**Introduction**

Mental health conditions are widespread and most of us will either experience one, or know of someone who has experienced one. The term mental health covers many different conditions. Mood problems are common involving both low mood (depression) and less commonly over excitable mood (or mania). Anxiety is another common problem. Features of mental distress may include self-harm or eating disorders. This is not a complete list and there are varying degrees of severity.

In recent years is has become increasingly common for people in the public eye to speak openly and honestly about ill health and how it has affected their lives. Such openness has undoubtedly made progress in lessening the stigma around mental ill health, but much still remains today. **The reason for providing this “Toolkit” of resources is to provide a compendium of resources to support pupils that show early signs of any mental health condition.** It is the aim that it will enable staff to support pupils with the coping mechanisms to deal with everyday life and what it sometimes throws at us. By acquiring these skills and knowledge pupils will be better placed to help themselves with daily dilemmas.

Research tells us that child and young people suffering mental health conditions don’t want to be medicalised growing up and are interested in learning about how to help themselves wherever possible. Locally this has been re-iterated at the Student Conference. Young people have said that having someone to talk to is key.

**The Landscape**

The Wellbeing and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out a shared purpose and drives to achieve a better and lasting quality of life for us all. This shared purpose is represented by an integrated set of seven wellbeing goals. **This strategy focuses on the development of healthier (goal1) and more resilient (goal2) children and young people.** It links with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) Act 2014 and the proposed ALN Bill bringing together local authorises duties and functions in relation to improving the wellbeing of people who need care and support. This includes a shift in focus towards preventative and early identification needs.

**Statutory Duties and the New Curriculum**

All schools have a **Statutory duty, (Section 28 of the Children Act 2004),** to exercise their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their pupils.

In Wales the social and emotional needs of children and young people are underpinned by the Welsh Government’s **Personal and Social Education Curriculum framework**. The curriculum focus for **personal, social development** within the **Foundation Phase** is also an important component of the work being carried out by schools. The **curriculum** **reforms where health and wellbeing has been identified as one of six key areas** of learning will also help in building knowledge, understanding and skills that will enable children and young people to **develop positive and appropriate relationships, deal with difficult issues and decisions they will face and learn to live independently.**

The diagram and definition below clearly shows the Public Health Wales definition of Wellbeing and of the precarious balance between coping skills and challenges.



**How can schools make a difference?**

Schools are invariably well placed to identify early signs of emotional and mental health issues and are therefore best placed to address any issues before they become more severe. We want our children and young people to realise their own abilities to cope with the normal stresses of life, be ready to learn, work productively and make a contribution to their community.

**Expectations**

* To have emotional and spiritual resilience which enable Child and Young People to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of wellbeing and underlying belief in their own, and others’ dignity and worth. (World health Organisation, 2004)
* To be an emotionally literate person, able to **know and explain their own feelings, manage their emotional life**, be **persistent in the face of difficulties, show empathy** and **understanding of others’ emotions**, and **handle relationships with skill**. (Whitehead, M. 2014)
* To be **physically literate** having the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life (Whitehead, M. 2014)

**Interventions are only part of the picture**

This “Toolkit” provides a compendium of resources to use with pupils who have emotional and mental health issues. **The success of intervention and prevention efforts are not just attributed to any given programme per se, but rather to the way in which the programme is implemented and embedded in a school that is coping with an extensive set of daily demands and priorities. (It’s not what you do it’s the way that you do it).**

Banerjee et al (2016) argue that school-based work on emotional health, wellbeing and resilience needs to be situated within an **integrated school systems approach** where it is ***connected with*** - rather than **competing with** - other school priorities, so as to **avoid an approach** where the work is seen as **‘something else’** that schools need to do. It requires a whole school approach for real sustained success.

**Final thoughts**

Research shows that **schools matter greatly** in terms of children’s emotional health, wellbeing and resilience, as well as their academic achievement. School based activities have the potential to make **significant and lasting positive impacts** on young people’s wellbeing. A variety of **high-quality** and **evidence-based programmes** provide excellent **guidance and resources** for supporting school-based activities in this area.

We need to be mindful that children’s emotional health, wellbeing and resilience is **complex** and remember the school as a **web of connected systems** that impacts on young people including the **school ethos, school systems and range of interventions**. It is the aim of this resource to provide a toolkit for all to access for both whole school and targeted support for children and young people in order to develop more of a bounce back culture.

**Behaviour Support-what can we offer**

The Behaviour Support Team in Merthyr offers an advisory and consultation service to schools on behaviour strategies. The team can provide support for individual pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties this can be used to work effectively with families and carers to develop a programme of targeted preventative strategies to improve behaviour. Over the years, the team has developed effective working partnerships with schools and other external agencies. Attendance at multi-agency meetings can be arranged in order to support schools and offer appropriate alternatives when a pupil is on the cusp of exclusion.

Behaviour Support Team – 01685 724823/ 725067