

First 'State of the Nation' report marks World Mental Health Day

Friendship, school and a good night's sleep have all been named as key factors in a young person's happiness, in the government's first ever State of the Nation report on children's mental wellbeing.

More than four in five young people aged between 10 and 24 say they are happy with their lives, in research published to mark World Mental Health Day today (Thursday 10 October), rating themselves happiest with their family and friends, their health, their school and their appearance. Bullying, including cyberbullying, remains a key reason for unhappiness or poor wellbeing, especially among teenage girls, while sleep and leisure time were also reported as important factors.

The landmark research fulfils a government commitment to bring together the best evidence on children and young people's wellbeing, identifying trends and drivers so that the right support is in place to help them fulfil their potential.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The pressures young people face today both in and out of school are vastly different to those their parents and grandparents experienced, so we need to listen to what they have to say and act on it.

That's why our new compulsory new health and relationships education will teach pupils from an early age how to build their resilience, notice changes in their wellbeing and how to form healthy relationships, starting with their friends at school. We are also ramping up professional mental health support in schools so that when there is a problem, help is available quickly.

It's encouraging that the overwhelming majority of children say they are happy, but we have a responsibility to do better for those that aren't. We have given teachers the power to tackle bad behaviour like bullying so that school is a safe place for every child to thrive, but today's report helps shine a light on where to focus these efforts.

With recent NHS data finding almost a quarter of older teenage girls (22.4% of 17-19 year olds) have an emotional disorder, the first State of the Nation report looks further into teenage girls' mental and emotional health and finds being bullied, particularly online, is a primary link to poor wellbeing.

Seeing their friends and feeling safe in their neighbourhood also has an

impact on their ability to concentrate and enjoy day-to-day activities. The report also found that one in five young people aged 16 to 24 years old said they had experienced high levels of anxiety even while also rating their happiness and wellbeing as high.

It comes as the Education Secretary visits Chosen Hill School in Cheltenham, one of the 1,600 schools which volunteered to begin delivering the government's new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) before it becomes compulsory in all secondary schools from September 2020. Relationships education and health education will also become compulsory from primary school age.

The new RSHE curriculum is designed to equip children early-on with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their wellbeing, health and relationships, as well as preparing them for adult life in a changing world, so that fewer older children and teenagers feel unprepared and anxious.

Chosen Hill School is also a Mental Health Trailblazer school, in one of the first 25 areas bringing in specialist Mental Health Support Teams [announced](#) last December. Part of the government's Green Paper on transforming children and young people's mental health provision, each of these teams will support around 20 schools and colleges in their area, helping speed up access to specialist services and building on support already in place from school counsellors, nurses, educational psychologists and the voluntary sector. These specialist teams will be rolled out in an additional 48 areas of the country.

Staff for these teams have been training since the start of the year, and build on significant mental health support already in place, including training programmes that bring together the expertise of NHS professionals and school and college staff, those that train senior mental health leads in schools and those that offer mental health first aid training to improve how young people are supported during the school day.

The State of the Nation report, which collated the responses of more than 7,000 young people aged from 10 to 24, identified trends that reinforce the government's emphasis on mobilising mental health awareness and support in schools, including:

- 94% of children felt happy with their family, 91.6% happy with their friends and 94.5% felt they had good or very good health;
- Most young people are happy with their lives, with 82.9% reporting high or very high life satisfaction;
- Age is a clear factor of wellbeing: being older was associated with lower wellbeing;
- Young females were more likely to report that they were recently anxious than males.
- Bullying had the strongest link to teenage girls' emotional wellbeing across adolescence, with seeing friends and getting enough sleep also rating highly;
- There are marked gender differences with experiences of cyberbullying:

females report higher rates than males;

- Women report lower satisfaction with their leisure time than men; and
- Social media did not have a strong association with teenage girls' psychological health.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Looking after our mental health must start at a young age – and our children should feel valued, supported and listened to. It is encouraging this report finds the majority of our young people are happy, but our mental health is an asset – just like our physical health, so it is vital children get the support they need.

We are training a new dedicated mental health workforce in schools and colleges across the country, to ensure quicker access to a range of support and treatments, as well as teaching pupils what good mental health and physical health looks like.

We are also transforming services through the NHS Long Term Plan – backed by an extra £2.3 billion a year – so that 345,000 more children and young people have access to mental health support by 2023/24.

The report delivers on a commitment made last World Mental Health Day to publish an annual report designed to better understand patterns and issues in young people's mental health, alongside guidance for schools to help them measure their students' wellbeing and make sure appropriate support is in place.

This guidance is being developed in consultation with experts from across government and in the charity sector. It will help schools navigate the resources and tools available to them to assess the impact of the pastoral activity they provide for their pupils, as well as advising on any other steps they can take to boost their pupils' mental health and wellbeing, including when and how to seek further specialist support to ensure pupils get the right support at the right time.

Professor Peter Fonagy, CEO of the Anna Freud Centre, says:

I very much welcome this survey and we need to absorb all its findings. It's heartening that four out of five children are happy. However, we cannot ignore the fact that one in five children are not. We should be pleased that so many young people are resilient to the pressures of 21st Century life, and be both prepared to stand by and support those who struggle.

The high level of satisfaction with family relationships is particularly encouraging, given the effort that successive governments and the voluntary sector have made to support good parenting over the past decade. The survey is also important in

highlighting the importance of the community in which our children live and study in determining their potential to achieve happiness.

These findings should remind us that everyone has a role to play in promoting good mental health – and at the Anna Freud Centre, we are playing a key role in this by working with over one million children in schools.