

Worksheet 6.6: Collaborating with school/work/university

There are many others involved within the herd of elephants who take their role in collaborative care very seriously. This might be teaching and support staff at school, university tutors and support staff, employers and work colleagues.

As a group think up a situation in which Edi is being supported by individuals at any of the above-mentioned institutions. If there are several suggestions perhaps draw a spider diagram on the flipchart and then choose one to discuss.

Consider these two questions:

- a) Why is it important to communicate with this person or group?
- b) What sorts of things might it be useful to address?

Visualising both positive and negative possibilities and contingency planning can be invaluable, as well as scheduling regular meetings to review and reflect how things are going. Herds of elephants are renowned for their ability to get agreement and resolve any potential or actual problems.

Example

Collaboration with school staff in advance of Edi returning to school.

a) Why is it important to communicate with the school in advance of Edi returning?

Returning to school after a long period of absence is likely to be a daunting experience and it is well worth spending the time to consider anything that might trip the student up.

b) What sorts of things might it be useful to address?

- Information from the care team about this transition – in an ideal world there would be a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meeting to prepare for the return to school to which carers and a school representative would be invited. This is good practice, although doesn't always happen.
- Travelling to and from school.
- Eating at school, especially if returning while in recovery from an eating disorder.
- Dealing with large numbers of students and adults at the same time.
- Timetable management – is it realistic for the student to take part in the full timetable from day one?
- Homework management – is extra time or reduced levels of homework required?
- Having to take time off for any reason (e.g., appointments).
- A free pass to take a break if anxiety levels are high.
- A safe place to go if anxiety levels are high (e.g., student support).
- A buddy who will look out for the student (peer and/or empathetic member of staff).
- One-off events (e.g., a theatre group visiting the school and hosting a large noisy event).
- School trips (might be one-day trips and/or longer residential trips).
- PE – will the student be fit and comfortable to join in with all PE sessions?
- PSHE – are there any subjects in which the student might feel overly sensitive or upset, or feel everyone is looking at them?
- Friendship issues – if a new school, does the student find it difficult to make friends? If an existing school, were there any friendship problems before the period of absence?

After creating this list, carers can organise to spend time going through these issues with the school and student in advance of returning to school. This will be invaluable. After a long period of absence, it is natural that the student will find the return to school exhausting and scary, while also feeling positive and excited about getting on with their lives away from home.