



Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition

Key Principles for Improving Children and Young People's Mental Health in Schools and Colleges

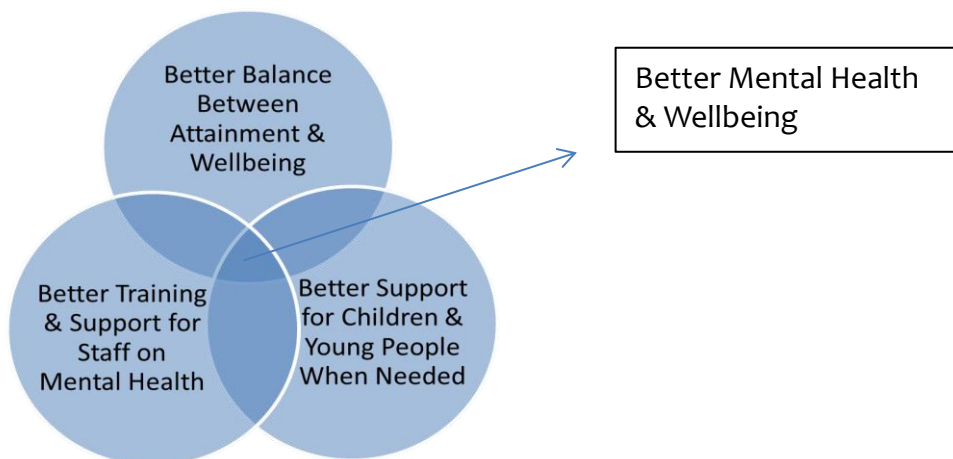
About 1 in 10 children and young people have a mental disorder (Green, et al., 2015). It is generally agreed that we need more upstream interventions to try and prevent mental health problems developing, and also provide appropriate help and support when problems first arise. There isn't the capacity within specialist children and young people's mental health services to provide this, so we need to train up and utilise the wider workforce.

With appropriate funding, training and support, school/college staff are able to recognise and support less severe mental health and emotional wellbeing issues in their pupils. Potentially they are in a good position to identify risk factors that might impact on mental health, such as parental conflict, parental mental health and so on.

Improving children and young people's mental health is useful for schools/colleges as well because it can help them achieve their objectives. We know that programmes to support social and emotional learning can significantly help promote attainment (Durlak et al., 2011; Brooks, 2014); and a good education, can be a protective factor for mental health (CAMHS Review, 2008), so reducing the chances of developing mental health problems, making for a virtuous circle.

Implementing the following key principles will improve the mental health support that children and young people and their families can expect from within schools and colleges.

Three Key Principles



We believe that these three principles (above) need to be in place in order to build resilient organisations, as well as resilient people within them. This fits within a whole school approach that ensures that the culture within the school and the leadership embrace and understand the importance of mental health and wellbeing and its impact on pupils' learning and development (PHE & CYPMHC, 2015).

To implement these key principles, schools need to be adequately resourced and supported in order to play their part within a wider system, to support pupil's mental health and wellbeing.

Better Balance between Wellbeing and Attainment

- Government, school leaders, teachers, parents and those governing or inspecting schools need to actively advocate pupil mental health and wellbeing alongside academic attainment.
 - Schools should, when necessary, be encouraged to fulfil their existing duties with regards to promoting pupils' wellbeing.
 - Government should actively encourage all schools to strive towards a better balance in the curriculum, which incorporates mental health and wellbeing within PSHE lessons and the wider curriculum. These lessons need to be well taught, of high quality and address pupils' needs.
 - Ofsted should use its existing mandate in the schools inspection framework to assess how schools are promoting wellbeing. Ofsted should highlight and celebrate what schools are already doing, and ensure they are rewarded for it.

Better Training and Support for School Staff on Mental Health

- Policy and adequate resources are needed to ensure that all school staff receive training in children and young people's mental health and wellbeing and child and young people's development. School staff should be able to identify and respond compassionately to mental health problems, and know how to signpost a pupil to targeted support.
 - Training should be for both new and existing teachers.
 - It needs to be fit for purpose and should offer a module around mental health and wellbeing, that equips them to deal with issues in practice
 - Continued professional development is essential to keep skills up to date and ensure all teachers have adequate training
- Government and school leaders should ensure that school staff are more aware of their own mental health and how to look after it.
 - Schools should ensure that the culture of the school includes support for teachers
 - Schools need to build in time in the busy school day for supervision

Better Support for Children and Young People When Needed

- Essential that there is appropriate, targeted support both within schools and colleges, and the local community to promote and support the mental health and wellbeing of all pupils. This support could be available within the school or the community, and could be provided by statutory services e.g. CAMHS or other providers such as the voluntary sector.
 - Government should ensure that local areas are using the monies announced for children and young people's mental health to implement their Local Transformation Plans and Future in Mind.
 - Local Authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups should involve schools in Health and Wellbeing Boards and other strategic bodies within the area. So schools are involved as key players in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs), local transformation plans, commissioning plans and so on.
 - Government and local agencies to encourage the building of good relationships between schools and other partners such as CAMHS, social care and so on, to establish joint working arrangements, referral pathways, share skills, knowledge and expertise, and they can train and learn from each other.
 - Schools need to be adequately resourced so they can involve parents/carers and families because a child's life extends beyond the school gate.

Why it is important?

All children and young people have a right to be healthy, have access to health care and to have a good education that helps them reach their full potential. The WHO's definition of health covers mental health as well as physical health. This is important as 1 in 10 children and young people have a diagnosable mental disorder; and about half a million children are unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives. There are some groups of children and young people, such as those with learning disabilities or neurodevelopmental disorders, who have a higher risk of developing mental health problems.

Children and young people tell us that they want access to mental health support when, how, and where they need it. Schools are ideally placed to be a hub for mental health support because this is where the majority of children and young people are.

Virtuous Circle

Programmes that support social and emotional learning have been shown to promote attainment. Conversely, good education, which is a protective factor for mental health, can help reduce the chances of developing mental health problems. This creates a virtuous circle. So it is important to encourage and fund schools to properly implement evidence based, social and emotional learning programmes in order to get good outcomes.

Current Government policy encourages schools to develop character, resilience and good mental health alongside academic attainment to equip young people with the skills to fulfil their potential. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) considers mental health an area of SEN need and support. The majority of schools are

working to support their pupils' mental health and wellbeing e.g. PSHE lessons on mental health awareness and wellbeing (ASCL and NCB, 2016). However issues such as financial constraints within school budgets can make it difficult to buy in services such as counselling. About 64% of primary schools do not have access to a school based counsellor (Place2Be and NAHT, 2016) and 63% of school leaders (mainly secondary) reported that limited funding made providing mental health support within school challenging (ASCL and NCB, 2016).

Whole System

Pressures on other parts of the system e.g. cuts to NHS or local authority funded child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) also impact on providing support within schools. Poor referral pathways between schools and specialist CAMHS, cuts to school nursing teams etc., can result in children and young people not receiving the support they need.

There is a transformation programme for child and adolescent mental health in England. This includes all local areas producing a local transformation plan (LTP) for child and adolescent mental health. Schools have an important role to play in the development and implementation of these plans. NHS England's (2016) analysis of LTPs, found that the 6th most common KPI related to schools. Our own analysis of a representative sample of LTPs, found that 69% had consulted with schools, and 64% had involved schools in strategic planning. So the narrative has a whole in LTPs is generally positive. However, according to a survey sent to school leaders by ASCL and NCB (2016), only a quarter of people who responded to their survey were aware of the plan.

We Need your Support

We are calling on all relevant stakeholders to support and implement these key principles on delivering improved children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in schools.

Whilst Government has a key role to play, other organisations such as clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), local authorities, CAMHS, voluntary sector organisations, teachers' unions, and of course schools themselves, all have a role to play as well.

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