



POSITIVE

MENTAL

HEALTH

MEETING THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

OF LEARNERS 11–18 YEARS

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

This new series of texts presents a modern and comprehensive set of evidence-based strategies for promoting positive mental health in schools. There is a growing prevalence of mental ill health among children and young people within a context of funding cuts, strained services and a lack of formal training for teachers. The series recognises the complexity of the issues involved, the vital role that teachers play, and the current education and health policy frameworks in order to provide practical guidance backed up by the latest research.

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Jonathan Glazzard and Kate Bancroft

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SAMPLE

+ INTRODUCTION

The Ministerial foreword to the government response to the consultation on the Green Paper *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision*, published in December 2017 (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2017), states that:

Childhood should be the happiest time in a person's life, yet for thousands of children who develop mental illness in childhood or adolescence, the reality can be very different. One in ten (around 850,000) children and young people have a diagnosable mental health condition. These illnesses can have a devastating impact on their physical health, their relationships and their future prospects. The challenge often extends into a person's adult life, with half of all mental health conditions beginning before the age of 14.

(Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Education, 2018, p 3)

Mental illness in young people appears to be increasing. We know that there is a link between social deprivation and mental ill health. We also know that adverse childhood experiences, including abuse, neglect and insecure attachments with primary caregivers contribute to poor mental health. However, school factors also play a role. Young people are learning at a time when expectations and pressures on them have never been higher. The 'knowledge-rich curriculum' has placed increased academic demands on students. Examination stress has increased; assessment through coursework has diminished in favour of terminal examinations that test students' abilities to recall subject content.

Young people are worried about what their futures will look like. The economy is unstable and jobs are not guaranteed. Higher education is a costly investment, to which some young people cannot financially commit. Family contexts, particularly those that are financially deprived, can be challenging for young people and relationships between young people and parents can be volatile when parents experience stress or have their own mental health needs.

The growth of social media in recent years has resulted in young people becoming addicted to their phones. Cyberbullying, body-image concerns related to social media use and fear of missing out can result in the development of mental ill health. The pressure to share personal data and to respond instantly to messages can also place young people under stress.

Given this context, it is no surprise that young people are anxious, stressed and depressed. Anxiety, stress and depression can lead to self-harm and self-harm can lead to attempted suicide. Schools can do a great deal to support young people's mental health needs but it is not realistic to expect schools do this alone. Teachers are not in a position to diagnose a mental health need. However, they can identify warning signs that may warrant a referral. Support from external professional services and parents is vital if young people are to gain the support they need quickly. Currently, it is too difficult to gain a successful referral to child and adolescent mental health services. These services are at breaking point; they are overstretched and waiting times are too long. Ultimately, the responsibility falls to schools to address young people's mental health. However, education professionals are not health professionals and the primary role of the school is to promote learning. Despite this, the reality is that unless mental health needs are addressed this will have a detrimental effect on young people's academic learning in school.

This book introduces you to the common mental health needs that you will experience in secondary schools. In each chapter, we outline the nature of the need and introduce strategies that schools can use to support young people with mental ill health.

Jonathan Glazzard and Kate Bancroft

+ CHAPTER 1

FACTORS THAT PUT YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK



PROFESSIONAL LINKS

This chapter addresses the following:

- ⌚ The Teachers' Standards (2011) state that a teacher must have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these (TS5, p 11).
- ⌚ The Teachers' Standards state that a teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct (Part 2, p 14).

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter you will understand:

- + risk factors within the school;
- + risk factors within the young person;
- + risk factors within the family;
- + risk factors within the community.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces you to some of the critical factors that influence young people's mental health. Some of these factors are easier to control than others in your role as a teacher. You may not be able to mitigate factors which arise in the family or community, but you will be able to influence what happens in school and particularly within your own classroom. It is important to understand that several risk factors may be interrelated and therefore it may be difficult to attribute a single factor to a young person's mental health. As a teacher it is important that you try to understand what is causing a young person to have poor mental health. You will then be in a better position to decide whether you can influence the factor(s) to support the young person. It is also important to understand that 'within child' factors may have a social, cultural or environmental origin. For example, a child's poor self-concept or self-esteem may have been caused by factors in the school, community and/or the family, which may result in a poor sense of self. This chapter provides you with advice on what you can do to alleviate risk factors in your role as a teacher.

RISK FACTORS IN THE SCHOOL

Young people's mental health can be influenced by multiple factors in school. As a teacher, you can directly eradicate some of these factors in your own classroom. However, some risk factors within the school will require direct intervention by the senior leadership team.

THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOL

Schools that have a positive culture promote a sense of belonging for all members of the school community. Within your classroom and in the wider school environment, it is important that you promote positive relationships between young people, adults, and between young people and adults. Positive relationships are rooted in mutual respect, empathy, dignity and a sense of feeling valued. As a teacher, you have a responsibility to model and promote these attributes. Some young people will demonstrate these attributes instinctively, but others will need encouragement to learn how to treat other people. In your classroom you can promote these values through your own interactions with the young people. Positive interactions might include:

- + smiling;
- + thanking young people and adults for their contributions;
- + listening without interruption;
- + demonstrating empathy when someone is distressed;
- + using praise and rewards;
- + rewarding effort as well as achievement;
- + promoting a 'can-do' culture;
- + recognising all achievements, however small;
- + using positive body language;
- + enabling all young people to recognise that they have strengths and talents.

You can directly teach young people about developing positive interactions with others in lessons by insisting that young people treat each other with respect, listen to the views of others and value diversity.

As a teacher, you have a duty to develop in young people a positive sense of self. It is important that you promote a positive climate in the classroom rather than promoting a climate of fear. Young people should never be afraid of trying things and getting them wrong. Additionally, young people should not be afraid to express their views, wishes or needs. It is important to empower young people to have a voice and to teach them how to respond appropriately to their peers in situations where someone makes a mistake or is distressed. You can do this by

promoting a team spirit and by helping young people to recognise that they are part of a learning community in which everyone works together to help each other. Developing collaboration through group work in lessons is an effective tool for promoting these skills.

You will also need to consider your interactions with other adults in the room. As a role model you will need to demonstrate that you value the teaching assistant(s) and they will need to demonstrate that they value you. In addition, your interactions with parents should be respectful, even though you may have little contact with parents in secondary schools. It is critical that you treat parents with respect and dignity, even when they do not demonstrate these attributes towards you. This is perhaps one of the most difficult skills to demonstrate, particularly when parents may be angry with you, upset or distressed. You are the professional and it is important that you can remain calm and respectful always. It is also important to try to understand that some parents lead complex lives in challenging circumstances. Negative parental interactions towards you may not be personal. They may be a product of adverse circumstances that they have experienced, and you happen to be in the firing line! The same is also true for young people. If parents model inappropriate interactions with you in front of young people, your interactions with them need to be positive and calm so that young people observe appropriate ways of responding to others. They may not observe this at home. Obviously, if you are being threatened or abused you retain the right to terminate the conversation by asking the parent to leave in a polite way and requesting a follow-up appointment when they are calm.

TEACHER–PUPIL RELATIONSHIPS

The relationships that you form with young people are critical to their developing sense of self. You have a duty to form positive relationships with all young people and you will find this easier in cases where young people demonstrate positive attributes towards you. However, it can be more challenging to develop positive relationships with some young people. These include those who:

- + are disrespectful towards you;
- + demonstrate poor classroom behaviour;
- + demonstrate negative interactions with their peers;
- + demonstrate limited effort or lack motivation.

You will need to try to understand the causes of these negative behaviours so that you can support young people's development. For example, young people may demonstrate limited effort in lessons because they have a poor sense of self. If you recognise this, you can then focus on enhancing their self-concept and self-esteem. Poor behaviour is often an attempt to communicate an unmet need. Some young people may have disrupted, insecure or broken attachments with their parents or carers and this may affect their behaviour in the classroom. Understanding the causes of classroom behaviour will help you to demonstrate empathy towards the young person and to respond to them positively. As a teacher you cannot 'give up' on any young person. You should believe that fundamentally there are good characteristics within everyone and that some young people simply require additional support to demonstrate these characteristics. You can support young people to recognise that they are good at something. You can help them to realise that they can have a positive future. You can catch them being good and you can reward them. You can build their sense of self. You can help them to realise that they might find an aspect of learning difficult right now but eventually they will be able to grasp it. Believing in them is one of the most powerful things that you can do as a teacher.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

You will need to consider how you interact with young people. The following questions should support you to do this:

- + Are you consistently positive with all young people?
- + Do you respond in different ways to different young people?
- + Are you consistently calm in the classroom, even in challenging situations?
- + Do you value young people's achievements?
- + Do you reflect on your own teaching when young people fail to understand something?
- + Do you believe that all young people have positive traits?
- + Do you believe that all young people have potential?
- + Do you believe that there should always be consequences to poor behaviour?

CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING

The curriculum should be carefully planned and structured so that all pupils are explicitly taught about wellbeing. Developing young people's mental health literacy is essential so that they can understand how to care for their own wellbeing. Additionally, young people need to be taught how their own interactions towards others can influence the wellbeing of other people. In secondary schools, a mental health curriculum should typically cover a range of themes including how to manage stress, anxiety and depression, self-harm, overcoming adversity, resilience and substance abuse. This is not an exhaustive list. It is important that young people understand that everyone has mental health. It is also important that they recognise that mental health falls along a continuum which ranges from positive mental health to mental illness and that people's mental health can fluctuate depending on life events. Even in secondary schools there may be some reluctance to use the terms 'mental health' or 'mental illness' with young people. This may be due to the belief that young people should be protected from discussions about mental health. However, it is attitudes like this that lead to the stigmatisation of mental health. It is important to normalise and de-stigmatise mental health so that young people do not grow up to believe that mental health is something that should not be discussed.

Lack of curriculum breadth and balance can also affect young people's mental health (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). The focus on the academic curriculum in secondary schools can lead to the development of a poor self-concept and reduced confidence, particularly for those who find these subjects more difficult or less interesting. Young people need access to a rich curriculum that includes vocational subjects, science, music, the creative and performing arts, and the humanities. Providing a curriculum that offers breadth all young people will enable the development of their talents. This will boost their confidence and will help to develop a positive sense of self. Lack of curriculum choice in secondary schools can result in disengagement and a poor sense of wellbeing.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- + What are your views on using the terms 'mental health' and 'mental illness' with young people?

- + Why do you think mental health has been stigmatised in the past?
- + What are your views on introducing young people to themes such as depression, anxiety and stress?

STUDENT VOICE

Giving young people a voice helps to empower them. It builds their confidence and fosters a sense of belonging. These are vital for their well-being. Historically, schools and society in general did not allow young people to have a voice. However, views on voice have changed significantly. Young people are now viewed as social agents. This means that they should be viewed as confident individuals who can express their views. Your school should have mechanisms for eliciting student voice. These might include student councils, which represent the views of all young people in the school. In your classroom you can use a range of approaches to facilitate student voice. These include:

- + a post box for young people to post confidential notes to an adult;
- + involving young people in decisions about what they want to learn by involving them in curriculum planning;
- + providing young people with opportunities to review their own learning and behaviour through termly student consultation meetings with an adult;
- + giving young people opportunities to set their own targets;
- + providing young people with opportunities to make decisions about classroom resources which need to be purchased;
- + introducing a 'you said, we did' system so that young people can recognise what influence they have had in their classroom;
- + developing a pupil voice wall.

It is critical to ensure that all young people are provided with a voice, including those with speech, language and communication difficulties. For young people with no verbal communication, you will need to develop ways of providing them with an opportunity to express their views. One way of doing this is to use signs, photographs or symbols. These can be presented to young people so that they can make a choice by pointing to their preference. Some young people may lack confidence to express their views in a larger group but may be willing to express their views in a smaller group. Some young people may not be

confident expressing their views to the teacher or to the class but may be confident in expressing their views to a teaching assistant or other adult. Some may be reluctant to express their views orally but may find it easier to express their views in writing or in pictorial form. As a teacher, you need to find different ways of giving young people a voice so that barriers to expressing their views are removed.

SOCIAL CONTEXTS: PEER INFLUENCES

Bullying and discrimination can have a detrimental impact on young people's mental health. Your school will have a whole-school policy for addressing bullying and it is important that you familiarise yourself with this policy. There is a wide range of types of bullying, including physical and verbal bullying and cyberbullying. Sexual harassment is also a form of bullying because it constitutes an abuse of power and is designed to undermine the victim. This can include verbal comments and unwelcome and inappropriate forms of contact.

Micro-forms of aggression targeted at individuals also constitute bullying. These include laughing, whispering or making jokes about someone. Young people in secondary schools may also become victims of online bullying. If you identify bullying in school, you have a responsibility to address it. All forms of bullying should be challenged because they have no place in a school. Your school policy will guide you on how to respond to incidents of bullying.

Addressing bullying through tackling it when it occurs is essential, but reactive. Teachers also need to be proactive by educating all young people about the various forms of bullying and the impact that it can have on the victims. Schools should develop an anti-bullying curriculum which addresses all types of bullying. This curriculum should teach young people how to respond if they witness bullying so that young people do not become bystanders.

Discrimination is a deliberate attempt to treat someone less favourably than others. In secondary schools this might involve subtle tactics such as ignoring someone or excluding them from participating in an activity. Schools have a legal duty to prevent all forms of discrimination. In England, the Equality Act, 2010, makes it illegal for schools to discriminate on the grounds of protected characteristics. These include sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender

reassignment and pregnancy or maternity. Examples of unlawful discrimination include:

- + a teacher refusing to allow a specific pupil to make contributions to questions and discussions in class because they have a protected characteristic;
- + boys and girls are not being given the same curriculum opportunities;
- + treating girls more favourably than boys or vice versa;
- + providing unequal access to resources for boys and girls;
- + refusing to admit a young person to a school because their parents are lesbian or because they have a protected characteristic.

Some young people may not intend to bully or discriminate but may use language which is perceived to be discriminatory. One example of this includes the casual use of *'that is so gay'* in secondary schools. The association of the word 'gay' with 'rubbish' is deeply problematic and although an individual may not have intended to cause hurt, it may not be perceived in the same way by young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. In secondary schools, many young people are aware of their sexual orientation and therefore the casual use of phrases like this can result in psychological distress. Schools should challenge language which is intended as 'banter' and should educate all young people about the damaging effects of it.

It is important to provide opportunities for victims of bullying and discrimination to sit down with perpetrators to resolve conflicts. Too often, well-meaning teachers intervene and make all the decisions in cases where young people are being treated less favourably. Restorative approaches which require perpetrators and victims to talk through conflict are particularly effective and provide young people with ownership. It can be highly effective for a perpetrator to listen to the effects of bullying or discrimination from the victim's perspective. It is also useful to ask the perpetrator how they intend to solve the problem. Teachers tend to tell the 'bully' how to respond in situations like this but it is the perpetrator's responsibility to solve the problem that they have created.

Schools should have processes for logging all bullying incidents to help them to identify patterns. It is good practice to note:

- + the type of bullying which took place;
- + the context surrounding incidents: what was happening at the time;

- + when the incident took place, including times of the day, days of the week;
- + the frequency of incidents;
- + the triggers;
- + the details of follow-up discussions and details of how incidents were followed up;
- + the consequence(s) applied and their effectiveness.

This checklist will help you to identify the factors that may be causing the young person to behave in specific ways. You need to note the context in which the bullying takes place because it is possible that specific triggers might be responsible and if you know what they are then you can try to eradicate them. It is important to recognise that all young people can change their behaviour and that, with education, support and encouragement, young people can cease bullying behaviours. The bully needs as much support as the victim to help them change their behaviour. You need to try to understand the factors that might contribute to a young person's behaviour. The following questions will help you.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- + Does the young person have a poor sense of self? If so, what factors may have caused this?
- + Is the young person able to identify their strengths?
- + Are parent-child interactions positive?
- + Has the young person formed secure attachments with their parents?
- + How stable is the young person's home life?
- + What behaviours does the young person witness in the family?
- + Is the young person neglected or being bullied by others?
- + Has the young person formed secure friendships in school?

These questions will help you to understand the young person's behaviour. While you are not able to influence some of these factors, they will help you to understand the young person and empathise with them.

This knowledge will support you in responding positively to the ‘bully’ as well as to the victim.

- one in ten young people has a diagnosable mental health disorder, the equivalent of approximately three students in every classroom;
- one in five young adults has a diagnosable mental health disorder;
- Half of all mental health problems manifest by the age of 14, with 75 per cent by age 24;
- Almost one in four children and young people shows some evidence of mental ill health, including anxiety and depression;
- In 2015, suicide was the most common cause of death for both boys (17 per cent of all deaths) and girls (11 per cent) aged between 5 and 19 years;
- one in 12 young people self-harms at some point in their lives, although there is evidence that this could be a lot higher. Girls are more likely to self-harm than boys.

(Young Minds: <https://youngminds.org.uk>)

Negative peer influences can have a detrimental effect on young people’s wellbeing. These include:

- + bullying, harassment and discrimination;
- + being excluded from social groups;
- + being inducted into risk-taking behaviours by peers.

Secondary should provide a curriculum which addresses themes such as drug and alcohol abuse, other forms of substance abuse, sexual harassment, responsible use of social media, cyberbullying and manipulation or coercion within friendships. Sudden changes of behaviour may indicate that a young person has been subjected to negative peer influences. When you notice that there is a problem you will need to address it by following the school’s policies. However, it is also important in the curriculum to teach young people to come forward if they observe negative peer interactions.

+CONCLUSION

This book has emphasised the importance of reducing the stigma of mental ill health. We have stressed that schools should de-stigmatise mental health by talking about it with young people. Young people who experience mental ill health should never be made to feel guilty or ashamed because they have an illness. The role of the school is to support young people so that they can flourish.

Mental ill health that begins in childhood and adolescence can continue into adult life. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that there is parity of esteem between mental health and physical health and this attitude needs to permeate the rest of society.

Teachers have a responsibility to notice the signs of mental ill health. School leaders play a key role in ensuring that there is a positive school culture, which engenders a sense of belonging. School policies and practices should be evaluated through the lens of 'wellbeing'; where they have a detrimental impact on young people's mental health, they should be revised.

There is currently a significant emphasis by the Department for Education on character education, grit and resilience in schools. While this is not the place to define these terms, it is important to question why young people are increasingly expected to 'bounce-back' from adversity. While it cannot be denied that young people can learn a great deal from adverse experiences (such as failure), we question the role of the education system itself in contributing to mental ill health in young people. It would appear that the education system is in need of radical change. The teacher retention crisis suggests that teachers are not happy with the education system. Far too many leave the profession after three to five years. Young people are stressed, anxious and depressed. Recruitment to initial teacher training courses has been declining over several years. The emphasis on a more demanding curriculum, more challenging examinations and lack of curriculum breadth and choice results in mental ill health of young people. Some develop a poor sense of self and low confidence because the markers of educational success are too narrow. For teachers, the pressure to raise academic standards and close achievement gaps between different groups

of students can result in stress, anxiety, depression and burnout. The education system is toxic and has a role to play in explaining why mental ill health appears to be increasing. It is disappointing that the Green Paper (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2017) and the response to the consultation on it (Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Education, 2018) do not acknowledge the school factors that contribute to mental illness.

This book has introduced you to some common mental health needs that may be evident in young people in secondary schools. It is an introductory text and it will not have answered all your questions. It has provided you with an overview of some of the common signs of poor mental health and it has introduced you to some strategies that you can use to support young people with mental health needs.

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