

Press release: PM: mental health training for teachers will “make a real difference to children’s lives”

The government’s pledge to transform mental health services for young people has taken an important step forward with teachers and staff across the country starting training to identify and respond to early signs of mental health problems among pupils.

Delivered by the [social enterprise organisation Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\) England](#), the training was originally announced by the Prime Minister in January as part of a series of measures to address the “hidden injustice” of poor mental health across society.

Around one in 10 children are believed to have a diagnosable mental health disorder, with half of all mental health conditions begin before the age of 14, making it vital that children with early symptoms receive the support they need.

However, research by the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) found that 98% of teachers had come into contact with pupils who were experiencing mental health issues, but only 46% reported receiving training on children’s mental health.

The programme, backed by £200,000 in government funding, will start with 3,000 staff covering every secondary school in England over the next three years and will be extended to primary schools by the end of this Parliament. They will receive practical advice on how to deal with issues such as depression and anxiety, suicide and psychosis, self-harm, and eating disorders.

Participants in the training programme will be invited to become a Youth Mental Health First Aid Champion, and will help to share their knowledge and understanding of mental health across the school and wider community.

It is hoped that this will mean more young people will get fast and appropriate support for emerging mental health problems, and that all children will receive the highest quality pastoral care through their adolescence.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

When I stood on the steps of Downing Street on my first day as Prime Minister, I said that the disparity in mental health services was one of the burning injustices our country faces.

Since then we have announced real progress in tackling this unfairness, and this training will make a real difference to

children's lives by ensuring they have access to sensitive and swift support.

Tackling poor mental health is a huge challenge, and we will keep our promises and meet that challenge with the comprehensive cross-society response that is required.

Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, said:

Teachers provide outstanding pastoral care and support for their pupils, but many have said that they would appreciate more formal training on how to understand and respond to acute mental distress.

We know that identifying symptoms of mental illness in their early stages can help put young people on the road to recovery. This initiative will mean more children can get the fast and sensitive support they need to stay well, and help build a society with far better understanding of mental ill health.

Education Secretary Justine Greening said:

Growing up in today's world is not always easy and for some young people the problems can be acute. That's why we are stepping up our support for children with mental illness to help them become resilient, confident adults who can go as far as their talents will take them.

This new training will give teachers more confidence in tackling mental health issues and build on the fantastic support we know they already give their pupils. It's great that so many schools are taking part and I'd encourage others to follow their lead.

Caroline Hounsell, MHFA England Director and lead of the Youth MHFA in Schools programme, commented, saying:

Mental ill health in young people is a growing health concern, with half of all lifetime cases of mental health issues starting by the age of 14. It's therefore vital that we put the right measures in place to ensure that young people get the help they need and at the earliest possible stage.

We are really pleased to be involved in this government-backed programme and supporting our instructors to deliver this important schools-focused training.

John McKee, Headteacher, Patcham High School, Brighton, commented:

We are delighted to be one of the first schools in the country to be involved in the Youth MHFA in Schools programme.

Around one in 10 children have a diagnosable mental health issue – roughly three children in every classroom – so upskilling frontline school staff to be able to support these children is crucially important.

Sarah Brennan, Chief Executive of YoungMinds, said:

Children and young people today are facing a huge range of pressures, from exam stress to online bullying, which inevitably take a toll on their mental health. Many of these pressures become particularly intense during secondary school so it is important and welcome that mental health first aid training will be available for secondary schools.

This training is a move in the right direction and will help give staff the opportunity to gain confidence and understand mental health better. We hope it will encourage more leadership teams to put student wellbeing at the heart of their school which will benefit both students and schools alike.

Young people need to learn about wellbeing and resilience from a young age, so when they leave school they are equipped to deal with problems and have the confidence to seek help. It is vital that this work is part of a whole-school approach to wellbeing, and that mental health is made a priority across the education system.