

## Child mental health

**Mental ill health is often a taboo subject; however, it is important that we are willing and able to support children and young people who experience it. With an estimated 1 in 6 children suffering from some form of mental ill health in their childhood this is not something that can be ignored.**

### Definition

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right.

World Health Organisation

### What can promote good mental health?

- Good physical health – includes a healthy, balanced diet and exercise / movement.
- Safe environment to explore and develop – includes learning through making mistakes and the need to do things differently.
- Belonging and support – feeling loved, valued and safe, having people to turn to in times of difficulty and knowing they will help rationalise what is happening. This supports development of good social and emotional skills, helping them learn how to problem solve, manage and deal with anxieties.

### Mental ill health

At least 1 in 4 people in the UK will have a mental health problem at some point in their lives, so in the average group of 30 this means

at least 7 will be likely to experience a mental health problem in their lifetime. Research published by Digital NHS UK suggests that:

- around five children and young adults (aged 6-19 years) in every class of 30 pupils have a probable mental disorder;
- 13% of 11–16-year-olds have possible eating problems;
- problems with sleep affect over a quarter (28.7%) of 6- to 10-year-olds and over a third (38.4%) of 11 to 16 year olds.

### Self-harm and suicide

There are a lot of myths around about children and young people who self-harm. Self-harm is not attention seeking behaviour nor does it mean that the person is thinking about taking their own life (although there is an increased risk of suicidal thoughts in those who self-harm). For some, suicide may seem to be the only way of dealing with what they are experiencing. Conversations about suicide can be difficult, but they are as equally important as conversations about mental health in general. Guidance identifies that asking / talking about suicide can save lives, even though it can be painful or scary.

### Stigma

Many people face stigma from others, including friends and family, based on a lack of understanding and knowledge about mental ill-health. It is important to arm yourselves with knowledge and include it in the curriculum in your setting.

### What helps

Resolving these sorts of issues is not something that any one individual can sort out – always seek support and follow your safeguarding procedures.