project co-lead. (Co-host [UWC Parents for Wellbeing](#) group on Facebook and lead on UWC Coaching Pilot and beyond). If not on Facebook, email her at libby@humanbells.com
- Mona Taylor and Val Murray, UWCGB National Committee welfare team. Updated on request for distribution at GB selection weekend 2017 and then again for Orientation 2018.
- Libby Mason (UWC Red Cross) and Verena Heidenreich (UWC Robert Bosch).
- Emma Dillon, Matthias Rosenberg and Amelia Redmond, Jill Longson (UWC International Office).
- Dr Charlie Siderfin (AC '82, '19 Parent) - Version 1 Co-Lead
- Graeme Sutherland FRSA (AC '19 Parent) - Version 1 Co-Lead, Co-host UWC Parents for Wellbeing group on Facebook)
- Bea Davy-Sutherland (AC '19) - review of Version 1 and 2.
- Dr Gilles de Wildt (LPC '16 Parent) Version 1 and ongoing work. (Mental Health Reform presentation at GBUWC Orientation, available on request and stored in UWC Parent for Wellbeing Facebook Group)
- Plus additional UWC students and experts within our networks.

More wellbeing supporters are coming forward all the time. Join us, whatever your place in the UWC movement.

Reviewed in Autumn 2017 following Coaching Pilot Project at AC plus ongoing meetings with Welfare Officers within the movement.

Please feel free to contribute to this resource pack. We value the input and opinions of others, particularly more current and recent students, before next version due Spring 2018 for wider release.

Version 2, December 2017

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