



Working towards mentally healthy schools and FE colleges: the voice of students

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**Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families**

The Anna Freud Centre's work with schools and FE colleges.

The **Anna Freud Centre** aims to support all schools and FE colleges to embed good mental health across their whole setting, enabling all schools and colleges to be mentally healthy. We do this by bringing together research, resources, training and practice in order to work with schools and FE colleges to transform knowledge into action. Wherever possible our resources are shared free of charge.

The **Anna Freud Centre's** Mentally Healthy Schools website for secondary schools is being launched in March 2021 to support this approach.

The Anna Freud Centre's free support for schools and FE colleges includes the following:

- Our [Five Steps framework](#), a simple, interactive and free framework to support schools and FE colleges to create their own, tailored approach to mental health and wellbeing based on evidence of what works.
- [Mentally Healthy Schools](#) for primary schools, a free UK-wide website that brings together evidence-based information, advice and over 600 quality-assured resources for primary schools.
- [Schools in Mind](#), a free learning network to support 25,000 education professionals.
- Resources to promote school and FE college staff wellbeing including [Ten ways to support staff wellbeing](#).
- [Wellbeing Measurement for Schools](#), evidence-based tools for schools to measure student wellbeing.
- Our [Peer Support for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Programme](#) which outlines how to develop, deliver and evaluate peer support in schools and FE colleges.

Other work includes:

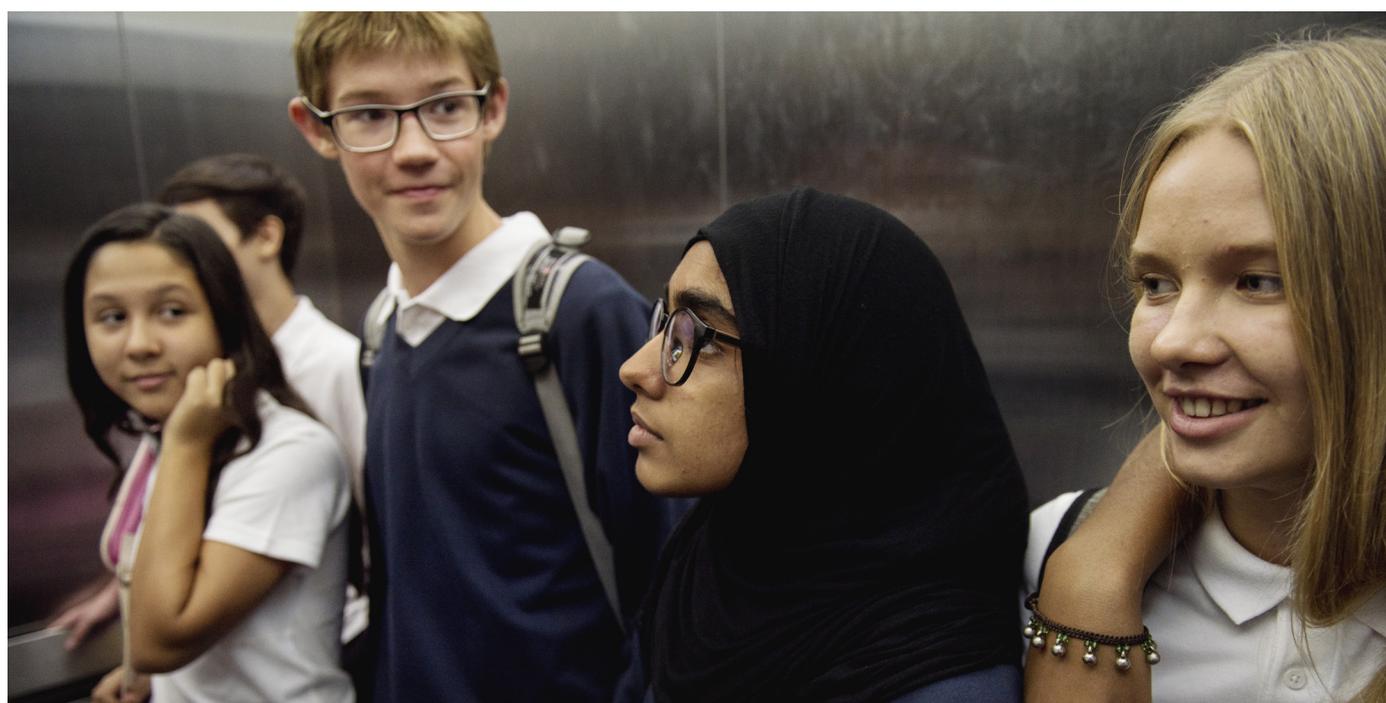
- Founding and supporting [Pears Family School](#), an alternative provision for children aged 8–13 who have been excluded or are at risk of being excluded from school. 64% return to their former school within four months, 95% of whom keep their places. Pears Family School has an [Outstanding from Ofsted](#) in every category.
- [Education for Wellbeing programme](#), one of the largest research trials of school-based mental health interventions in Europe. It aims to evaluate ways of supporting students' mental wellbeing in over 370 schools.
- Evaluating [Headstart](#), a five-year, £58.7 million funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It aims to test and explore new ways of improving the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10–16 and to prevent serious mental health issues from developing.
- Founding and Supporting the [UK Trauma Council](#) which creates evidence-based resources to improve professionals and carers' understanding of the nature and impact of trauma.

Training

- We offer evidenced-based training and interactive online workshops for professionals to develop the key skills needed to support children's and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing in schools and FE colleges.

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Summary

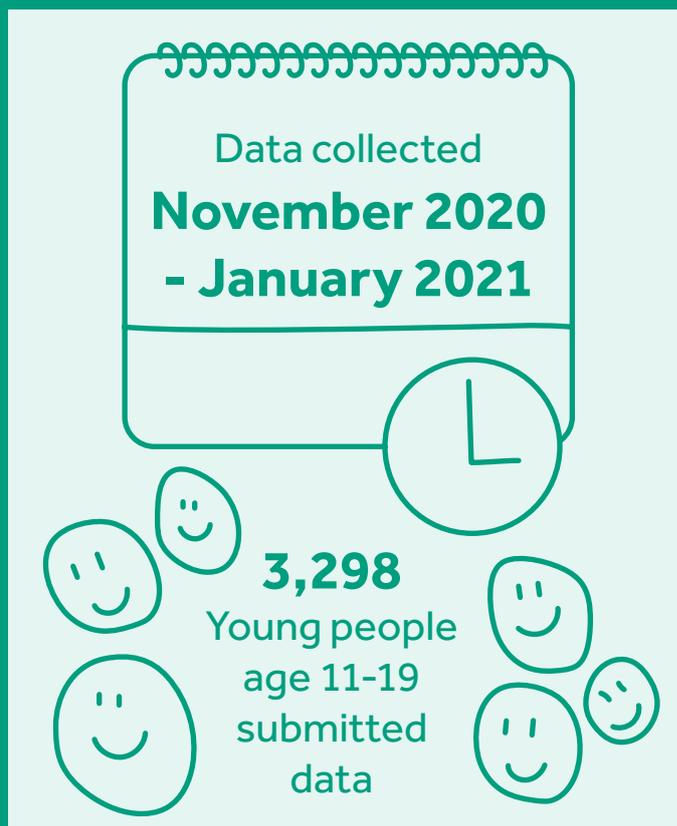
Between November 2020 and January 2021, the Anna Freud Centre surveyed 3,298 young people aged between 11 and 19, asking them about factors relating to their mental health and wellbeing.

The purpose of the survey was to hear the views of children and young people with regards to mental health in secondary schools and further education (FE) colleges, so that school leaders can develop a better understanding about how to build a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

The survey was carried out before the third national lockdown, when evidence of the impact of the pandemic on children and young people's mental health was building. It is published as schools and FE colleges across the UK are in the process of re-opening to all students, to the prospect of a crisis in children and young people's mental health.

In the survey we asked young people about how schools and FE colleges support mental health. We found that young people think schools are an important place within which students can talk about and learn about mental health, and where they can seek support for themselves or for their friends.

Children and young people told us that they wanted to learn more about mental health. We heard that talking about mental health in schools allows students to build relationships with their peers, to talk about issues which they might not want to discuss with their family, and to access trusted information from staff. Students also told us that if they spoke to a member of school or FE college staff because they were worried about their own mental health or that of another student, they were most likely to talk to a favourite class teacher,



Young people said that: Schools are important places...

to talk about
and learn about
mental health

to seek support
for themselves or
for their friends

The most important topics to learn about should be:

1. Depression and anxiety
2. Body image
3. Identity



form tutor or school counsellor. However, we also learned that some students prefer not to talk to school staff or would prefer to do so if concerned about a friend rather than about themselves.

We also asked young people about the most important topic areas that they would like to learn about. Respondents highlighted a range of key areas, with depression and anxiety, body image and identity as their top three priorities. Finally, we asked young people which factors have a positive or negative impact on their mental health. They told us that friendships, family and relationships had positive impacts, while schoolwork, exams and family were highlighted as having a negative impact.

This survey points to the need to embrace whole-school or college approaches to mental health, where all school staff, parents and carers, governors, and students together contribute to promoting mental health and protecting their friends, students and children from harm. It also raises the question of whether teacher training can better prepare staff for their increasingly important role in promoting mental health and signposting children and young people to further support. This is never more crucial than now, when it is essential that children and young people are able to turn to someone they trust in times of unhappiness or distress.

In school, they would be most likely to talk to:

a favourite class teacher



a form tutor



a school counsellor



Top three positive impacts on their mental health:

1. Friendships
2. Family
3. Relationships



Top three negative impacts on their mental health:

1. Schoolwork
2. Exams
3. Family



Introduction: mental health and the pandemic

Emerging evidence suggests that the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an increasing number of children and young people facing mental health challenges globally.¹ With mental health services under strain even before the pandemic, and schools and FE colleges facing increasing demand for young people's mental health support, the pandemic has exacerbated the mental health challenges that young people in the UK face. Research led by the University of Sheffield found that among the 13-24-year-olds surveyed, 40-50% reported feeling significantly more anxious than before the pandemic and 50-60% reported feeling worried about their parents or family.² The Prince's Trust's survey of 1,022 children and young people in April/May 2020 found that 43% reported increased anxiety as a result of the pandemic, and 32% were overwhelmed by feelings of panic and anxiety on a daily basis.³

Between 2017 and June 2020, mental health problems in 5-16-year-olds increased from one in eight to around one in six.⁴ Young women in particular have struggled, with 27.2% experiencing mental health problems.⁵ Girls also experienced greater anxiety about returning to school and more anxiety while in school. Girls have reported 10% higher anxiety than boys, and nearly twice as many girls as boys said they were worried about returning to school.⁶ Children and young people have expressed concerns about falling behind in exams.⁷

 **71%** 
of children agreed with the
statement 'I feel safe at school'



Sleep problems have increased, as has loneliness in children and young people.⁸ Children and young people whose lives are already hit by disadvantage are disproportionately likely to experience mental health problems.⁹ Research carried out in Autumn 2020 found that children and young people had experienced an increase in anxiety and a decline in happiness and life satisfaction.¹⁰

School provides a place of safety for many children. In September 2020, research by The Children's Commissioner found that 71% of children agreed with the statement 'I feel safe at school'. Primary school students were the most likely to feel safe (78%), and girls were more likely to agree that they felt safe compared to boys (74% compared to 67%).¹¹ Research by the NSPCC also found that children and young people missed the social and emotional support they enjoyed at school.¹²

Schools play a vital role in supporting children. Half of all diagnosed mental health conditions are established by the age of 14, so it is imperative to understand how children and young people want to learn and talk about mental health so that they can be fully supported.¹³

A whole-school or FE college approach

In recent years, Governments across the UK have developed policies to encourage a whole-school and college approach to mental health. Whole-school approaches involve bringing together senior leaders, governors, teachers and all school staff, as well as parents, carers and the wider community, including health and voluntary services, to signpost and support children and young people. Whole-school approaches have been found to improve student attendance and attainment.¹⁴

Throughout the UK there are a range of policies in place to pave the way for whole-school or college approaches. In England, The Green Paper on children and young people's mental health was published in 2017.¹⁵ In 2020, a new Relationships, Sex and Health education (RSHE) curriculum became mandatory in primary and

secondary schools in England and is now in place in most English schools.¹⁶ The national curriculum in Scotland, known as the Curriculum for Excellence, or CfE, has mental health and wellbeing threaded throughout. The Welsh Government has finalised a new curriculum which has mental health and wellbeing as a core area of learning and experience. The new curriculum will become mandatory for students up to Year 7 from September 2022. Secondary schools are expected to roll it out on a year-by-year basis between 2023 and 2026.

The implementation of a whole-school approach is down to the individual school or college. However, at the heart of a whole-school approach is the principle of schools, governors, parents and carers, children and young people and other agencies working together.



Methodology

Between 16 November 2020 and 1 January 2021 the Anna Freud Centre surveyed 3,298 young people aged between 11 and 19. We sought to understand what children and young people wanted to learn about with regard to mental health, and who they would approach for support, to inform how schools and colleges understand their students' needs and best support them. We also asked about what topics students wanted teachers to discuss and what had the most impact on their mental health.

The survey was distributed to students via contacts working with schools and FE colleges, the Anna Freud Centre's Schools in Mind learning network, school mailing lists, and school engagement and outreach. It was also advertised to older children aged 14+ⁱ on Facebook and Instagram. Participation was voluntary and the survey was completed anonymously online.

 **3,298** 

**young people between
11 - 19 took part**



**in the anonymous
voluntary online
survey shared by
schools, colleges
and on social media**



ⁱ Most social media channels require everyone to be over 13 years old before they can create an account, although some allow younger children to have an account if it is managed by a parent or carer.

Findings

A total of 3,298 students responded across three age groups; 11-13 (21.4%), 14-16 (60.6%) and 16+ (17.8%). The majority of respondents were in the 14-16 age group and 0.2% (n = 6) did not indicate their age group.

1. School is an important space to talk about mental health

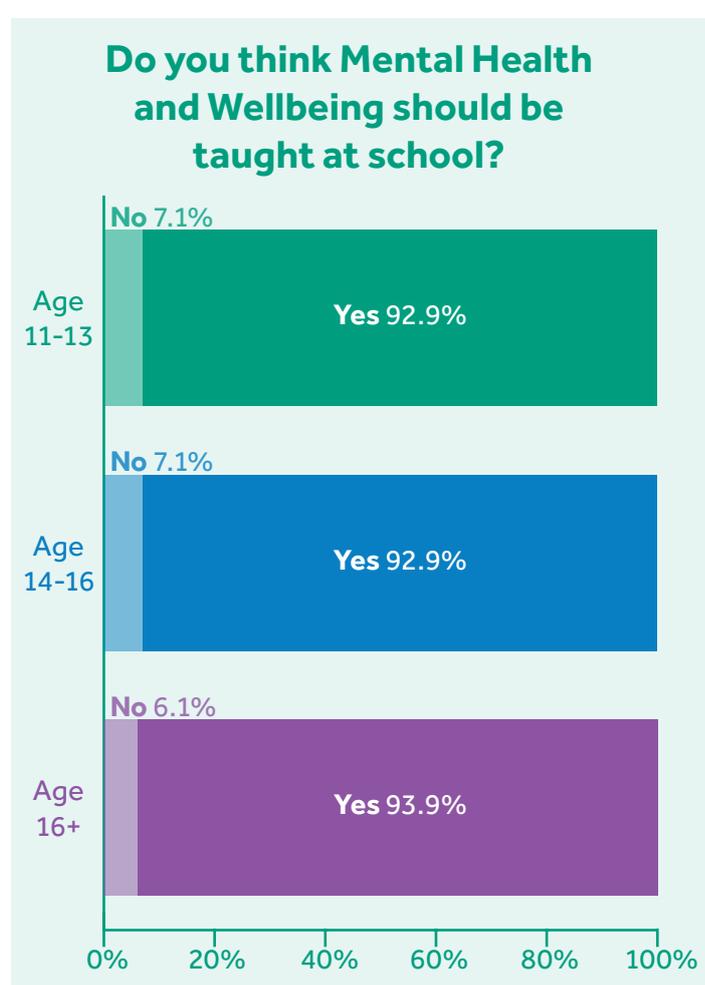
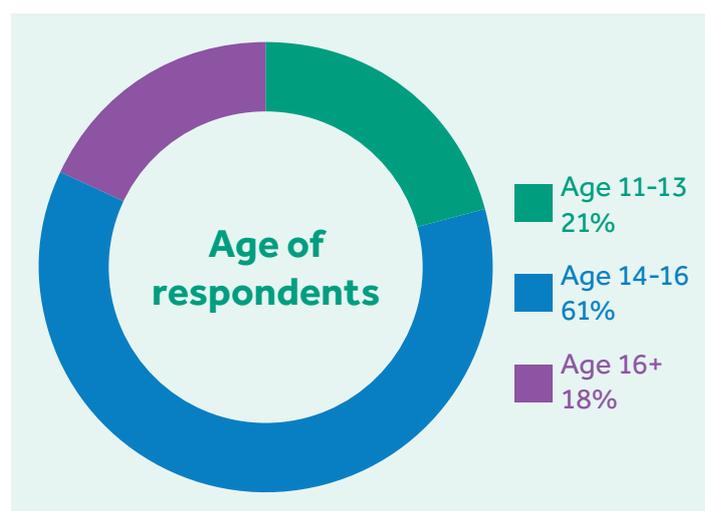
Students were asked whether they felt mental health should be taught in school. Overwhelmingly, students answered “yes”, with around 93% of young people agreeing with the current move towards teaching about mental health in schools and FE colleges. There was no difference between the age groups.

Students agreed that mental health and wellbeing should be taught in schools for a variety of reasons. The most common reasons were that it was important for supporting their own mental health, for supporting the mental health of others, because mental health matters, and to encourage people to self-support and avoid being isolated.

Many young people commented that talking about mental health in school is needed to support one’s own mental health, but also to better understand and support others.

“It’s important for children to be able to know what others are going through”

“So hopefully people can learn to be nice to each other”



"So that students can understand themselves better"

"To give people more of an awareness of what people may be going through"

"Makes people's feelings feel valid, might encourage them to seek further support if needed"

"It would encourage more people to speak up about their problems and would help people feel less alone knowing that there are other people going through the same or similar things as them and that there are people/things that can help"

Students also commented on the need to encourage people to seek support and not be isolated, which was connected with not feeling alone and the importance of legitimizing people's feelings. They also reflected the broader belief that mental health matters.

"Because it matters a lot more than a few grades"

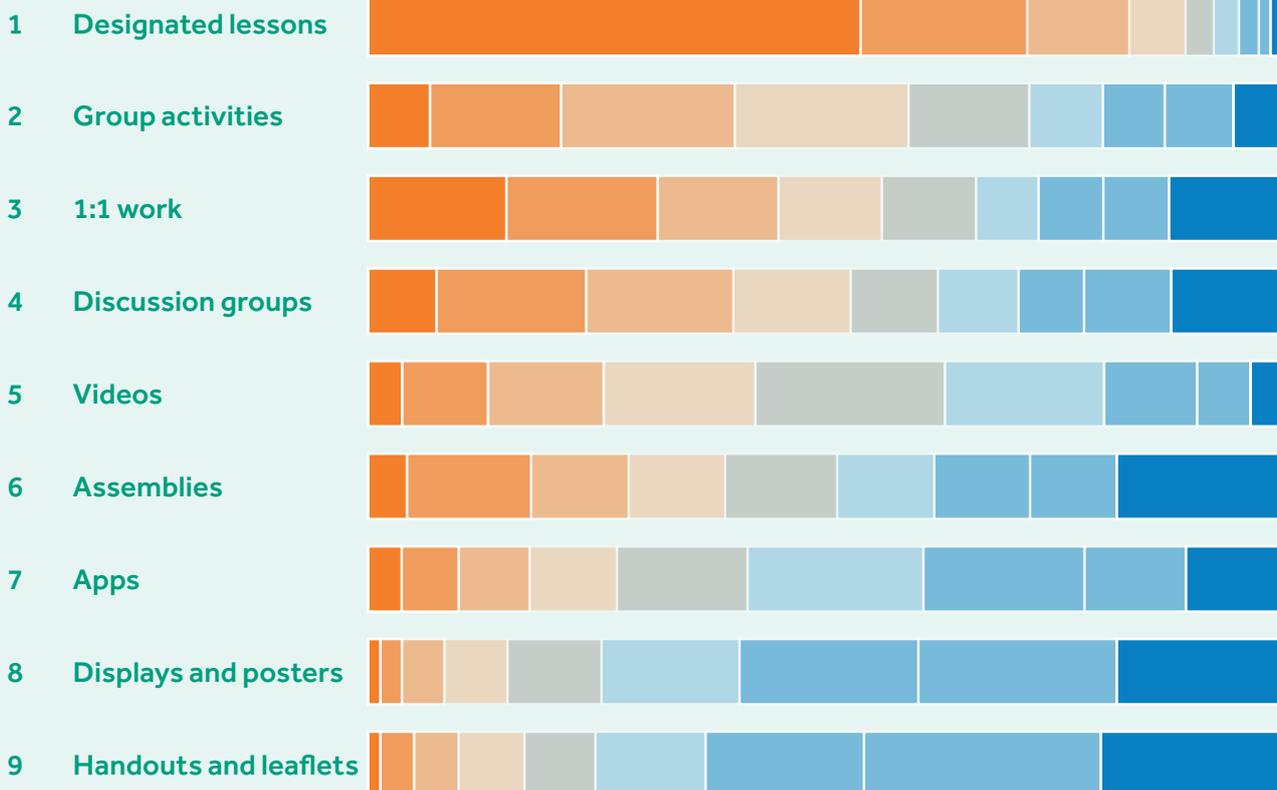
Respondents also talked about how they would like to learn about mental health. They said their preferred ways of learning were through designated lessons, group activities and 1:1 work and their least favourite ways of learning were handouts, leaflets and apps.

How would you like to learn about mental health?

Please rate from most preferred to least preferred

Rank Options

First choice Last choice



2. The benefits of discussing mental health at school or FE college

We asked young people what they felt the benefits were of learning about mental health in secondary school or FE college. Nearly a quarter of respondents said the main benefit of discussing mental health at school was that it was less difficult than talking to family.

One in five young people told us that having peer or friend support was the main benefit of discussing mental health topics in school, indicating the importance of peer relationships.

Staff in schools and FE colleges were valued as trusted sources of information and support. 20.4% of young people saw access to factual information from staff as a key benefit of discussing mental health in school. Additionally, 19% identified having support staff to talk to as the main benefit. This demonstrates that young people may seek support from a range of places and people. Some choose to talk to their family, others to their peers, while other young people prefer to speak to teachers and school staff for mental health support. This further underlines the need for a whole-school approach to mental health.

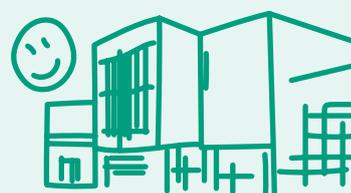
3. Seeking support

We asked young people who they would speak to for support with their mental health. Just over half of all respondents (52.2%) identified an adult in school who they would talk to if they were worried about their mental health or the mental health another pupil, but 47.8% said they wouldn't speak to anyone in school. The younger the children were, the less likely they were to speak to an adult at school. At age 11-13, 51.9% said they wouldn't speak to anyone at school compared to 47% of 14-16-year-olds and 45.6% of 16-19-year-olds.



1 in 5

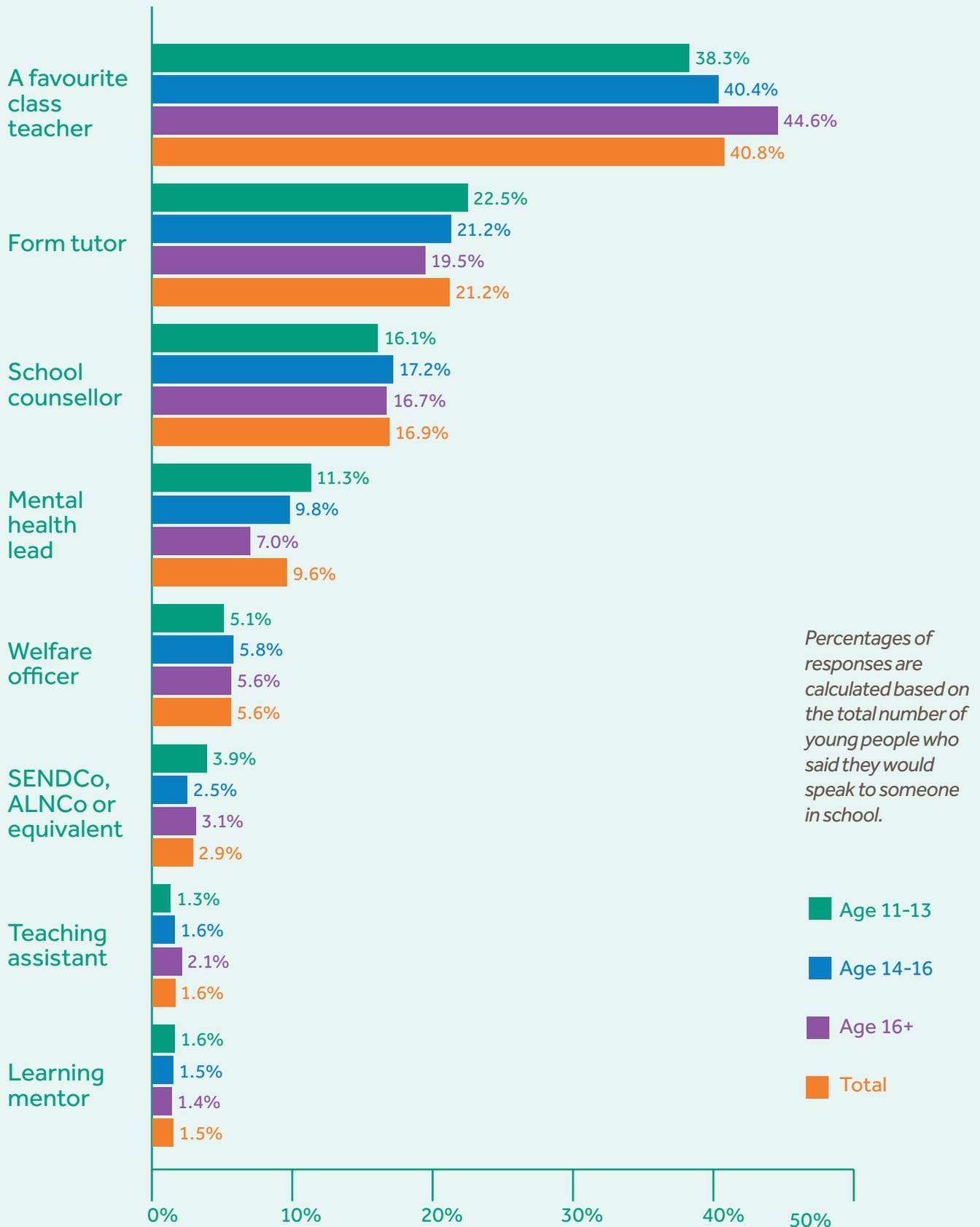
told us that having peer or friend support was the main benefit of discussing mental health topics in school



52.2%

identified an adult in school who they would talk to about their own or another pupil's mental health

If you were worried about your mental health or the mental health of another pupil, who would you speak to in school?



Across all age groups, students who told us they would speak to an adult in school said they would be most likely to speak to a trusted teacher, followed by a form teacher and a school counsellor.

Some students provided further clarification around who they would speak to. Of those who provided additional information, 25 young people indicated that they would speak to their friends, and 18 indicated they would speak to their Head of Year. Notably, some young people stated that if it was their own mental health they were worried about, they wouldn't speak to anyone, but if it was a friend they may encourage that individual to speak to someone. Some felt they would not confide in anyone in school, or even any adults at all.

"I wouldn't speak to anyone about myself but I would contact a welfare officer for a friend"

"I would try and help them feel better myself, but if I thought that they were in danger of harming themselves I would inform a school counsellor"

"If it was me I wouldn't speak to anyone I don't trust any teacher or parent with that information I only trust close friends."

4. Children and young people want to learn more about mental health

Children and young people overwhelmingly want to learn more about a range of issues relating to mental health. We asked students to select topics that they felt were important for teachers to address and discuss, and the most common response from all age groups was depression and anxiety. Over 90% of children in all age groups wanted more support on this issue, followed by body image, identity and self-harm.

There were similar levels of responses between the three age groups for depression and anxiety, body image and self-esteem, identity, self-harm, eating disorders, and risk taking.

A smaller number of students felt support on bereavement, social media and resilience would be helpful. Even on these topics however, over half of students said that they wanted to learn more.

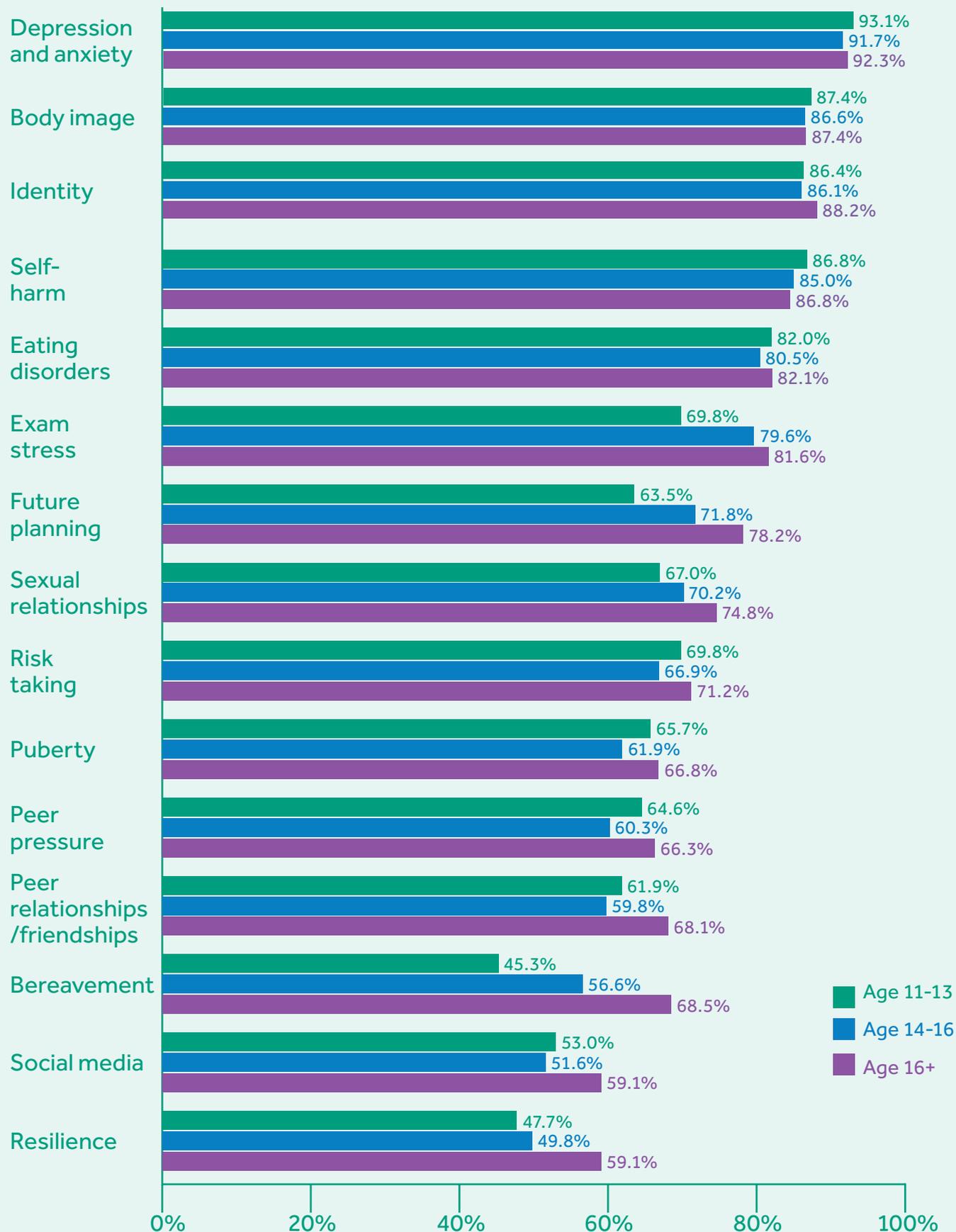
A greater percentage of the 14-16 and 16+ age groups selected exam stress as an important topic, which was a statistically significant difference to the 11-13 group. This could be due to over-14s being more aware of, and concerned about, the importance of approaching key exams such as GCSEs, A levels, N5s and Scottish Highers, than the 11-13-year-olds.



+90%

of all age groups wanted support for depression and anxiety

What topics do you think your teachers should address/discuss in school to support your mental health?



5. Positive impacts on mental health

We asked students to select the top three factors which positively impacted their mental health. Across all age groups, friendships were most commonly selected as having a positive impact on their mental health, followed by family, relationships, and social media.

Factors that young people said have a positive impact on their mental health



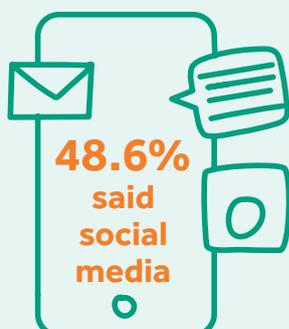
90.8% of 11-13yr olds
93.5% of 14-16 yr olds
93.2% of 16+ yr olds



60.2% of 11-13yr olds
61.0% of 14-16 yr olds
60.1% of 16+ yr olds



56.1% of 11-13yr olds
48.4% of 14-16 yr olds
40.4% of 16+ yr olds



56.1% of 11-13yr olds
48.4% of 14-16 yr olds
40.4% of 16+ yr olds



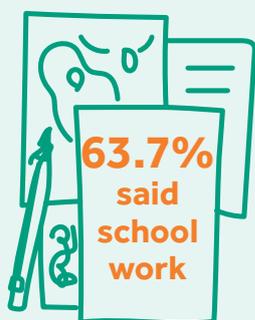
8.4% of 11-13yr olds
6.7% of 14-16 yr olds
10.4% of 16+ yr olds

6. Negative impacts on mental health

We also asked respondents to select the top three factors which negatively impacted their mental health. School work, exams and family were ranked as having the most negative impacts on mental health. Bullying, discrimination and social media were the

next three factors that had negative impacts on the combined aged groups. However, for the 16+ group, social media was ranked as having considerably more negative impact on mental health than in the younger two age groups. Friendships and relationships were ranked as the least negative, which is in line with the above findings of factors that positively impact mental health.

Factors that young people said had a negative impact on their mental health



61.0% of 11-13yr olds
64.1% of 14-16 yr olds
65.6% of 16+ yr olds



43.1% of 11-13yr olds
62.6% of 14-16 yr olds
61.7% of 16+ yr olds



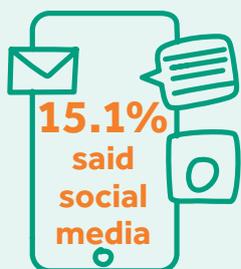
27.2% of 11-13yr olds
29.3% of 14-16 yr olds
34.6% of 16+ yr olds



37.5% of 11-13yr olds
26.9% of 14-16 yr olds
23.9% of 16+ yr olds



36.0% of 11-13yr olds
25.6% of 14-16 yr olds
23.3% of 16+ yr olds



10.3% of 11-13yr olds
14.1% of 14-16 yr olds
24.0% of 16+ yr olds



13.7% of 11-13yr olds
10.9% of 14-16 yr olds
10.1% of 16+ yr olds



10.8% of 11-13yr olds
6.9% of 14-16 yr olds
11.8% of 16+ yr olds

These responses were also reflected in students' qualitative replies about what affects their mental health and wellbeing. The main themes that emerged were homework, general school experiences, social relationships, gender and sexual identity, mental ill-health, stigma and discrimination, global and other issues, including coronavirus.

Factors relating to school included the workload, academic pressures and academic future, other students at school or college, and poor support and relationships with teachers. Some related to the uncertainty of coronavirus, for example: *"Changes in school, eg continuous stressful tests instead of exams, Worrying about the future"*. Others spoke about pressure, homework and the lack of understanding from others at school.

Social relationships, including those with peers, romantic partners and family, and also social isolation and loneliness were reported as factors affecting mental health and wellbeing:

"Arguments and relationships going bad. Caring what other people think of you as it makes you constantly doubt yourself"

"Difficulty making friends/ loneliness"

"Social situations"

Poor mental health and lack of support in general, including with specific education needs and emotional support were flagged by many students as an issue, for example:

"Negative view of myself and lack of self-confidence"

"I suffer from autism, depression"

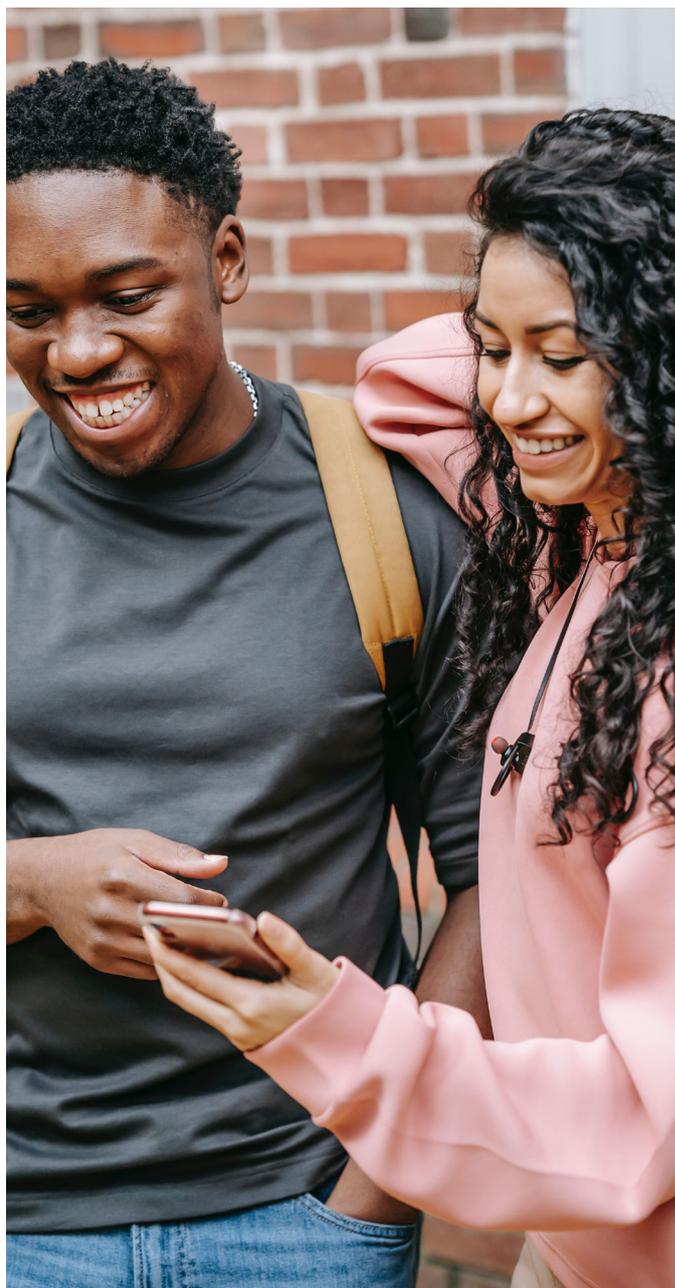


"Past traumatic events"

"Myself probably, my mental health is really bad and I'm really struggling"

A number of students talked about their gender and sexual identity, citing gender dysphoria, being transgender, and being confused about or afraid of their sexuality. Others found that the school environment was particularly challenging in this regard with fears of *"Being judged for being Trans/Non-binary"* and *"Teachers not understanding my gender as Non-binary"*. Others didn't feel the school environment was supportive and reported *"Feeling like I can't come out and socially transition because I'm scared that I will be harassed and bullied because I hear transphobia in college and heard it a lot in secondary too so am so afraid people will hate me, hurt me or even target me."*

Other societal factors including homophobia and racism were also raised, along with ableism and sexism. The students sampled also had concerns around the world, the news and current events, and several listed stress as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns. Some also expressed wider human rights concerns as well as environmental concerns which feel outside their control.



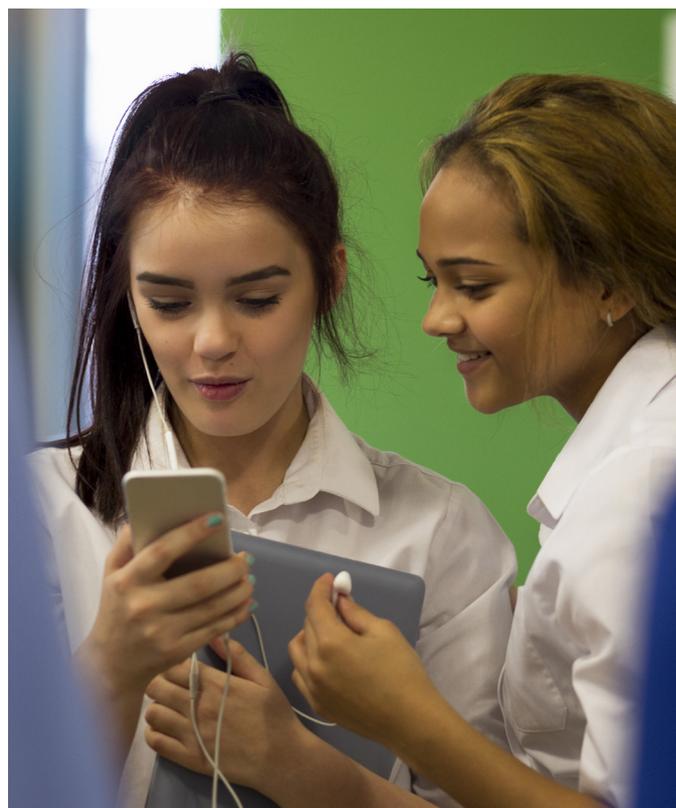
Discussion

This survey took place between November 16 2020 and January 1 2021. It has been informed by children and young people's experiences in an extraordinary and turbulent year. In Englandⁱⁱ the proportion of children and young people with a mental health disorder rose from one in eight in November 2017 to one in six in July 2020.¹⁶ The problem of mental health is escalating into a crisis.

Throughout the last twelve months, the efforts of schools and FE colleges to support the wellbeing and mental health of their students while re-calibrating the way they operate has been extraordinary, and teachers and staff in schools and FE colleges have been praised for their dedication and commitment to their students at such a challenging time. Schools and FE colleges offer places of safety and stability for vulnerable children and young people, particularly during the pandemic which has had such a disproportionate impact on the worst off.

Nevertheless, young people are experiencing uncertainty about exams, concern about loved ones during the pandemic as well as the more recognised challenges of adolescence. These factors make it all the more important to heed the needs and aspirations expressed in this survey, which are real and have a resonance beyond the crisis caused by the pandemic.

The last few years have seen welcome policies and major developments in promoting mental health in education across the UK. Governments in the four nations have developed comprehensive programmes to support the mental health of children and young people, but national lockdowns have put



a huge strain on both students and school staff. It's clear that schools provide a place where children can seek support from friends, have access to adults to talk to and a source of trusted information. However, there remains a concern that almost half of children and young people questioned said they would not speak to an adult at school.

Some young people discuss discrimination or bullying at school, and it is unsurprising, given these experiences, that some students are unhappy at school. However, others are experiencing difficult times at home and may feel more comfortable talking to people outside their family. This demonstrates the importance of having a trusted person available to talk to young people to talk to, to listen and to signpost them to further help whenever it is needed. It also underlines the importance of integrated school support where families are struggling.

ⁱⁱ Definitive figures across Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales over a similar period are unavailable at the time of writing, although international studies suggest the trend is global.

The value of peers should not go unnoticed. Children and young people - particularly during adolescence - deeply value their peer relationships as a source of support. Furthermore, many young people noted that they would be more likely to seek mental health support for a friend than they would for themselves. Ensuring that children and young people can talk among themselves about issues that most concern them is a key part of providing a whole-school approach. Many schools have peer support schemes which can form an integral part of the support network for children and young people when properly implemented within a whole-school approach.

The purpose of a whole-school approach is to ensure that the whole-school space is supportive, meaning that schools should, and often do, work closely with children, young people, parents and carers to ensure that as far as possible students always have someone to turn to for help. This is important from a mental health and a safeguarding perspective.

Parent and carer engagement is important because working together (with mothers, fathers and carers) has been shown to have a promising impact on the wellbeing, attendance, behaviour, sense of school belonging, intellectual development and attainment of children across a range of social and economic backgrounds.¹⁷

This report is based on a self-selecting survey, so it may be that those seeking more support are over-represented. Moreover, no demographic or ethnicity data was collected, and so conclusions about its generalisability are limited. Nevertheless, the sample has demonstrated that young people have expressed a clear desire to learn more about mental health.

While schools may wish to identify what is most needed in their own setting, depression, anxiety, body image, identity and self-harm were consistently identified as key topics where young people want more information and support. This survey also shows that students are highly interested in mental health and are looking for mental health support not just in lessons, but across their school experience.



Conclusion: moving forward together

This is a uniquely challenging time for staff and students in schools and FE colleges. Staff will know that many of their returning students may be struggling with the consequences of lockdown and the impact of the pandemic.

We also know that children and young people at secondary school are living through a developmental period in their lives during which relationships change and boundaries are challenged as young people explore independence. During this period, relationships with adults become more complicated and sometimes conflicted, and young people can start to rely more on their peers.

We should remind ourselves that even before the pandemic, teaching was identified by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) as one of the most stressful professions.¹⁸

In order to rise to this challenge, whole-school approaches are needed. Whole-school approaches draw on the strengths of parents and carers, children and young people, and school and college staff, as well as reaching out to the community for further support from mental health and youth services.

In recent years there has been a move towards understanding what lies behind some challenging behaviour or disengagement from school or college. This is a complex task, and one that requires close understanding between schools and colleges, parents and carers and children and young people themselves.

The full impact of coronavirus and lockdown is yet to be understood, but research indicates a concerning trend in increased mental health problems. This has a significant impact not just on the lives of children, young people and their families, but also on schools and staff themselves.

The return to school offers an opportunity for all schools and colleges to adopt or review their whole-school approach to mental health so that they can be prepared to support their students. In this way they can become mentally healthy schools and best support their students to reach their full potential, ensuring that mental health needs are balanced alongside academic attainment. It is also clear from this research that, although there remains a stigma to mental health, this generation of children and young people actively want to learn and talk about mental health. Schools and FE colleges have an opportunity to recognise and respond to this need.



Recommendations

There is no single template for creating a whole-school approach. However, the approach is founded on the understanding that school boundaries have changed. Everyone has a role to play in supporting children and young people's mental health: this includes all school staff including school leaders, governors, teachers, school site managers, catering assistants, parents and carers, children and young people themselves as well as voluntary organisations and health bodies.

While schools and colleges have rapidly adapted to the new mental health agenda, teacher training does not provide teachers with sufficient knowledge or training in mental health and wellbeing.

Every school and FE college is different. A whole-school approach is dependent on the demographics, social and economic circumstances of the school or FE college and its community. However, there are some important questions that schools and FE colleges along with others can explore. These include:



Leading change

- Do your school or FE college staff have access to evidence-based and quality assured materials about mental health?
- Does your school or FE college have a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing?
- Do you have a member of staff who leads on mental health?
- Is there a school governor with overall lead on mental health?
- Is wellbeing embedded in your school ethos?
- Is there enough time allocated in the timetable to teach mental health and wellbeing?

Working together

- Does your school or college work closely with health and voluntary services so that students can be signposted when they need help?
- Is your whole-school or college approach informed by the views of parents and carers and students?
- How do you work with parents and carers to identify and support children with mental health needs?
- How can you support parents and carers to discuss mental health and wellbeing with their children?

Understanding need

- Children aged 11-13 are least likely to speak to an adult in school about a mental health problem. This is at a time when students are dealing with transition from primary school and may be feeling isolated. What can your school or FE college do to encourage this age group to engage more in mental health?
- Does your school or FE college have a plan to encourage staff to speak to their students and ask them about how they have experienced the impact of the pandemic?
- Does your school or FE college carry out an annual survey of children's mental health and wellbeing?
- Do your school or FE college transition plans address the impact of changing schools, increased work load and exams on new pupils?
- Do you have open discussions about sexual identity, race and other forms of discrimination at your school or FE college?
- Does your school or FE college discuss how you can improve preparation for exams with your pupils?



Promoting wellbeing

- What else can you do as a school or FE college to encourage openness throughout your setting? Students told us they prefer lessons, 1:1 sessions and group discussions. How can your school or college facilitate opportunities?
- Are there trusted adults that children can turn to when they are troubled?
- Do you have a peer support group in your school, and does it give opportunities to address mental health and wellbeing? Are students consulted about the school or college environment?
- Do you have safe spaces in your school or FE college where students can go if they are feeling overwhelmed?
- Is mental health training cascaded to all staff?

Supporting staff

- Does your school or FE college carry out an annual survey of staff wellbeing?
- What actions can you take to improve staff mental health and wellbeing following the pandemic?
- Does your mental health policy include staff wellbeing?
- Do all staff, from teachers to site managers, have an understanding of how they can support students?
- Do staff feel confident discussing mental health with pupils?
- Do staff feel confident that they can report their own mental health and wellbeing problems safely?
- Are you able to offer mental health training for your staff?

Open discussion about mental health is vital. The Mentally Healthy Schools site for secondary schools and FE colleges is designed to provide schools and FE colleges with the information and quality-assured resources they need to support staff, parents and carers and students to meet the needs identified in this survey. Our 5 Steps framework is designed so that schools and colleges can implement their own whole-school approach. Trusted relationships offer the best protection against a mental health problem and these relationships are facilitated by creating an environment in which children and young people feel confident to talk and to listen.

Bringing together these elements requires a major effort, but the impact on children and young people's mental health will be profound. It requires an approach where everyone understands the role they play in promoting mental health and supporting children and young people when they experience problems. The return to school will be difficult. It is likely that significant numbers of children will need increased support. School and college staff will undoubtedly be feeling the strain of the last twelve months. There is, however, also an opportunity to build on the work that schools and colleges have put into place in recent years and to develop an approach in which all education settings are deemed to be mentally healthy schools and colleges.

The Anna Freud Centre's new [Mentally Healthy Schools](#) secondary site has been built and designed to support school staff with information about mental health to share with students. It includes lesson plans, information about policy and over 150 quality assured resources to help staff meet the needs of students.



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Mentally Healthy Schools website

The Anna Freud Centre's [Mentally Healthy Schools](#) website began as a resource for primary school teachers and was launched in 2018 by HRH The Duchess of Cambridge. It is a unique online hub for teachers, providing them with quality assured and trusted resources and information for supporting primary school students' mental health and wellbeing.

Research with teachers and education stakeholders has highlighted the need for a dedicated resource to support secondary students. Three years on from the launch of the primary school site, the Anna Freud Centre is now launching an expansion of the Mentally Healthy Schools website for secondary schools and FE colleges in order to provide specialised resources and support for secondary professionals. The site also includes information about mental health for parents and carers and for students.

Mentally Healthy Schools is a legacy project of Heads Together, the campaign spearheaded by The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. It was developed as a partnership between the Anna Freud Centre, Young Minds and Place2Be. From 1 April 2020 the Anna Freud Centre took full responsibility for the ownership and development of the Mentally Healthy Schools and FE colleges website. The Royal Foundation has supported the first year of the secondary school site's development.

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