



Connect Report Appendix

Comments made by Parents and Carers from our Parents' Voice Survey on the Support Available for Children and Young People's Mental Health

A striking, often distressing picture is painted by the comments, ideas and experiences of parents and carers in our Parents' Voice survey on support available for children and young people's mental health. The majority of respondents would really welcome help, information and advice from their children's schools about how to support mental health. Many parents describe painful experiences as they tried (and continue to try) to access help for their child. Other parents put forward really good ideas for making improvements.

We want all these voices to be heard; you can read the detailed and heartfelt comments below. We are very grateful to all the parents and carers who helped us by taking part in this survey. Parents' wish list of ideas for what would help support families cover four pages – so there is plenty of food for thought!

We have grouped the comments under the following headings:

- 1. Parent Perspectives - What Happens In and With School**
- 2. Impact on Family**
- 3. Complexities of Mental Health**
- 4. Parent Cries for Help**
- 5. Professional Perspectives**
- 6. What Would Help – Parents' Wish List**

Please note: The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is the National Health Service for children and young people with mental health challenges and is referred to several times in comments.

You can find the full report on this Parents' Voice survey here <http://bit.ly/ConnectMentalHealthReport>

1. Parent Perspectives - What Happens In and With School

- The school has run sessions for parents to talk about mental health and the role of the champions in the school. It was a poor turn out at the school for the parent session so there needs to be some reflection...I believe that has been happening
- My child's school has a strong guidance team who I believe are very effective at supporting pupils
- Our school used PEF funding to allow kids access to Relax Kids. This has been instrumental in my son finding coping mechanisms. He has borderline autism and has never been given any other support despite referrals after becoming aggressive at an early age

- We are on our second primary school...his first school...had no skills or understanding to support a child displaying anxiety. They humiliated and shamed him in front of others for how his behaviour manifested. ...His new school have also had great difficulty accepting that his behaviour is not controlled and...at times escalated situations through...lack of understanding. Through the support of the LA inclusion manager, we are now seeing more positive changes and better communication
- We can have all the policies, guidance and resources in the world, but it's all worthless without the right culture among staff
- Limited support available to pupils in school; staff willing and competent; difficult to fit in to a very busy curriculum
- There is far too much pressure on teachers and pupils to achieve so much at a young age. The impact this has on children's behaviour toward each other, their feelings about themselves and their mental health is shocking
- Since Place To Be stopped, there is nothing in place for many of the children within the school
- Some school staff have been supportive, but I feel they don't have the best understanding of mental health and the way it can impact on a child's life and no allowances are made for this!
- Lack of ongoing support through CAMHS, lack of time in school to nurture and exclusion of pupils from activities due to absence from illness is penalising young people for something beyond their control
- I don't know much about how my child's mental health is supported at school
- The link between Fife CAMHS and the school is fantastic
- Previously, our school had a representative from local mental health charity Hope Café Lanarkshire to do a talk to both children and parents
- Don't really get any information from school about children's mental health. I also feel schools need to be consistent, not one teacher doing something different from another or not knowing the correct process or correct referral process
- We have a few members of staff in our school who have received training to help kids deal with various issues in life and possible mental health needs
- I suspect if my child had a mental health issue the school wouldn't notice, unless it was something I knew about and informed them of. I think if they did know they would be helpful but not sure to what extent that would make a difference
- There has been little to no support from the school despite knowing the issues. I have been told that due to staffing their plans for extra support cannot happen. I don't feel until recently that the issue was taken on board at the school. Our child has picked up on this and now has a negative view of school and cannot wait to move to high school.
- Schools provide support and counselling through Place to Be and curriculum. Could improve by making parents more aware of facilities they have in general rather than once a problem occurs
- The school doesn't tell me what they are doing for my children's mental health, and does nothing for my mental health
- School is great; it's outside professional bodies that I feel let down by
- Have not yet experienced any support from school
- Sometimes teachers think that they know everything, but they see a child only in one environment - school. Children who have good relationships with parents say everything - what has happened in school, good and bad moments. Teachers should more speak and believe parents and co-operate together

- My son was supported through school by a fabulous Guidance teacher and school counsellor. After this he went on to counsel other children. However, it was not till after he left school and had very dark thoughts that he had help from The Junction in Leith. He was seen as an emergency twice and given a block of counselling. This turned his life round and gave him the tools to cope with life. As a parent feeling helpless, I could have done with someone to talk to. School did offer a course on parenting teenagers which was invaluable when my second child became a teenager
- Parents should know what support is available for their child through the school. GP support was hopeless
- The school struggles to provide support due to resources and knowledge/training
- In general, the school staff have been incredibly kind and caring to my daughter and I would say she now has the support she needs. However, it would have been good to have a clear pathway for who to go to, under what circumstances. As a parent, you struggle to decipher what is normal and what is a problem that needs outside help, so better guidance as to what path to follow would be helpful
- I like the fact our school have a zero-mobile policy at the primary school to help combat bullying, the kids accessing social media sites, and keeping the children safe where they can (especially in grooming/accessing suicide/pornography drugs sites etc). They also teach the children about the dangers, and to always tell someone if anyone needs help. They have a nurture hub for children to talk about emotions and feelings, a chill out room if they are feeling anxious, angry, upset etc. Also the head teacher has an open door policy where children can talk to her anytime. The school really does support the kids and the parents
- Schools should do more to involve parents in children's learning and wellbeing
- School took too long to kick in with help for him although they are doing alright now. As for his therapy, we had started taking him to a private counsellor before the NHS gave us an appointment for the one he is seeing now. Not very good in my opinion
- I don't think teachers are equipped or qualified enough in dealing with mental health issues. In our case, my child's school often put things in place for a few weeks, then stop, expecting issues to be better
- The school has been great but are unable to access appointments with CAHMS any faster and that is the help that's needed the most
- The school my children attend has virtually no parental engagement events and does not information share with parents about mental health or any health and wellbeing topics. We, as parents, get absolutely no information about the PSE curriculum & are given no opportunity to provide input. It's pretty disgraceful really
- My child's current school are fantastic and my child's teacher has supported my child, taking time out of their own lunch to check on my child and offer support. They also referred my child to a pupil support worker, to see if she needs any more support with her anxiety and social skill deficits, after which we will meet with the school about any next steps. I would like to see more workshops/information available, pointing parents towards the right person who can support children with mental health difficulties
- I am aware that my child's school did not participate in the same nurture practice that other schools were involve in. My child attends X and my nephew attends Y. I was aware that my nephew's school had various options for support groups for young people. For example, I know they have an LGBT group, exam support group (not a study group), boys' groups, girls' groups - all these groups were based around improving a young person's mental health and in addition to this they also have a support worker who has pupil drop ins on throughout the day. My child's school has none of these things and as a parent of a child who suffers from serious anxiety and low self-esteem, I feel that they have fallen

behind the rest of the area's schools and are seriously lacking in supporting young people's mental health ... with no consistent provisions in the school, this has been a serious gap in supporting my child's health

- Our school has various bases and rooms that pupils that need help with mental health can go to for support
- I feel that there has been an improvement in supporting children over the past year, and also improved support for the teachers
- Not aware of what is being taught in PSE, but hope they are covering mental health issues, anxiety etc
- Our local primary has impressed me with their ability to communicate and 'listen' to and work together with both parents and children. My daughter is now thriving and ready for high school
- I would like to know more about how [schools] look for signs of mental health and how they support them [children] and how they work with parents for this
- The school does not support children. Bullying is not dealt with. The headteacher refuses to engage with parents. There is NO parental engagement or involvement. Unless some headteachers are mandated to, they will not promote parental engagement fully. There is too much 'professional judgement': how dare you question me? - even as a Parent Council member
- Not enough support within the school environment and staff have no formal training to deal with children with mental health issues
- Pupil support staff are aware and share information with teachers but teachers don't always have time to read the information and therefore do not understand behaviour or adapt lesson plan to avoid triggers or allow my son chance to opt out of 'trigger' lessons
- A child psychologist assessed my son and said that he wasn't diagnosed as ADHD. I was left then with no further discussions of other routes. In fact, I was informed that no other routes were open to me. Fortunately, the school referred him to specialists themselves.
- There needs to be more information and discussion in primary and nursery level. My eldest is at high school and they do a lot to support with mental health and so far it's been a great programme
- There has been a definite focus on mental wellbeing in the last couple of years and it is very much a part of the conversation among children, teachers and parents which is definitely to be welcomed
- Children need to be encouraged to talk more with teachers who can offer a little support in classroom - primary and secondary!
- Mental health is becoming destigmatised, but we have a long way to go. Culture change from day 1 - learning about healthy bodies should include healthy brains

2. Impact on Family

- We have had to learn to cope with things on our own and do our own research into what's available that can help. Silo thinking and professionals stuck in their own narrow areas has made it all problematic
- I have had to not let my child's mental health...impact my own mental health; this is not always easy. I have seen ... friends and family members take their own lives as a result of poor mental health and feel quite passionate about getting the correct support in place... My youngest child's primary school is very big on being healthy and active and this helps ...towards a positive mindset. ...In my older child's secondary school, she has worked with

the Support Worker and knows who he is and where to find him should she need his support and that is reassuring. Her Guidance Teacher is also very supportive

- I suffered from mental health very similar to my son's and got no help whatsoever as a teenager. Even my parents did not ask why I tried to take my own life. So this has brought all those worries and feelings back, but I have tried to help him go through it by talking to him and letting him tell me how he is feeling. I must get him as much help as possible and I am seeing glimmers of the child I once knew. My mental health has suffered through teen years and I am still on a high dose of anti-depressants due to night terrors and suicidal thoughts. Children must be helped when it starts or it will impact their whole life
- School has kept in contact and set up MCR Pathways and counsellor, but (my son) finds it abhorrent that they should consider him in that boat...he also feels that I tell the school lots of lies...he was refused CAMHS by school and other bodies because he presents well, but also because of being so unlikely to engage in a much oversubscribed service: I was also told by GP and some others that he had to request this service himself (at 14). Help is too formal and separate, making it too big a step for him. Better if there were general occasions for all children to share thoughts, time given to listen well for early signs from the start of school, and a culture of positivity and supporting each other
- I've got problems with anxiety and it's stressing me that my child is having issues with this too
- Parents are expected to have all the answers. School have asked me in for meetings and said behaviour, or attendance, or concentration etc needs to be better. I know this - but nobody is telling me how to achieve or influence that! The weight of expectation is huge and I feel like a failure every single day. CAMHS have been excellent with my daughter and I have had some help but I could do with a lot more - to understand what is happening and how I can help or reinforce the messaging at home
- Children with mental health issues need help quickly. Everything takes too long. I have had to pay privately and this has had an effect on my whole family
- I don't think that the school understands my eldest and so doesn't know how to support her. Her behaviour has had a detrimental impact on family life for years

3. Complexities of Mental Health

- There's always room for reflection and improvement. Mental health is mainly all referred to as anxiety and depression but there are so many forms of mental health conditions
- More people need educated...(and) trained to spot the signs and be able to talk about their own mental health and also know how to help others. Families need to be able to talk to each other comfortably and support each other...[conversations about mental health need to become part of daily life, not just at home...but in school, learning environment and the workplace

4. Parent Cries for Help

- We are still struggling, and the GP and school do not take my son's mental health seriously enough!
- I feel helpless. I cannot help my children - very frustrating
- I do not really have the help that I need from school, for issues that I am dealing with at home
- Previous head teacher wasn't great, new head teacher and younger staff members much more up to date with ASN. Happy to talk about concerns and sort what they can. Tiny rural primary too - has been amazing for ASD child - friendly, intimate, calm, routine based learning and lots of 1:1 so no need for hub/base support. Nothing is perfect but communication is key and there is no fear to address anything with primary staff. Really

worried about high school as relationships with staff are different, numbers are huge, chaotic days, lots of change. First mention of concern was met with 'he's fine and academically bright' and it took a huge tearful meltdown for staff to finally listen to us and believe us and him. Not so sure the high school has enough support in place or is as open to share and communicate with parents

5. Professional Perspectives

- Kids seem to be so anxious, more than ever before. I'm treating more teens for anxiety and depression than adults
- In general, staff are not well enough prepared and do not have enough understanding of strategies to identify/support. I note this from variety of input through friends, my children and their friends, my parent council and various other roles within our local authority. Parents regularly note the struggle in receiving support or feeling heard. There are some good news stories too, but also some stressed and worried frontline staff who want to feel more capable and confident in this area. Too many children, families, and practitioners are struggling badly. We need to make real change to move into healthy prevention rather than scrape up the pieces when everything has already gone badly wrong

6. What Would Help – Parents' Wish List

- More help is needed to know who to talk to and what action to take
- More funding of support services
- I would like to see education about mental health issues (and breaking down of the stigma) be an important issue in the school. I would also like to see breaking down of binary notions of gender, making room for those kids who don't fit on the binary early on. I think education about different family types and different sexualities is important to talk about early in the school too. I also think talking about racism and the different experiences that kids and adults are subject to depending on their identities is very important. I think all of the above (normalizing difference) is part of supporting kids' mental health; because the position that kids find themselves in matters.
- I have been speaking to both the primary headteacher and the secondary headteacher [about] more help for children moving from primary to secondary education and they have put a lot of new measures into place to help with this. The primary school now have a teacher from the school going into the secondary (familiar face) each week and meeting with the new S1 to see if they have any worries! This is only done by my son's primary though and is not across the board. ...There is such an emphasis on nursery to P1 transition ...but the transition from primary to secondary must be made much better for children or this knock on effect of poor mental health in childhood will continue.
- I have become aware of several pupils in the school who are not having their emotional needs met - there are S4 pupils with eating disorders, anxiety preventing them from regular school attendance (two of these have autism) and also two who have attempted suicide. I feel it would help if there was a trained mental health first aider in the school who could provide information and contacts to facilitate referrals if necessary.
- My child is struggling with their gender identification but as they are 10 years old, there is no groups about to help them understand this is ok
- More needs to be done to quickly flag behaviour issues...easy access to support for pupils, possibly not teachers, should be a requirement in every school
- More unstructured, free play outside in nature for children as well as longer lunch breaks and risky play opportunities. Research shows these things improve mental health and

resilience. Children need more freedom and independence to push their limits, find their boundaries, to be trusted to make good decisions, to try and fail. Overprotection due to fear of worst case scenarios (or in schools' cases fear of being sued) is stifling our kids' ability to make decisions for themselves. Lack of autonomy and underdeveloped executive function skills are contributory factors to poor mental health. Will the government listen though if you can't quantify the impact of these measures easily and in a short space of time ie within their term in office? The foundations for strong mental health are built in the early years. If these are strong then deal better with what comes along thereafter. This issue needs a long term approach. Short term interventions and quick fixes haven't, don't and won't work

- In-school mental health support from qualified practitioners could reducing waiting time and address problems before they reach crisis point
- Teachers should be more mindful of these issues and try and support children rather than taking a discipline approach
- Regular meetings held with the school, after appointments with psychologist
- There needs to be a step by step programme that is followed for each child and people need to be given more information on where to go to get help and you shouldn't have to have the school's backing - a child should get help if required, regardless of a teacher's view, as not all children show their problems at school
- It would be helpful if school staff were prepared to manage lower level mental health issues, and had access to tools/materials that parents could work through, without needing to access specialist services
- There needs to be more counselling type services available free of charge. Schools need to provide support for parents and information about what to access. Our primary school is good at doing this. We have a Health and Wellbeing subgroup of the Parent Council, which has helped the school introduce a parenting course for parents and work with Dr Zeedyk. Schools are overwhelmed; more money needs to be made available for every school to have a counsellor, and other resources
- I would like more information on what the school is doing to support mental health. Maybe a stand at parents' evenings? I welcome any workshops that are put on for parents but attendance is often low. Use of twitter is effective in getting short pieces of info out to parents. The Action for Children workshop was excellent and very practical; giving me tools (CBT) to use with my child. I think it would be hugely beneficial to all young people in secondary to have access to this kind of training. Pupil attendance on their course was by invitation only and I feel some young people would not opt into a programme like this because of the stigma attached. If this kind of programme was rolled out to all young people, it would equip them with skills for dealing with stress and anxiety as well as encourage peer support and conversation about issues faced by most young people at some point in their adolescence. This could hopefully prevent some issues from developing to the point where more specialist intervention is needed
- I think too much pressure is put on schools. As a mother, I believe I need to seek the help and support for my own child's mental health. Schools should teach them about keeping their mind and body healthy as part of physical education. Teachers need to be more vigilant with monitoring bullies as this is the largest cause of mental health worries in children
- Pupil support base not only for physical health issues – they cater for extreme ends or mental health crisis. I feel there should be good support for young women on body issues/confidence in female-only environments where they are free to talk - same with the boys - mentorship in school – in-school yoga and mindfulness - again target boys who might not do this as they think it's too 'feminine'

- Support has to be available at an earlier stage, otherwise the mental health difficulties experienced at school will lead to life-long issues. We need to ascertain how much of an issue this is. How many children are not going into school due to MH issues? How many school refusers are doing so due to anxiety, depression etc? Scotland has the SEEMIS system - it has lots of coding on it but nothing to record school refusal or mental health issues leading to non-attendance. If a new code was introduced, it would give schools and the Scottish Government an idea of how many children are missing out on schooling due to mental health issues
- It would be wonderful if the (mental health) professionals could coordinate with the school as a point of contact and referral. I have no help from any other body apart from the school and don't know where to go to get it
- If I needed to, I could get help for my child. However, I believe that the school could be incorporating mental health/resilience into classes. Schools need to be better at communicating to the parents what they are teaching so we can follow up the discussions at home
- It is something which should be taught in schools but school staff are not mental health specialists and their roles shouldn't be blurred. I wouldn't expect or want them to try to resolve issues or offer support unless my child requested it. Even then they should seek assistance of a trained person and not try to deal with it themselves. Teachers have too many responsibilities as it is and they shouldn't be jeopardising their own health by worrying about the health of all their pupils
- Children (should be) encouraged to take part in all activities; this is great as each opportunity could be something that a child shines at in life but some children are just not cut out for 'performing', 'sport' or simply being pushed out of their comfort zone which can result in anxiety being born or manifested and set for life. Perhaps certain subjects and sub categories ie reading out loud, drama and plays, team sports etc could be agreed by school staff and pupils in advance for the year ahead, then further agreed with parents to find the right amount of encouragement, circumstances and subjects, tailored specifically for a child. Children see adults as authoritative figures and may push themselves more than they want so should feel comfortable in having a get-out card but there is also the balance of not letting them off with everything
- More money for programmes such as mindfulness
- The school caters well for the children. However, classes involving children and parents would help
- Good communications between school and home, on-site counselling and play therapy, improved funding and path to access support, focus on earlier focussed intervention. I have been told my child is at significant risk of mental health issues as she ages (depression, suicide risk) but day to day I'm left to deal with it on my own. This is really not satisfactory and will result in higher cost to community with time let alone impact on my child and her carers
- I am not aware of anything the school is doing with regards to mental health so I wouldn't think to go to them about it. I would if it related to school. I think they should make parents aware of who they can talk to if your child has mental health issues. I feel like it needs to be talked about more with the children and parents. I can imagine if a child has these issues they feel very alone
- Our school's Guidance staff require more robust training on how to support pupils appropriately; they would greatly benefit from asking external services trained in mental health wellbeing to come into school on a regular basis to support pupils and train staff

- Schools need a lot more money to support children's mental health; the budgets have been disgustingly cut yet the number of children who are suffering from mental health rises dramatically
- A more open and inclusive approach for whole families to be involved in activities promoting good mental health eg mindfulness sessions, meditation, yoga, massage etc
- My child suffered mostly in S6 with the transition of leaving school. A lot is done to support children and parents going into P1 and S1 but we found leaving S6 much harder. I would like to see more support put in place for those getting ready to leave school and dealing with exams, UCAS, changing friendships and the routine they have known for 13 years. We have had a particularly difficult S6 but having spoken to other parents, now I realise we were not alone but no one was talking about it
- I think it is good that our child's school has had discussions around mental health but I also feel it was done inappropriately and there was no continuous discussion plan for children to take forward. Parents were not advised of the school plan and left slightly floundering when our child came home and said they felt they had mental health issues but the teacher just told them to come home. I feel there should be better communication between the school and parents in this case to ensure if there are children left feeling vulnerable after a wellbeing discussion in school then all the right support is there for them
- More funding is needed in schools so that all children are supported appropriately
- There has to be more support for people with mental health and for their families as this has a massive impact on health, crime, drugs, social skills and life itself
- I feel that a deeper understanding of health and wellbeing is essential for front line staff working with children ie teachers. I feel that if teachers do not respond to a child appropriately, they could actually undermine their mental health and wellbeing and I don't think they all understand how much of a profound effect they can have
- Invite charities in to do talks/breakout sessions
- I think kids are put under way too much stress nowadays...most schools are just putting way too much pressure on them to be excellent...I don't feel there are enough resources available to help our kids deal with stress

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