

# Practice briefing for professionals working with young people Working with young people with mental health needs

Everybody has ups and downs with their mental health and well-being. For some people the feelings can become persistent and interfere with their everyday life, particularly when they are living in a stressful or unsafe environment.

Common types of mental and emotional problems that young people can face are stress and anxiety, depression, psychosis, eating disorders and self-harm.

# Signs and symptoms of mental health problems:

- Being anxious and irritable
- Feeling hopeless or worthless
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of self-care
- Finding it difficult to concentrate or remember things
- Finding it hard to sleep or sleeping too much
- Having very high or very low moods
- Finding it difficult to manage everyday life (for example, preparing food, washing regularly)
- Becoming suspicious and paranoid
- Changing behaviour around people (for example, becoming isolated and withdrawn)
- Having suicidal thoughts or wanting to harm themselves
- Feeling people are against them
- Hearing voices or sounds that aren't real
- Believing they have special powers or are on a mission
- Excessive spending and/or problems managing money

Experiencing one of these symptoms does not mean someone is mentally unwell. But if a number of symptoms are identified, or symptoms are pervasive, it is worth further exploration with the young person.



If you have concerns, make a referral to your local Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) where they can access specialist assessment and intervention for a variety of mental health needs.

# Relevance for young people experiencing intimate partner violence

Our initial research indicates that young people accessing the young people's violence advisor (YPVA) services are reporting disproportionately high levels of mental health concerns as compared to the normal population<sup>1</sup>. The findings show that of those young people seeking support for intimate partner violence, three-

One in 10 young people have a mental health diagnosis.

Source: Time to Change

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> SafeLives (2014) Young people's national dataset January to December 2014. Bristol: SafeLives.

quarters disclose a mental health problem.

This includes depression and anxiety (65%), eating disorders (16%), sleeping problems (38%), self-harm (45%) and planned or attempted suicide (13%). Additionally, the data suggests that 27% of young people's parents also have mental health disorders.

Helpfully these needs are being addressed. 89% of YPVAs reported to SafeLives that they are providing wellbeing advice and support to the young people that access their services.

# Engaging young people with mental health needs and how to respond

When working with young people, we need to be aware of signs of mental health difficulties and how to respond appropriately. Young people might not understand what they are experiencing or realise that they have a problem. They may not know how to talk about their worries, therefore professionals need to feel able to support, and know how to respond to their individual needs.

# **Practice pointers**

#### Do

- Look for non-verbal signs of emotional distress such as lack of eye contact, poor concentration, closed body posture or unusual energy levels (either very low or very high)
- Proactively discuss moods and emotions so the young person knows it's ok to talk about them
- Show genuine concern in what the young person has to say
- · Ask direct questions about thoughts of self-harm and suicide
- Consider if there are any underlying substance misuse issues which may be affecting their mental health
- Be clear about your confidentiality policy
- Be aware of your local safeguarding procedures and know when and how to refer to mental health services in your area

#### Don't

- Dismiss the concerns young people raise about their emotional wellbeing
- Speak in jargon without explaining what terms mean
- Make assumptions about a young person's lifestyle

#### Simple strategies for helping young people to keep well:

- Eat well
- Exercise
- Do things you enjoy
- Talk to your support network
- Do something supportive for someone else
- Ask for help
- Take time away from the situation
- Mindfulness a mind-body approach to well-being that can help you change the way you think about experiences and reduce stress and anxiety. (Free podcasts available at mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/podcasts/)

# **Domestic abuse resources**

SafeLives has developed a young people's Dash risk checklist and young people's safety plan, in partnership with young people from IKWRO, Leap Confronting Conflict and Barnardo's. Practitioners can use these tools to assess risk and to support and advise young people on how to keep safe. The checklist and guidance is available to download on safelives.org.uk/practice-support

The checklist is not a mental health assessment. However, question 3 on the form asks you to explore low mood, emotional coping and suicidal thoughts with the young person. This may provide an opportunity to explore other mental health concerns with the young person, or highlight additional support that is required.

#### Safety planning

The SafeLives safety plan for young people can be accessed on: safelives.org.uk/practice-support

#### Additional resources and signposting young people

Some mental health difficulties will need more specialist or long term intervention. Below are some helpful online resources and organisation that can offer support:

#### Young Minds youngminds.org.uk

Leading UK mental health charity which offers information to young people, professionals and parents about mental health and emotional wellbeing. The organisation also offers young person-friendly explanations of a variety of different mental health issues:

youngminds.org.uk/for\_children\_young\_people/whats\_worrying\_you

#### Minded minded.org.uk

Contains a wealth of information for anybody working with children and young people's mental health issues.

#### Beat www.b-eat.co.uk

Provides helplines, online support and a network of UK-wide self-help groups to help adults and young people in the UK beat their eating disorders.

# Time to Change time-to-change.co.uk

England's biggest programme to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination. You can also watch their video of young people talking about their own experiences of mental health problems: youtu.be/vzmfdECUvxM

#### Rethink rethink.org

Provides a range of services nationally including advocacy, carer support, crisis services and more.

# Mental Health Foundation mentalhealth.org.uk

Leading mental health research, policy and service improvement charity, they produce publications and resources to support working with a range of mental health issues.

#### Harmless harmless.org.uk

Provides a range of services about self-harm including support, information, training and consultancy to people who self-harm, their friends and families and professionals.