

Mental health: information for staff

Issue

[Mental health disorders](#) are emotional and behavioural problems that are “outside the normal range” for a child or young person’s age or gender. To be considered a mental health disorder, the problem will be particularly severe or persistent over time, or the child will experience multiple problems at the same time.

Examples of mental health disorders include emotional disorders, conduct disorders, and developmental disorders.

What to do

- [Only medical professionals should make a formal diagnosis](#) of a mental health condition
- Where severe problems are identified a pupil can be referred to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). This should be done in consultation with your school’s special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), the pupil and their parents/carers
- You can use the [strengths and difficulties questionnaire](#) to help judge whether a pupil *might* have a diagnosable mental health problem¹. This can be completed by both parents and teachers, allowing a comparison of results
- As severe mental health difficulties can impact learning, the SENCO should consider whether the pupil would benefit from being identified as having a special educational need (SEN). Schools should refer to the [SEND Code of Practice](#) for further guidance
- Possible support strategies include providing school-based counselling, consulting a child psychologist and, for more complex cases, introducing one-to-one support
- Every secondary school can send one person on a [free ‘mental health first aid’ course](#). If your school is eligible, find out if someone has been from your school and seek their support
- Teach your pupils about mental health and emotional wellbeing. The PSHE association has a [scheme of lesson plans](#) for Key Stages 1-4 that you might find helpful



Context and prevalence

[A 2015 report from the Office for National Statistics](#) found that 1 in 8 children aged 10-15 reported symptoms of mental ill-health in 2011/2012.

Children who were bullied frequently were 4 times more likely to report mental health difficulties.

¹ Some schools prefer the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) for assessing needs and involving other professionals

[Insert local procedures here]

What to look for

Mental health is a broad issue and includes a wide range of disorders. Therefore, a large spectrum of symptoms is possible. Note that behavioural changes do not necessarily point to mental health problems – they may be temporary and caused by a negative experience or distressing life event. However, persistent disruptive or withdrawn behaviour can indicate an underlying problem.

Warning signs may include:

- Severe behaviour problems
- Persistent or severe anxiety
- Feelings of sadness that dominate and interfere with the pupil's life
- Persistent and severe inattentiveness or impulsiveness
- Worries about weight that dominate the pupil's life
- Unusual eating patterns
- Substance misuse
- Self-harm (for example, overdosing, hitting, cutting or burning oneself)

Risk factors

Certain individuals and groups are more at risk of developing mental health problems, these include, but are not limited to:

- Looked after children
- Children with learning difficulties
- Children on the autism spectrum
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds

There are also risk factors within the family such as abuse, bereavement, and parental psychiatric illness. You should also be mindful of risks within the school environment such as bullying, poor relationships and discrimination.

Where to go next:

- [Mental health toolkit for schools, Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families \(Adobe pdf file\)](http://www.annafreud.org/media/4612/mwb-toolki-final-draft-4.pdf)
<http://www.annafreud.org/media/4612/mwb-toolki-final-draft-4.pdf>
- [MindED \(a free educational resource for children and young people's mental health\)](https://www.minded.org.uk/)
<https://www.minded.org.uk/>
- [A guide to mental health services in England, NHS](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/mental-health-services-explained/Pages/about-childrens-mental-health-services.aspx)
<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/mental-health-services-explained/Pages/about-childrens-mental-health-services.aspx>

Questions for staff

- What warning signs would you look for in relation to mental health?
- How might mental health issues have an impact on learning?
- Which of the risk factors are most prevalent in our setting?
- As a school, how can we ensure we are aware of distressing or life-altering events such as bereavement, illness or financial difficulty?
- What can we do to support those who are vulnerable or susceptible to mental health issues?
- What useful insights might be gained from a comparison of the home and school results for the strengths and difficulties questionnaire?

Sources

The information in this factsheet is based on the following sources:

- [Keeping children safe in education, GOV.UK – DfE \(Adobe pdf file\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550511/Keeping_children_safe_in_education.pdf)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550511/Keeping_children_safe_in_education.pdf
- [Mental health and behaviour in schools, GOV.UK – DfE \(Adobe pdf file\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508847/Mental_Health_and_Behaviour_-_advice_for_Schools_160316.pdf)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508847/Mental_Health_and_Behaviour_-_advice_for_Schools_160316.pdf
- [Mental health in schools, Child Law Advice](http://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/mental-health-in-schools/)
<http://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/mental-health-in-schools/>
- [Insights into children's mental health and wellbeing, Office for National Statistics \(Adobe pdf file\)](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160106025030/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_420239.pdf)
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160106025030/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_420239.pdf
- [SEND Code of Practice, GOV.UK – DfE \(Adobe pdf file\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf
- [Youth MHFA in schools programme, Mental Health First Aid England](https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/schools-programme/)
<https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/schools-programme/>
- [Guidance on preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing, PSHE Association](https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/guidance-preparing-teach-about-mental-health-and)
<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/guidance-preparing-teach-about-mental-health-and>