



QEGSMAT
MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

Safeguarding Bulletin

Children's Mental Health

Issue 7: Winter 2023

What does mental health mean?

Mental health is an individual's cognitive, behavioural and emotional wellbeing (Mind, 2020). It's something we all have - including every child and young person.

We use the term "mental health issues" to refer to mental health problems, conditions and mental illnesses. These issues may or may not be medically diagnosed.

It can be hard for adults to recognise when a child needs support with mental health issues. And it can be difficult for young people to speak out about the challenges they're facing.

So it's crucial that anyone who works or volunteers with children is able to recognise the signs that a child may be struggling with their mental health. And that they know how to take appropriate action to support children and young people in getting the help they need.

Who is at risk?

Any child or young person can develop mental health issues. But research has shown there are some factors that are associated with children and young people's long-term mental health.

Abuse and neglect

The traumatic impact of abuse and neglect increases the likelihood of children developing a range of mental health issues – both during childhood and in later life. These include anxiety, depression, eating disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

d/Deaf and disabled children and young people

d/Deaf and disabled children and young people with complex or additional needs may face a range of challenges including:

- reduced mobility
 - prejudice, discrimination and bullying.
- These challenges may lead to lower self-confidence, difficulty forming peer networks and social exclusion, putting them at higher risk of developing mental health issues.

LGBTQ+ children and young people

LGBTQ+ children and young people may experience:

- prejudice, discrimination and bullying
- a fear of or an actual rejection from

family and/or friends

- feeling excluded or like an outsider.
- They may also experience gender dysphoria: the unease felt when someone's sex registered at birth does not match their identity.

Living in care

Children in care are more likely than their peers to have a mental health difficulty (NSPCC, 2019c). This can be due to isolation and loneliness. Children in care may also have experienced abuse or neglect, which increases the likelihood of developing mental health issues.

Young carers

Young carers are more likely to experience mental health problems than peers who don't have caring responsibilities (Sharpe, 2021).

Young carers may:

- feel worry or stress about the health and wellbeing of the person/s they care for
- feel that they must manage or hide their emotions due to fear or guilt of upsetting the person/s they care for
- feel that they don't have time for themselves and are missing out on opportunities or activities.

Signs of child mental health issues

There are ways you can identify if a child needs support with their mental health.

By being attentive to a child or young person's mood and behaviour, you can recognise patterns that suggest they need support.

Common warning signs of mental health issues include:

- sudden mood and behaviour changes
- self-harming
- unexplained physical changes, such as weight loss or gain
- sudden poor academic behaviour or performance
- sleeping problems
- changes in social habits, such as withdrawal or avoidance of friends and family.

Responding to child mental health issues

All children and young people should have someone they can talk to about whatever they're going through, regardless of whether they have a mental health condition.

Children may not want to talk specifically about their mental health, but about the struggles and issues in their daily lives (Mental Health Foundation and Camelot Foundation, 2006). If you are concerned that a child may be struggling, it's important not to wait for them to talk to you before trying to start a conversation. Encourage them to talk with you or with other trusted adults.



Talking with a child about their mental health

If you're talking with a child or young person about their mental health and wellbeing, be prepared that conversations may not be easy or straightforward. There are things you can do to make these conversations as easy as possible.

The following principles will help you discuss mental health and wellbeing sensitively.

Use the right language

When talking with a child, use language that they understand. This will differ according to their age and stage of development. Avoid using technical or diagnostic language which children might find unfamiliar, confusing and distant from their experiences. Make sure you understand the language the child is using and how they are using certain terms. For example, a child may use the word "anxiety" to describe a feeling of general nervousness or as a way to describe severe anxiety attacks.

By paying attention to the language children use to describe their feelings, you can reflect the terms they use in your own language. This will help them feel listened to.

Some children may have difficulty communicating, for example if they have additional needs or disabilities (Fuggle and Redfern, 2019). Make sure you give these children the time and support they need to talk.

Create an open environment

It's important to create an open and safe environment where children and young people are comfortable speaking about their mental health. Make sure children and young people know who they can talk to — and make this pool of people as wide as possible.

In schools, for example, discussions about mental health and wellbeing can be integrated into the curriculum and put on an equal footing with physical health.

Some children with mental health problems will have experienced abuse. An open environment will help them talk about the

Getting or signposting Support

Contacting a GP

GPs may be able to diagnose mental health conditions, suggest next steps and provide medication.

Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)

Across the UK, CAMHS is a free NHS service for children and young people that aims to help with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, self-harm and eating disorders.

Teachers, social workers, GPs and parents can refer a young person to CAMHS. Services differ from area to area.

In England, you can find CAMHS services in your area through the [NHS CAMHS webpage](#)

Childline

Children and young people can get free, confidential [support from a Childline counsellor](#) via online chat, email or phone.

NSPCC services

NSPCC provide therapeutic services to help children, young people and families with their mental health.

Building Connections

[Building Connections](#) is an online service to help young people aged under 19 to find a way through loneliness.

Letting the Future In

[Letting the Future In](#) is a play-therapy service that helps children who have been sexually abused.