

Safe and happy childhoods for all

Briefing: Mental health and wellbeing

Action for Children

What's happening?

Mental health is consistently raised by children and young people as one of the most pressing issues they're facing. The Children Commissioner of England's Big Ask surveyed half a million children and found that one in five children are worried about their mental health – the biggest issue they were worried about.*

About one in five children aged 8-16 years old are now estimated to suffer from a 'probable mental health disorder'. That's 6 in every classroom of 30. These children are much less likely to enjoy learning at school than their peers and more likely to miss more than 15 days of school.** This can affect their educational outcomes, their life satisfaction and prevent them from reaching their full potential.

This is also an issue of inequality - young people from families on the lowest incomes are four and a half times more likely to experience severe mental health problems than those from families on the highest incomes. Those in the lowest 40% of the income distribution, were twice as likely to report having attempted suicide compared to their more advantaged counterparts.***

The Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, a cost-of-living crisis and unfolding global conflict are also impacting young people's perception of the world around them. In June 2023, fewer than four in 10 children in the UK felt positive about the future of the country and the future of the world.****

“We need staff in schools and universities to be better trained to support us with our mental health. We want to see hobbies and activities used to help tackle loneliness and isolation and connect young people together.”

Young Ambassador

“Young people have too much on and too many choices to make. Everyone's trying to get the best grades. There's too much pressure.”

Young Ambassador

“I didn't realise others felt the way I did either, it made feel normal and that I wasn't going crazy. It was a safe space where we could talk about anything that was worrying us that week”

Esther, 15, who was supported by Action for Children

References:

* [The Big Ask: The Big Answer | Children's Commissioner for England](#) (childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

** [NHS Digital 2023 Mental Health of Children and Young People 2023](#)

*** [High levels of serious mental health difficulties among 17-year-olds | CLS \(ucl.ac.uk\)](#)

**** [The Children's Society, Good Childhood Report 2023](#)

What services do we offer?

Action for Children has a strong record in supporting the mental health needs of children and young people. We have helped to identify children with early signs of difficulty, we have supported them and ensured they get the professional help they need to build resilience, confidence, and well-being.

While all our services provide mental health and wellbeing support to children and their families through our holistic approach, across the UK we provide 43 services that directly support children with their mental health:

We provide:

Emotional health and wellbeing services, which provide preventative and early intervention workshops at community events, direct support through 121 therapy and group support sessions, digital support through online therapy, information and advice, as well as intensive support for specific emotional health challenges.

Blues Programme in schools, which provides courses to help improve emotional resilience and reduce anxious thoughts and low mood.

Bouncing Back in primary schools, which gets children across Wales talking about their feelings.

Who are Action for Children?

Action for Children protects and supports vulnerable children and young people by providing practical and emotional care and support, ensuring their voices are heard, and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives.

With 426 services across the UK, in schools and online, we helped 765,905 children, young people and families in 2022/23 alone.

Service Spotlight:

The Blues Programme

The Blues Programme is an internationally acclaimed wellbeing programme for young people aged 13-19 years old. It's designed to help young people who are showing early signs of needing help with their mental health. Over six weeks, it teaches emotional resilience, and reduces low mood and anxious thoughts. Crucially, it gets teenagers talking.

Blues involves a one-hour group session at school each week, plus home tasks. Students learn how to challenge negative thoughts, and talk about different coping strategies. Regular group work builds rapport and confidence. The home tasks are a chance to practise the new skills. It's simple, and it works.

So far, we've delivered The Blues Programme in over 350 schools, to more than 13,100 young people.

“I've always struggled with stress and anxiety, however Blues has helped me to come up with ways to combat my negative thoughts and feelings so that I feel more positive about myself.”

Young person who attended the Blues programme

Contact

If you would like any more information on our work or services, please get in touch: Rachel Allison, Public Affairs Manager, 07977825826, rachel.allison@actionforchildren.org.uk