

## Managing pupils' mental health in schools

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### Pupils' mental health

A degree of pressure and stress is inevitable in most pupils; however, when their stress becomes excessive, it can move pupils to a state where it begins to have an effect on their health and wellbeing. Stress can also undermine educational attainment, causing pupils who suffer to fall behind in their overall educational achievement.

For children, growing up presents significant challenges; however, in recent years it could be argued that these have, in many ways, become increasingly complex. The growth and development of a culture of social networking, and growing expectations on the young to achieve high grades has, amongst other things, contributed to circumstances where children find themselves under increasing levels of pressure and stress.

Developing the ability to manage the situations that may generate feelings of stress is an essential prerequisite of a healthy emotional development.

### Key points

- In order to help their pupils succeed, schools have an important role to play in supporting them to be resilient and mentally healthy.
- There are things that schools can do for those showing early signs of mental health problems and for families exposed to several risk factors, such as early intervention and strengthening resilience, before serious mental health problems occur.
- Schools can influence the health services that are commissioned locally through their local health and wellbeing board. All health services used by children are within the scope of the health and wellbeing board, including specialist children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS).
- A school's approach to mental health and behaviour should be part of a consistent whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- Schools should consider how best to use their SEND and pupil premium resources to provide support for pupils with mental health difficulties, where appropriate.
- School staff cannot act as mental health experts and should not try to diagnose conditions.

- Schools need to be alert to how mental health problems can underpin behaviour issues, and that they also need to be aware of their duties under the Equality Act 2010, recognising that some mental health issues will be classed as a disability.
- When schools suspect a pupil has a mental health problem, they should use the graduated response process to put support in place.
- Schools should ensure they have clear systems and processes in place for early intervention and identification, referral to experienced skilled professionals, and clear accountability systems.

## Factors that put pupils at risk

	Risk factors
<b>In the child</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genetic influences</li> <li>• Low IQ and learning disabilities</li> <li>• Specific developmental delay</li> <li>• Communication difficulties</li> <li>• Difficult temperament</li> <li>• Physical illness</li> <li>• Academic failure</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> </ul>
<b>In the family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental conflict, including domestic violence</li> <li>• Family breakdown, including adoption or being taken into care</li> <li>• Inconsistent or unclear discipline</li> <li>• Hostile or rejecting relationships</li> <li>• Failure to adapt to a child's needs</li> <li>• Physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect</li> <li>• Parental psychiatric illness</li> <li>• Parental criminality, alcoholism or personality disorder</li> <li>• Death and loss, including friendship</li> </ul>
<b>In the school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying, both offline and online</li> <li>• Peer-on-peer abuse</li> <li>• Discrimination</li> <li>• Breakdown in or lack of positive friendships</li> <li>• Deviant peer influences</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• Poor pupil to staff relationships</li> </ul>
<b>In the community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-economic disadvantage</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Disaster, accidents, war or other overwhelming events</li> <li>• Discrimination</li> <li>• Exploitation, including by criminal gangs and organised crime groups, trafficking, online abuse, sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation</li> <li>• Other significant life events</li> </ul>

Risk factors are cumulative. Children exposed to multiple risks, such as a social disadvantage, family adversity and cognitive or attention problems, are more likely to develop behavioural problems.

## Identification

A record should be kept of the changes in pupils' patterns of attainment, attendance or behaviour, and relevant procedures should be implemented to address the problems found.

At least one member of staff should know every pupil well and be able to spot where negative or unusual behaviour may have a root cause that needs addressing. Where this is the case, the pastoral system or school policies should provide the structure through which staff can escalate the issues and take decisions about what to do next. The pastoral system should also provide the opportunity for pupils to seek support in a confidential way.

## Providing support

It is important that pupils are provided with support as soon as a problem emerges – giving the pupil early help is more effective than reacting later. Schools should have access to local educational psychology services. These services will support pupils with SEND, but are also well placed to advise on emerging mental health needs and can either provide direct intervention or signpost to other, more appropriate, forms of support.

For pupils with the most complex problems, schools could implement additional in-school interventions, including:

- Support for the pupil's teacher, to help them manage the pupil's behaviour within the classroom, taking into account the needs of the whole class.
- Additional educational one-to-one support for the pupil to help them cope better within the classroom.
- An individual healthcare plan (IHP). Governing boards, academy trusts and management committees must comply with their statutory duty in ensuring that schools make arrangements to support pupils with medical conditions. If mental health professionals have recommended medication, this should be detailed in the IHP. School staff should be aware of any medication pupils are taking, and how this should be stored and administered.
- One-to-one therapeutic work with the pupil, delivered by trained mental health specialists (with or beyond the school), which might take the form of cognitive behavioural therapy, behaviour modification or counselling. Where possible, such therapy should be scheduled so as to minimise disruption to the pupil's school attendance.
- Family support and/or therapy to help the pupil and their family better understand and manage behaviour, where appropriate.

## Collaborative working

To best support pupils' mental health, schools need to work collaboratively with a number of different people and agencies, including:

- Support and health services, e.g. the school nursing service – schools can commission these services directly, which gives increased flexibility and provides an early intervention response.
- Other schools – where schools are in clusters or an MAT, they should consider collectively commissioning specialist support. They can also provide joint training opportunities for staff.
- CYPMHS – serious cases should be referred to CYPMHS.
- Parents and carers – evidence shows that where support is provided to help manage behaviour at home, alongside work being carried out with the child at school, there is a much greater likelihood of success in reducing the child's problems.
- Alternative provision – schools and alternative provision settings should work together to develop a plan for reintegration of the pupil's return to mainstream education, where this is considered appropriate.

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## **Bibliography**

DfE (2018) 'Mental health and behaviour in schools'