# Operational Policy: Ākonga Mental Health and Wellbeing (NAG 5)

## Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ

## Statement of Intent:

The Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) is committed to ensuring the mental and emotional wellbeing of its ākonga (NAG 5.1). Underlying this policy is the belief that BLENNZ will promote good mental health in an environment where people care, respect and trust one another.

In conjunction with other professional organisations BLENNZ has a responsibility to ensure that ākonga are supported to understand the impact of vision loss and how to manage this. In addition to this BLENNZ has a responsibility to ensure ākonga in long and short term residential programmes are supported to adapt to changes in their lives such as separation from whānau and friends, establishing new social networks and adjusting to a different lifestyle. This is particularly important for those ākonga who may experience emotional or psychological difficulties which are more persistent and which inhibit their ability to participate fully in BLENNZ programmes without appropriate professional support.

A whole BLENNZ approach to mental health promotion will facilitate the increased empowerment of ākonga and address barriers to learning as well as strengthening supportive relationships.

## Definition:

Mental health has been defined in New Zealand broadly as that which nurtures family, social, mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing\*.

Mental health promotion is defined as:

* The process of enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to take control over their lives and improve their mental health
* The use of strategies that foster supportive environments and individual resilience while showing respect for culture, equity, social justice, personal dignity and a sense of belonging\*.

\* “Guidelines for Mentally Healthy Schools 2001”, Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand.

## Policy Requirements:

1. To support mental health promotion BLENNZ will ensure it has relevant policies and procedures to support the mental health of all ākonga, the maintenance of a positive school climate and ethos, and teaching and learning in the curriculum. These policies will include:

* Child Protection
* Managing Ākonga attending BLENNZ programmes
* Anti Bullying
* Drugs and Alcohol
* Traumatic Incidents
* Support for Ākonga in Cases of Physical Illness
* Non Custodial Parents’ Access to Ākonga and their Records
* Administration of Medication
* Health & Safety Injury and Incident Management and Reporting
* Health & Safety Risk Management.

2. Ākonga, staff and the BLENNZ community will be encouraged to work together to enhance learning and health and to sustain strategies that maintain a healthy educational environment.

3. BLENNZ will support ākonga inclusion in both local and BLENNZ based Health and Physical Education Curriculum. Wherever possible specialist mental health education programmes will be delivered by qualified professionals.

4. BLENNZ will engage with appropriate health services when required. This could include access to counselling, the creation of peer support groups and programmes, referral systems for ākonga experiencing distress, access to kaumatua and other significant, trusted people in the community.

5. If ākonga are exhibiting signs associated with negative mental health and wellbeing, staff will notify their respective line manager of their concerns. The line manager will discuss the issue with their senior manager to ensure appropriate support is provided.

6. If ākonga is considered to be at risk of self-harm, this must be immediately raised with a member of the senior management team who will communicate with the Principal. If the risk is immediate, emergency services should be contacted.

## Supporting Documents:

[Mental Health Organisation - Guidelines for Healthy Schools](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/ResourceFinder/guidelines-for-mentall-healthy-schools.pdf)

BLENNZ Policies (located on Group Drive and the BLENNZ Website)

[Hostel Licensing Regulations](http://www.education.govt.nz/school/running-a-school/hostel-regulations/)

Ministry of Education Resource Kit for Schools: Preventing and Responding to Suicide

Residential Operational Procedures: Protection and Promotion of Ākonga Health

Flowchart for Ākonga in Crisis and Suicide Prevention Plan

Approved: 
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Next Review: 2025