# Mental health handbook

## For the classroom

# How to use this handbook

This handbook has been designed to help educators create and maintain a healthy environment in the classroom and promote positive mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

Whilst not all of the following information will be relevant to all of your pupils, it's useful to be aware of the key signs to look out for, so that you can take the first step of pointing them in the right direction, and to the most suitable support for them.

There are factors that increase a person's vulnerability to mental health problems such as an abusive experience, or a life changing transition, but for many people, mental health problems are likely to be caused by a combination of different factors.

It's important to recognise and appreciate that everyone has different needs and responses to situations, and to always be sensitive to how someone may be feeling.

> **"**
>
> There is an unprecedented crisis in young people's mental health, further evidenced by these record numbers of young people needing help from the NHS.
>
> **Olly Parker, Head of External Affairs at Young Minds, 2022**

# Did you know?

→ **1 in 4** people will experience a mental health problem each year in England

→ **1 in 10** children have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem at any one time

→ **450 million** people worldwide have a mental health problem

→ Those with mental health problems often have **poorer physical health** compared to the general population

[source: Mind and NHS]

> **"**
>
> What we've seen across our frontline services in UK schools is rising numbers of young people struggling with anxiety, self-harm, eating difficulties and suicidal thoughts.
>
> **Catherine Roche, Chief Executive, Place2Be**

# What to look out for

A [survey published in 2022](#) by Place2Be and the National Association of Head Teachers found that staff had witnessed an increase in mental health problems among pupils since the start of the academic year, including increased anxiety (95%), low self-esteem (86%), depression (76%) and constant feelings of anger (68%).

**What are the most common mental health problems you're likely to encounter in the classroom?**

**Anxiety:** Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a long-term condition that causes you to feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues, rather than one specific event.

**Depression:** Clinical depression is when you feel persistently sad for weeks or months, rather than just a few days.

**Bipolar:** Bipolar disorder affects your moods, which can swing from one extreme to another – causing episodes of depression and mania.

**Eating disorders:** This is when you have an unhealthy attitude to food, which can take over your life and make you ill. The most common eating disorders are: anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge eating disorder and other specified feeding or eating disorders.

## Signs to look out for in your pupils:

→ Increased irritability and restlessness

→ Unusual reactions and responses to situations

→ Low mood

→ Seeking isolation

→ Changes in attendance

→ Changes in friendship groups

→ Changes in behaviour

→ Weight changes.

## More serious signs and symptoms, requiring intervention from professionals, may include:

→ Psychosis

→ Suicidal feelings

→ Paranoia

→ Self-harming

→ Hearing voices.

# Time to act

Once you've identified possible signs and symptoms of mental health problems, it's important to know what steps to take to provide the best level of support to your pupils.

## Conversation starters

Sometimes it can be difficult to open up a conversation around mental health. Here are a few simple questions which can help.

> Is there anything I can do to help?

> You look sad/ worried today. Do you want to talk about it?

> I've noticed that...

> How are you, really?

> Are you okay?

> Do you want to take a walk?

## Points to remember

→ Find an appropriate time and a relaxed place to talk

→ Listen carefully, be patient and friendly

→ Give your full attention

→ Take what they're saying seriously

→ Don't overreact, but don't try to minimise or dismiss what they're saying

→ Ask questions to encourage them to talk

→ Sometimes it's easier to talk side-by-side instead of face-to-face, on a walk or during an activity.

# Helpful mental health resources

**Barnardo's** protects and supports the UK's most vulnerable children. They provide a range of services to help and support children, young people, parents and carers.

**CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)** runs a free, confidential helpline and webchat service offering help and advice to anyone feeling down or in need of support.

**ChildLine** is a free, confidential service where children can talk about any issue they're going through. You can call their helpline or use their webchat to speak to a trained counsellor.

**The Children's Society** supports children going through serious life challenges. They run services and campaigns to make children's lives better.

**Contact** offers advice and support to families with disabled children. If you're a parent caring for a disabled child, you can arrange to speak to an adviser for practical and emotional support.

**Family Lives** offers information and support on all aspects of family life, including the stages of child development, issues with schools, parenting support, bullying and mental health concerns.

You can text **Shout** on 85258 for confidential support by text.

**The Mix** offers free emotional support to people under 25 by phone, webchat or email. They also offer a short-term counselling service.

**YoungMinds** offers information and support to young people about their mental health and helps adults to support young people in their lives. If you're a parent worried about a child's mental health, you can call their helpline.

[Source: Mental Health Foundation]

## Mental Health Qualifications from NCFE

As part of our commitment to helping equip educators with the tools they need to support their students we have developed a range of mental health qualifications, including:

→ NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Mental Health Awareness
→ NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Children and Young People's Mental Health
→ NCFE CACHE Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills
→ NCFE CACHE Level 2 Award in Suicide Awareness

**For more information visit ncfe.org.uk**