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Safeguarding Monthly Newsletter

FOCUS ON…



CHILD MENTAL HEALTH

WRITTEN BY SERVICES FOR EDUCATION

In this edition around CHILD MENTAL HEALTH, we'll look at:

- **What's the issue? –** *a guide to some of the most common mental health issues in children.*
- **Talking about emotions –** *how to talk to your child and help them to identify how they are feeling.*
- **Emotional resilience –** *what can your child have in their toolbox to manage when things get tough.*
- **Magical Mindfulness –** *some top tips for supporting children to regulate their emotions.*
- **Resources and Signposts –** where to look for help, advice and guidance.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE? COMMON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN CHILDREN

1 in 6 children aged 5-16 likely to have a mental health problem (see article), but what are the most common issues affecting children in the UK?

- **Depression:** Signs and symptoms of depression can include persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities, changes in appetite or weight, sleep disturbances, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and even thoughts of death or suicide.
- **Self-harm:** Some people who experience intense emotional pain may try to deal with it by hurting themselves.
- **Anxiety:** This can be broken down into different types, all affecting children in different ways, including:
- *General Anxiety:* Feeling worried a lot and finds it hard to stop worrying about everyday things.
- *Social Anxiety:* Feeling scared or worried in social situations, like large groups or working with others.
- *Phobias:* Strong fears or worries about specific things or situations, like heights, snakes, or being sick.
- *Body Dysmorphic Disorder:* A distorted view of the body and thinking parts of it are "ugly," "wrong," or "bigger" than they are.
- *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):* Worries that can involve repetitive thoughts and behaviours, like checking if doors are locked or worrying about someone being in danger.
- *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):* Your child has developed anxiety problems after experiencing a traumatic event. This might include nightmares or flashbacks of how they felt at the time.
- **Disordered Eating:** A range of unhealthy eating behaviours that can negatively impact your child's physical and mental health. It can involve anything from excessive dieting or overeating to restrictive eating patterns or purging. This can include conditions such as Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating Disorder or ARFID (Avoidant restrictive food intake disorder)

Talking about emotions:

One of the most crucial ways parents or guardians can support their children is by actively listening to them and treating their feelings with respect. Children may seek a hug, request changes or need practical assistance. While negative feelings often subside, it's advisable to seek help if your child's distress persists for an extended period, interferes with their daily life, disrupts family harmony, or manifests in unexpected behaviours.

Top tips for talking to your child about their emotions and their mental health:

1. **Create a safe space:** Let your child know that it's okay to talk about their feelings, no matter how big or small.

2. **Practice active listening:** Give your child your undivided attention when they're expressing themselves, find time to sit and speak together, make sure your child feels important and worth your time.
3. **No judgement:** Avoid judging or dismissing their feelings, even if things seem small or insignificant- validate their feelings and show you understand. Where possible, share examples of times you've felt these emotions to show they are normal.
4. **Watch your language:** Explain emotions and feelings in language your child can understand. For example, instead of saying "anxious," you could say "worried." Don't use 'labels' or try to diagnose anything.
5. **Encourage healthy coping strategies:** Show them and model healthy ways to express emotions, such as drawing, playing, or talking to a trusted friend.
6. **Problem-solving:** Try to help your child develop strategies to cope with difficult emotions, create an 'emotional toolkit' that they can reach into when they are finding things tricky.
7. **Model healthy emotional expression:** Share your own feelings with your child in a healthy way. Try not to hide how you are feeling, as they may encourage them not to share difficult emotions.
8. **Practice self-care together:** Encourage self-care tasks to support with emotions- taking a walk, reading a book or watching your favourite film can all help you to feel better.
9. **Lastly, seek professional help if needed:** If you are concerned about your child's mental health and coping with their emotions, speak to the pastoral team within your school or reach out to the GP.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Emotional resilience is your child's capacity to cope with stressful or unexpected events and challenges. Factors such as their age, how they feel about themselves and their life experiences can contribute to the level of emotional resilience they possess. As people, the stronger our emotional resilience, the easier we find it to manage trickier situations without them taking a significant negative impact on our mental health.

We can support children in being more emotionally resilient by:

- Identifying and naming emotions to help children recognise how they are feeling
- Reflecting on past mistakes and growing from them
- Practising positivity to encourage finding the good in themselves and different situations
- Taking a step back and getting the broader view to help children get some control of a situation
- Nurture connections so children know they are not alone and have people around to help when they feel overwhelmed.

MAGICAL MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is essentially focusing on the here and now. It's about noticing what you're feeling, hearing, or experiencing in the present moment.

It doesn't require a state of perfect tranquillity or meditation but allows you to look at what you are feeling. Mindfulness can really help children manage their emotions, by giving them time and space to feel and understand what they are going through, it can also help nurture emotional resilience.

Mindfulness can look like:

- Sitting quietly and thinking- focusing on deep breathing
- Colouring, drawing or painting
- Yoga, stretching or going for a walk in nature
- Sensory activities- different lights, sounds and textures
- Listening to peaceful music or white noise

Whatever you and your child choose to do, make sure there is a level of purpose and intent and link it back to how they are feeling. This will help them to create those healthy coping strategies and deal with difficult emotions better in the future.

SUPER RESOURCES FOR YOU AND TO SHARE

- Young Minds – Resources and information for parents and children
- NHS- Better Help – Every Mind Matters
- HappyMaps – Resources and information for parents
- MentalHealth.co.uk – Supporting children and young peopleYoung Minds Parent Helpline – **0808 802 5544** (confidential advice, support and guidance)