



Connect Report

Parents' Voice Survey on the Support Available for Children and Young People's Mental Health

We are very grateful to the **256 parents and carers** who took part in our survey on the support available for children and young people facing mental health challenges.

Parents and carers set out their sometimes harrowing experiences as they struggled to get help for their children and young people. Inadequate mental health services, struggles to get a referral, long delays after referral, parents, children and young people not being listened to and links with additional support needs (particularly related to autistic spectrum disorders) were all described. The responses are really striking in one particular respect: parents try and try to get their children the help they need, battling inadequate services or inappropriate professional responses. Many parents and carers are trying to cope with complex problems and feel very isolated themselves as they struggle on, with severe impacts on family life.

There were some positive experiences, as children and young people's mental health improved with the right support at the right time. Parents also shared their suggestions for improving the support available to children and their families, to sort out patchy, inconsistent approaches and hard-to-access services. We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to provide access to counsellors for children and young people in every school. However, this needs to happen quickly and must involve parents and families, so they gain confidence in supporting their child and everyone can work together.

Key Learning Points

Connect asks Scottish Government, local authorities and schools to work with parents, young people and families and their local communities to support mental health by:

- consistently sharing knowledge and, most importantly, information through schools with children, young people, parents and families about developing resilience, coping strategies, how to recognise mental ill-health and how to support mental health challenges
- making sure the right kind of support is available for children, young people and their families when they need it
- signposting support services at or through school, with clear routes and pathways to meet the needs of children, young people and their families in their communities
- promoting active listening as a crucial life skill for all, as a way of enhancing respect-based school community values so that children, young people and families are listened to

- creating cultures in school and local communities where mental health can be discussed openly and where support mechanisms are in place for all
- providing training for school staff, young people (including as mental health ambassadors), parents and families to promote mental wellness
- recognising the impact of poor adult mental health on children and young people
- researching the link between additional support needs and mental ill-health urgently so support can be developed and provided
- delivering on pledges for access to counsellors for children and young people as soon as possible.

Summary and Overview

- **256** responses from **28** local authorities (out of a possible **32**), generally evenly spread though larger numbers of responses from Edinburgh (16%) and Aberdeenshire (15%)
- Responses covered all age groups 0-18 years as follows:
 - 0-3 year olds (**4%**)
 - 3-5 year olds (**7%**)
 - 5-7 year olds (**32%**)
 - 8-10 year olds (**42%**)
 - 11-13 year olds (**33%**)
 - 14-16 year olds (**22%**)
 - 16-18 year olds (**4%**).
- **75%** of respondents feel **only a bit** or **quite confident** about supporting their child's mental health.
- **64%** said their child's school had not given them information about the lessons/activities delivered to children about mental health
- **94%** of respondents said they would find it helpful for supporting their child's mental health if schools involved parents in their programmes
- Programmes/approaches/resources used by schools are many and varied. It would be useful to know why so many different programmes are used – possibly this is because Education Scotland's *Compassionate and Connected Classroom* is relatively new (June 2019)? Or schools aren't aware of it/don't have capacity to implement it quickly?

Findings

We asked parents several specific questions about confidence, support available (or not), whether information is shared by the school and more.

Question 4

What would help improve your confidence?

- **78%** said a clear understanding of where to go for advice (eg school, doctors, helpline) and what services are in place to support children and young people
- **70%** said a whole school approach eg conversations involving staff, children/young people and parents on promoting positive mental health and resilience
- **68%** said being involved in what children learn about mental health and wellbeing in school eg parent sessions on what my child learns would help them gain confidence

Suggestions from parents about what would improve their confidence

- *Support from specially trained teachers/school staff*

- Training for all school staff so they can recognise signs of mental distress
- Information-sharing by schools with parents and families
- Workshops on mental health and resilience for children and young people and their families
- Mental health first aiders in schools
- Make sure support actually is available eg the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) waiting lists are very long or children/young people are turned away (for not being at risk of suicide or risk of harm to others)
- Direct referrals from schools to NHS mental health services or other support services (as opposed to having to go to the GP)
- Make mental health education a more important part of children's learning in school, with signposting to help and support
- Better support during transitions
- Faster access to help from CAMHS before crisis/suicidal
- Help at time of need before crisis point
- Clear information from the school about where to go for help
- Positive nurturing environment
- Whole school approach to positive mental health (open, clear signposting, less focus on attainment and homework, more emphasis on work/life balance)
- Web chat support
- A helpline
- National guidelines on how to help with wellbeing eg guidelines on screentime, no testing young children etc

'More people need to be...trained to spot the signs and be able to talk about their own mental health and know how to help others. Families need to be able to talk to each other comfortably and support each other about mental health when it's good or when it's poor and when it's challenging and be able to support each other. It needs to become part of daily life, not just at home...but in school, learning environment and the workplace.'

'Parents are expected to have all the answers. School has 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 has 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'

Question 5

Has your child's school given you information about activities/lessons delivered to children which included mental health?

- **64%** said no
- **36%** said yes

'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'

Question 6

We then **asked the 36%** which programmes/resources had been used to help children learn about mental health. **47%** of these parents/carers were not sure which programmes were used.

Those that did know said

- Curriculum for Excellence Personal and Social Education (**29%**)
- Health Promoting Schools (**23%**)
- The Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood website (**9%**)
- Children in Scotland's Improving Children and Young People's Understanding of their Wellbeing (**8%**)
- The Compassionate and Connected Classroom (**2%**)

The following programmes, organisations and approaches were mentioned:

- Mental Health champions/ambassadors
- Living Life to the Full
- Seasons for Growth
- Relaxed Kids
- Our Minds Matter
- Nurture groups
- Emotions boards in classrooms
- Treetops Nurture Group
- Growth Mindset
- Skipper
- Edinburgh Council's Resilience programme/Raising Confident Teens
- Action for Children workshop
- CAMHS talks/courses in schools

'I feel schools need to be consistent, not one teacher doing something different from another, or not knowing the correct process or correct referral process'

Question 7

The **36%** of respondents who had been given information by their school on health and wellbeing (including mental health) said they were involved/informed in the following ways:

- A leaflet (**39%**)
- Information was shared with the Parent Council (**33%**)
- Information sessions (**26%**)
- Parents shared information with other parents (**14%**)
- Parents were involved in organising events (**6%**)

Other ways in which information was shared included:

- Email
- School newsletters
- Individual parent meetings with the school
- Kids telling parents
- Evening event for parents organised by the school with other organisations involved
- Class assemblies
- Information shared by class teacher via Seesaw App

'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. Use of Twitter is effective in getting short pieces of info out to parents. I think it would be hugely beneficial to all young people in secondary to have access to training like Action for Children's workshop. 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'

Question 8

Would you find it helpful for supporting your child's mental health if the school involved parents in health and wellbeing programmes relating to mental health?

- **94%** said yes
- **6%** said no

'I believe 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'

'I would like to see more workshops/information available, pointing parents towards the right person who can support children with mental health difficulties'

Question 9

Where would you go for support and information on mental health?

- **77%** would go to the GP
- **59%** would look online
- **40%** would ask friends
- **35%** would ask the school
- **33%** would go to family members
- **26%** would go to other parents
- **2%** didn't know
- **9%** had other suggestions which included self-help programmes, other health professionals, the local library, support groups (eg Hope Café Lanarkshire, NEWSolutions CEC, Liam charity, Trust Jack Foundation, Chris's House, SCILL, Partners in Advocacy, Barnardo's Nurture Service, Social Work, Youth Health Service, Parentline, FASS)

'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'

Question 10

Has your child been affected by mental health issues?

- **48%** said yes
- **48%** said no

- 4% preferred not to answer

Question 11

Please describe what your child has experienced, if you wish to.

114 parents and carers (including grandparents) described the following mental health problems:

- Anxiety, self-harm, depression, low mood, developmental trauma, body dysmorphia, low self-esteem, bullying, loneliness/isolation, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, panic attacks, anger, bereavement, social anxiety.
- The link between troubled mental health and learning difficulties (especially autistic spectrum disorders) was striking

'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'

Question 12

Were you able to access help and support for your child?

- 60% said yes
- 40% said no

'Children with mental health issues need help quickly. Everything takes too long'

'I think kids are put under way too much stress nowadays. And I don't feel there are enough resources available to help our kids deal with stress'

Question 13

If you answered 'no' to Question 12, please explain what happened.

68 parents and carers replied to this question. They faced (and continue to face) delays in referrals and then appointments with CAMHS; too-slow diagnoses of learning difficulties; parents being blamed; inappropriate treatment; no help found; GPs not responding constructively; turned away by CAMHS; bullying hasn't been stopped by the school; counselling at school; inadequate or non-existent support for autistic spectrum disorders; lack of joined-up working between school, mental health services and parents; lack of nurture programmes in school; not 'severe' enough for CAMHS; lack of resources and funding for support in school; failure of school to engage with the family; untrained or inexperienced school staff.

'I feel helpless. I cannot help my children'

'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 gone badly wrong'

Question 14 and 15

For children who did receive help, this was in the form of: CAMHS, third sector support; private counselling; NEWSolutions CIC; Mind Mosaic child and family counselling; GP; Drop-in counselling; medication; Relationship Scotland's Play Therapy; counselling sessions run by a charity; hospital admission; guidance teacher organised support in school; headteacher/pupil support worker.

Of these, **46%** were NOT satisfied with the support while **42%** were satisfied. Dissatisfaction was explained as follows: inadequate support; long waiting times (years); failure to tackle bullying in school; limited approaches/understanding; PEF funding for mental health support ran out; not 'severe' enough mental health problems; discharged from support too quickly (service under too much pressure; support not consistent nor in place for long enough; too slow)

'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'

Question 16

Has your child's mental health issues impacted on your own mental health?

- **68%** said yes
- **32%** said no

'I've got problems with anxiety and it's stressing me that my child is having issues with this too'

This Report includes a separate Appendix of many of the detailed comments and experiences parents and carers shared with us. You can find the Appendix on our website here <http://bit.ly/ConnectMentalHealthReport>

We are very grateful to all of those who contributed. We hope very much that every child, young person and parent who needs support and advice is able to access it. We will do everything we can to work towards this.

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