

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING GUIDANCE – OUR CHILDREN, THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This guidance document, *Our Children, Their Mental Health*, has been developed to ensure that the Education Service in conjunction with partners, effectively addresses the mental health and wellbeing needs of all our children and young people. The aim of this guidance is to
- provide information about mental health and wellbeing in children and young people
 - inform decision-making on strategies and programmes to implement in schools with a focus on early intervention and prevention
 - build knowledge and assessment skills to support appropriate and timely onward referrals to more specialist services if required.

The document also provides signposting to more detailed information on a range of relevant issues.

1.2 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.2.1 Agree the content and purpose of *Our Children, Their Mental Health*.
- 1.2.3 Agree that the document is circulated and promoted with all staff within Education Services, and relevant partners, to improve outcomes for children and young people.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 There is increasing awareness on the rise of mental health difficulties being experienced by children and young people, including anxiety and depression. Young people in Scotland have highlighted the need to prioritise mental health and start talking about these issues more openly. The Scottish Youth Parliament chose mental health as their key focus for 2016, reporting on the views of young people on the topic in the document "[Our Generation's Epidemic](#)" (Scottish Youth Parliament, 2016). Young people interviewed identified four key priorities for schools in relation to mental health:

- a) Encourage positive conversations about mental health through education
- b) Make information about mental health more available and accessible in schools, including information about where to access support.
- c) There should be more mental health support available in school.
- d) Ensure staff are equipped to deal with mental health concerns.

2.2 A number of risk factors increase the likelihood of children and young people experiencing mental health problems. For example, young people under 19 who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, have experienced abuse, or have intellectual difficulties are significantly more likely to experience mental health difficulties (Mental Health Foundation Scotland, 2016). Children with mental health problems are more likely to have poorer educational attainment, and those with poor educational attainment are more likely to have difficulties with their mental health post-school (Esch et al., 2014). As such, it is essential to recognise the importance of a focus on improving mental health and wellbeing as a key aspect of initiatives aimed at closing the attainment gap between those from the lowest and highest areas of deprivation.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Agree the content and purpose of *Our Children, Their Mental Health*.

- 3.2 Agree that the document is circulated and promoted with all staff within Education Services, and relevant partners, to improve outcomes for children and young people.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 There is increasing awareness on the rise of mental health difficulties being experienced by children and young people, including anxiety and depression. Young people in Scotland have highlighted the need to prioritise mental health and start talking about these issues more openly. The Scottish Youth Parliament chose mental health as their key focus for 2016, reporting on the views of young people on the topic in the document "[Our Generation's Epidemic](#)" (Scottish Youth Parliament, 2016). Young people interviewed identified four key priorities for schools in relation to mental health:
- a) Encourage positive conversations about mental health through education
 - b) Make information about mental health more available and accessible in schools, including information about where to access support.
 - c) There should be more mental health support available in school.
 - d) Ensure staff are equipped to deal with mental health concerns.
- 4.2 A number of risk factors increase the likelihood of children and young people experiencing mental health problems. For example, young people under 19 who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, have experienced abuse, or have intellectual difficulties are significantly more likely to experience mental health difficulties (Mental Health Foundation Scotland, 2016). Children with mental health problems are more likely to have poorer educational attainment, and those with poor educational attainment are more likely to have difficulties with their mental health post-school (Esch et al., 2014). As such, it is essential to recognise the importance of a focus on improving mental health and wellbeing as a key aspect of initiatives aimed at closing the attainment gap between those from the lowest and highest areas of deprivation.
- 4.3 This document aims to raise the importance of promoting maximum mental wellbeing for all children and those who work with them, while providing tools and pathways to help adults to recognise when mental health difficulties emerge and to put into place the most effective support.
- 4.4 The first section of this guidance sets the context and helps to place mental health within current planning and assessment systems, as well as describing some of the policy drivers around the mental health of

children and young people in Scotland. It also aims to improve understanding, helping practitioners to distinguish mental ill health from poor mental wellbeing, and to understand how this might impact upon our practice in working with children and young people.

- 4.5 Underpinning good mental health is a resilient system with the child at the centre. The emphasis should be on how we can build the resilience within systems with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. The second section of this document covers what practitioners can do at the universal level for children and young people within our schools, for example in terms of curricular programmes, which may help to meet this end.
- 4.6 At times prevention and early intervention are insufficient to meet the needs of our most distressed children and young people. A decision-making flowchart has been developed to support, inform, and empower practitioners to make decisions about good practice in school and when to seek outside help. To aid in this decision-making, information on assessment tools that schools can use independently or with advice from colleagues is provided.
- 4.7 In addition to the information contained within this document, a mental health and wellbeing resource hub is being developed to include associated links and resources.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Across our schools and services, significant work is being undertaken to support resilience and build positive mental health. This document is aimed at ensuring all staff understand the importance of early intervention to promote positive mental health and wellbeing, to improve outcomes for our children and young people as well as impacting positively on staff, families and communities.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

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| 6.1 | Policy | Document consistent with existing policies |
| 6.2 | Financial | None |
| 6.3 | Legal | None |
| 6.4 | HR | None |
| 6.5 | Equalities | Increased awareness and action around mental health difficulties as an additional support need |

6.6 Risk Failure to target mental health leading to poorer outcomes for children, young people and families

6.7 Customer Service None

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Our Children, Their Mental Health