Mental health issues in schools: 
UK perspectives

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Outline

• Identifying children and young people at risk
• The development of services for students, families and schools
• Recent initiatives on prevention, intervention and support
• Some current and future challenges
Identifying children at risk

- Vulnerable groups
- Additional risk factors
- Protective factors
- Strategies of identification

Vulnerable groups

- Looked after children
- Young people in contact with the youth justice system
- Children with disabilities or learning difficulties
- Children of refugee and asylum seeking families
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers of school age
- Children in families living in poverty
- Children of armed forces personnel
Additional risk factors

- Temperamental risk factors
- Negative personal experiences
- Direct and indirect impact of damaging experiences in the family
- Failure of normal family support
- Stigma, hostility and neglect at school and in society at large

Protective factors and sources of resilience

- Ability to communicate feelings, wishes and needs
- Ability to cope with stress
- Adaptability
- Capacity to act autonomously with feelings of mastery and control
- Feelings of security and confidence (linked to early attachment and bonding)
- Problem solving skills
- Pro-social behaviour
- Self-esteem
- Skills in negotiating with peers and managing conflict
What does this mean? (Adapted from Baxter, 2009)

- Those most at risk of mental health problems can be identified and targeted for particular help and support.
- Intervention can be planned to promote mental health both universally and for targeted vulnerable groups and individuals.
- Public policy can be designed to mitigate risk.
- It is possible to promote resilience at different levels – nationally, communally, within families and individuals.

Key issues in childhood identification

- Is earlier always better?
- What risks arise from false positives and false negatives?
- Are the costs reasonable and commensurate with the benefits that will be obtained?
- Can a balance be struck in attending to visible and invisible disabilities associated with poor mental health?
- How can parents best be involved?
- How can full collaboration be achieved between all who work with a child?
- How can the process be given a low profile?
Preventive work in schools

- The school as a key location for enhancement and repair
  - Transitions, challenges, protections, support

- School ethos and the pastoral care tradition
  - The historical roots of the pastoral tradition in UK schools
  - Responsibility for promoting social and emotional development

- Mental health promotion in the curriculum
  - Curriculum priorities and preparation for citizenship
  - The development of the SEAL initiative
  - Time and space for reflection, silence and calm

The development of services for support and intervention

- Changes in the funding, communication and coordination in multi-agency services over time

- Recent national and local initiatives (including Every Child Matters, CAMHS Review, TaMHS and local responses)
The organisation of child guidance (1974)

Four separate services contribute staff and have joint working arrangements for a child guidance service:

- School psychological services (Education)
- Child psychiatric services (Health - regional)
- Social work services (Social Services)
- Child health services (Health - district)
Some recent national and local initiatives

• *Every Child Matters*

• *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Review*

• *Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TaMHS project)*

• Local initiatives to meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups

• *Code of Practice on age-appropriate environments for young psychiatric patients*

Some current and future challenges

• Should SEAL be compulsory?

• Are we relying too much on prevention and early intervention?

• Can funding of preventive projects and specialist services be sustained and enhanced in the future?

• Can we develop a framework that takes account of the child mental health implications when designing changes in policy and regulation?

• Can we develop a smoother transition route from child to adult mental health services?

• Can we translate inclusive education into inclusive employment for psychologically vulnerable individuals such as those with Asperger’s syndrome?