



Mental Health in Schools

Curriculum, Inclusion and Pastoral Support
Advice from young people with lived experience of mental health conditions

Fundraising, Awareness and incorporating Mental Health into school culture

East Sussex
Community Voice



Recommendations brought to you by:
The Youth Inspect & Advise Group (IAG)
Youth-Led Mental Health Investigations and Guidance for East Sussex schools





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This report gathers ideas and insight from our 14 Young Volunteers (aged 11-18) who form the Youth Inspect & Advise Group in East Sussex, hosted by East Sussex Community Voice.

Our volunteers (who participate as School Wellbeing Inspectors) were recruited through both schools and youth groups (including the East Sussex Youth Cabinet, CAMHS Download Group, Seaford Youth Forum, SCDA Newhaven Young People's Forum, Hastings Youth Council, The Youth PPI Cafe, and the Children in Care Council).

With lots of lived experience of mental health, we strive to share our recommendations with professionals to help them guide other young people through the challenges that they might face in schools.

We hope you find this guide useful and that it helps you to support the development of a whole school approach to supporting youth wellbeing!





Contents

This report provides you with Young People's Mental Health Awareness Tips on:

1. Online Resources & Social Media
2. The Role of Friends and Peers
3. Charity Support & Fundraising
4. Knowledge of Comorbidity
5. Available Support Services

Developing Mental Health Awareness through Online Resources & Social Media

In our experience, resources shared online via Instagram stories are useful and provide realistic, practical advice. These resources are often presented as infographics, making them accessible and easy to understand, as well as giving insight into various different perspectives on how young people can deal with their mental health.



East Sussex Community Voice have released a separate resource on social media. Check it out on our website: www.escv.org.uk





Developing Mental Health Awareness through Friends and Peers

We believe there is a gap in **knowledge** and **understanding** for young people in supporting friends with mental health issues.

Also a lack of **acknowledgment** of the impact of our friends' difficulties on our own mental health can leave young people feeling frustrated that they should be doing more to help, **but do not know what to do**.

We advise and believe it to be the duty of schools to deliver mental health teaching that considers the perspective and role of friends and peers.

It is not only young people directly struggling with mental health difficulties that need support in learning and gaining awareness of coping mechanisms, but also their **friends and peers who often act as a 'first point of contact' when we seek support.**



Teaching young people how to help their friends with mental health difficulties can be an effective tool for reaching the most vulnerable and inaccessible students, owing to the trusting relationships between friends that may not be established between teachers and students.

This teaching can also help maintain relationships between peers as it can be very damaging for young people with mental health issues if their peers/friends approach the issues in an insensitive or inappropriate way.



This teaching could involve **advising young people how to initiate mental health conversations between friends in a non-invasive or confrontational way, for example by sharing their own experiences first in order to create a relatable and comfortable environment open to further discussion.**

Schools should **signpost information** about where to find additional help in and outside their schools so friends and peers are equipped with resources they can share.



However, **schools tend to overly focus on passive, informative mental health teaching - we believe schools need to also provide advice and active guidance on how to help friends/others as well as yourself**, in order to support young people with putting knowledge and information into practice in the real world.

Developing Mental Health Awareness through Charity Support and Fundraising

We believe that supporting and fundraising for mental health charities is an effective way of spreading awareness on mental health and emotional wellbeing within the school or college.

Mistakes to avoid:

- **Targeting just adults - resulting in students and young people not attending and not being exposed to the awareness or message of the fundraiser.**



- Raising donations for charities - without meaningfully raising awareness. Schools need to tackle the difficult elements of fundraising that include mental health teaching. This teaching could involve an assembly (see our advice on assemblies), PSHE lessons and/or informative leaflets.
- Having one off events - schools should support their students in having regular events which can be used to supplement mental health teaching in lessons by aligning the theme/topic.
- Avoid tokenism - plan and organise events alongside students (for example, through student bodies such as school councils), ensuring they have direct roles and responsibility in the delivering of the event.



Key Example - Bake & Cake Sales

We believe bake sales can be an effective tool for raising awareness on specific mental health topics, as long as effort is put in to address the mental health aspect rather than simply being a cake selling event. To do this, we advise that bake sales should be shaped around a specific theme.

In our experience, central themes such as LGBTQ+, with all cakes decorated with different flags representing the varying sexualities and genders, have been effective by increasing exposure.

We also advise that bake sales provide leaflets or sheets with helpful sign-posting and/or information on the specific mental health theme that can be discreetly accessed by being placed next to the cakes.

We encourage bake sales that follow our advice, as they can be much more accessible and targeted at young people.

Overall, we recommend that charity events are used to provide:

- 1) External Support by fundraising for the community.
- 2) Internal Support, such as distributing leaflets and information for students within the school





Developing Mental Health Awareness through Knowledge of Comorbidity

We believe **there are gaps in young people's knowledge on comorbidity and the interlinked and interwoven nature of illnesses that may occur at the same time or worsen each other. Mental health difficulties are often not caused by a singular disorder, but by the interaction of many.** Schools can help **paint a wider picture of mental health and support students in understanding its complexity by including comorbidity in the curriculum.**

Developing Mental Health Awareness through available support services

Another gap in our peers' knowledge may be self-awareness and the ability for young people to gauge where they are with their mental health and what type of support they may need. We advise that schools facilitate opportunities for young people to use flow diagrams to explain and visually present where they feel they are with their mental health in order to identify issues and how they can get help.

Self-help for mental health difficulties is often promoted, but we believe **schools should equally educate students on the possibilities for professional support.**

In our experience, **in-school counselling services can be very useful for students, but are often not accessed until much later than they should have been.** Alongside this, in-school counselling is usually capped at **four/five sessions per student, which is an insufficient amount to make any meaningful difference.** When considering the long waiting lists for external services like CAMHS, **we advise schools to increase the awareness of, accessibility and availability of in-school counselling services.**





Other reports in this series:

- Teaching and learning tips for mental health in the curriculum
- Transition - supporting new Year 7s
- Prevention of bullying
- Using Social Media and the relationship between Social Media and wellbeing



Check out www.escv.org.uk for more youth-led recommendations on mental health and emotional wellbeing.





Thank you and About Us

This consultation and report was brought to you by East Sussex Community Voice (ESCV).

ESCV is an independent Community Interest Company (Reg no. 8270069) set up to champion the voices of the public.



We deliver the Healthwatch functions in East Sussex, It Takes a Village to Raise A Child (VRAC), The Youth Inspect & Advise Group, and we also commission NHS Complaints Advocacy in East Sussex.

Please get in touch with ESCV to hear more about our projects and the young people who work with us.

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