



**Pastoral Care  
And  
Emotional  
Well-Being  
DRAFT Policy**

<b>Review of Policy</b>	September 2023
<b>Ratification of Policy by the Board of Governors</b>	October 2023
<b>Next Review Date</b>	September 2024

## **What is Pastoral Care?**

Pastoral Care is a set of systems, procedures and programmes which attempt to meet the totality of needs of children so that each child has the opportunity to reach his/her potential and is equipped with the skills to cope with life. Pastoral Care addresses social, spiritual, mental, emotional and physical needs.

## **What is mental health?**

The terminology regarding emotional health, emotional wellbeing and mental health can often be used interchangeably. The World Health Organisation's definition of mental health was recently amended to take on a more child focused dimension, a change influenced by young people from Northern Ireland during the European Network of Ombudspersons (ENOC) Annual Conference 2018:

'A state of wellbeing that allows children to develop and become aware of their own unique personality, to build their own identity, to fulfil their own potential, to cope with the challenges of growing up; to feel loved, secure and accepted as unique individuals and to be able to be happy, play, learn and to participate and contribute to family and community.'

We all have mental health. Your mental health affects how you feel, think and act. It refers to your emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. Your mental health can change on a daily basis and over time and can be affected by a range of factors.

Mental health and well-being is not just the absence of mental health problems. We want all children to:

- feel confident in themselves
- be able to express a range of emotions appropriately
- be able to make and maintain positive relationships with others
- cope with the stresses of everyday life
- manage times of stress and be able to deal with change
- learn and achieve

## **Why is emotional wellbeing important?**

There is substantial evidence to show that emotional wellbeing impacts every aspect of a child's life, and indeed carries through to adulthood. In particular, the Early Intervention Foundation (2015) reviewed social and emotional wellbeing at age 10 across a range of characteristics, and found that positive emotional wellbeing, in particular self-control, self-regulation and self-awareness, were a strong predictor of adult outcomes.

Positive emotional wellbeing in childhood has been shown to contribute to the following:

- Better long term mental and physical health
- Strong academic success
- Stable employment
- Reduced experience of risk-taking and/or criminal behaviours

When children have good levels of wellbeing it helps them to:

- ✓ learn and explore the world
- ✓ feel, express and manage positive and negative emotions
- ✓ form and maintain good relationships with others
- ✓ cope with, and manage, change, setbacks and uncertainty
- ✓ develop and thrive.

When children look after their mental health and develop their coping skills it can help them to boost their resilience, self-esteem and confidence. It can also help them learn to manage their emotions, feel calm, and engage positively with their education - which can, in turn, improve their academic attainment.

## **Rationale**

Society today presents children with many challenges; socially, emotionally, physically, academically and morally, they encounter many difficulties. Peer pressure, child abuse, low self-esteem and media influences have become more prevalent. Pastoral care in St. Mary's Primary School is a priority. It is acknowledged as playing a crucial role in the development of the ethos in the school. This ethos is based on Catholic Christian values with emphasis on the intellectual, moral, emotional and spiritual development of each pupil. The staff are acutely aware of the challenges and influences that children may encounter in their daily lives and we want our pupils to achieve their fullest potential in a safe, happy and stimulating environment supported by the whole school community. We recognise that central to the success of our pastoral care provision is the involvement of parents and outside agencies within the community. We strive to work in partnership with them to achieve our aims.

## **Guiding Principles**

1. Pastoral Care and learning are inextricably linked. Wellbeing is integral to school engagement and successful learning and successful learning is a key contributor to positive lifelong wellbeing outcomes.
2. Parents have the primary responsibility for the development of their child's wellbeing. It is important for families and communities to collaborate as partners with the school to support attendance, pupil learning, safety, and wellbeing
3. Pastoral care is a unique and core value of catholic schools. Pastoral care fosters the physical, emotional, academic, social, moral and spiritual growth and wellbeing of every person and is integrated throughout the teaching and learning process.
4. Pupil wellbeing is most effective through a whole school approach and when
  - prioritised by leadership and adequately resourced
  - pupils are active participants in their wellbeing
  - embedded within policy, curriculum, culture, and everyday practice
  - implemented using a multi-tiered system of support
  - grounded in Catholic teaching and tradition
  - within a safe and supportive environment
5. Wellbeing underpins curriculum planning and pedagogy and is demonstrated through the actions, interactions, and attitudes of all school community members.
6. Teaching and learning wellbeing skills, including social and emotional skills, is a parallel, integrated, complementary process of broader academic learning.
7. Wellbeing is dependent upon, and nurtured through positive, authentic relationships. Relationships within Catholic school communities value the dignity of the person, promoting connection, safety, trust and respect for all.
8. Pupil voice is valued and important in informing decision-making and when reflecting on the teaching and learning environment, culture and pedagogy. By working in partnership with pupils, staff and the broader community, schools are able to promote inclusion and foster belonging.
9. The wellness of teachers is critical to the education, behaviour and mental health of young people. Staff and pupil wellbeing are linked and therefore it is important that schools focus on supporting both staff and pupil wellbeing.
10. There are some pupils who will require additional and targeted support in schools when experiencing emotional wellbeing difficulties.

## Context

Increasing concern has been raised around the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children.

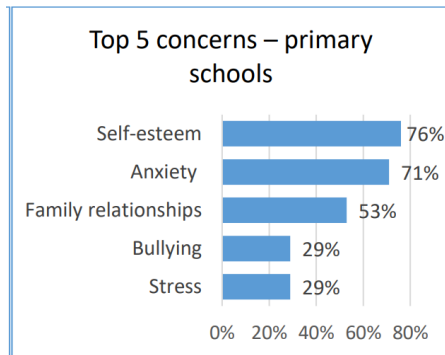
- The Youth Mental Health Committee (made up of young people from Belfast Youth Forum, NI Youth Forum and Children's Law Centre) report that 91% of respondents think mental ill-health is a 'huge issue' for young people in NI, with concerns focused on stigma, lack of safe spaces to talk about emotional wellbeing, and the need to enhance education and information on positive wellbeing.
- Research from Action for Children (2018) surveyed over 5000 young people in schools and found that a third of young people aged 15-18 are struggling with mental ill-health and need further support.
- More than 20% of young people are suffering "significant mental health problems" by their 18th birthday (DHSSPS, 2010)
- 45,000 children in NI have a mental health problem (NI Assembly, 2017)
- 12 young people (under 19) died by suicide in 2017 (NISRA, 2018)
- 2,706 young people (under 18) were in receipt of anti-depressant medication in 2017 (NICCY, 2018)
- The Prince's Trust Macquarie Youth Index (2018) survey results of young people aged 16 to 25 shows that young people's self-perceived happiness and confidence levels are at the lowest since 2009.
- In 2020, 13,348 referrals were made to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services in Northern Ireland.
- One in 10 children in Northern Ireland experience anxiety or depression, which is around 25% higher than in other UK jurisdictions. (Bunting, L. et al, (2020) Youth Wellbeing Child and Adolescent Prevalence Study).
- In 2018, 759 young people took their own life in the UK and Republic of Ireland.
- There are serious concerns about the number of young people self-harming. Self-harm is often used as a way of trying to obtain relief from emotional distress or expressing feelings that are difficult to communicate. Dr Bernadka Dubicka, chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' child and adolescent mental health faculty, said data from NHS Digital showed that 41% of all admissions to hospital for self-harm were teenagers. "What we are seeing year on year clinically is more young people presenting self-harm in A&E and admissions to paediatric beds and mental health units."

EA completed their Regional Assessment of Need (2018) and a significant part of this research involved a survey of over 11,000 children and young people; findings showed the following top issues:

- Exam Stress
- Boredom
- Body Image
- Confidence
- Mental Health
- Bullying
- Racism
- Internet Safety
- Physical Health
- Making positive relationships
- Lack of confidence

## Top emotional wellbeing concerns

The Department of Education (DE) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) commissioned the National Children's Bureau (NCB) to undertake a research study to inform the development of an emotional health and wellbeing framework for children and young people in Northern Ireland. (May 2019) The graph below highlights the top issues reported by schools in response to the school survey carried out by NCB.



### Factors contributing to poor emotional wellbeing

Research evidence has shown there are a number of key risk factors which increase the chance of a child developing emotional wellbeing difficulties, and/or mental ill health.

These risk factors include:

- Membership of a minority group
- Sexual orientation
- Having a disability or special educational needs
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) For example, domestic violence, a parent with a mental health condition, being the victim of abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional), being the victim of neglect (physical and emotional), a member of the household being in prison, growing up in a household where adults have drug or alcohol problems.
- Poverty
- Parenting and family relationship difficulties and conflicts
- Poor attachment in infancy
- Parental ill-health

### Contemporary pressures

Alongside the key risk factors discussed above, children face a number of contemporary pressures throughout childhood which may contribute to poor emotional wellbeing and/or mental health. Some of the more common pressures include:

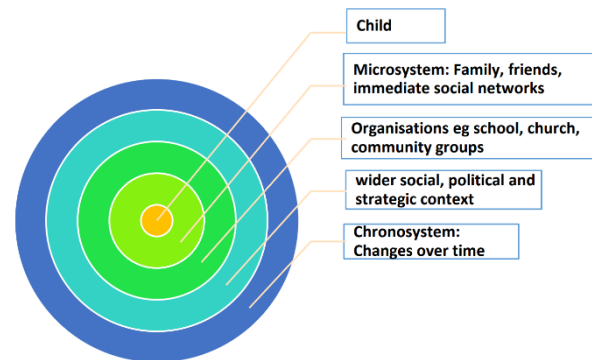
- **Pressure to achieve academically.** In 2014, NSPCC reported a 13% increase from the previous year in calls to Childline for academic pressures, and this trend has continued in recent years. While some pressure can be beneficial, extreme exam stress is a particular concern, and calls to Childline increase dramatically during exam months
- **The online world.** The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), and Young Health Movement, highlight that while the online world undoubtedly has massive benefits for children and young people, it can also be a contributing factor in mental ill-health. Social isolation is one such concern, particularly for young people involved in gaming who spend a lot of time alone in the house. Lack of sleep due to the constant presence of technology, the blue light of computer and phone screens, and the social pressure to communicate online at all times of night are all areas of concern supported by emerging evidence, as are the unrealistic expectations created by the world of social media and the associated FoMo (fear of missing out), which have been shown to decrease self-esteem and increase anxiety and risk of depression. There has also been a rise in websites promoting self-harm, anorexia and suicidal ideation. The RSPH, (2017) report that social media increases anxiety among young people, increases the opportunity for bullying and can have negative effects on body image and self-esteem. Online interactions can create pressure to conform to unrealistic expectations relating to physical appearance and lifestyle and can present a risk of exploitation and extortion.

## Supporting emotional wellbeing in children

Supporting positive emotional wellbeing in children is not the sole responsibility of one person, organisation or department. It requires a combined effort of all those working with, supporting and interacting with the child.

The whole-child approach Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model (Figure 1 below) sees the child at the centre of a number of influences, such as family, school or community. Each plays a role individually, and interacts with others, to influence the life of the child. Those closer to the centre will play a larger role than those further out.

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



Parents/carers, wider family and friends, school, youth organisations and the wider community all have a key role in:

- Supporting the development of positive emotional wellbeing
- Identifying concerns as and when they arise and before they escalate
- Ensuring that the child can access additional support if/when needed

## A Whole School Approach to Promoting Positive Mental Health and Emotional Well-being

We take a whole school approach to promoting positive mental health and emotional well-being that aims to help pupils become more resilient, be happy and successful and prevent problems before they arise. This encompasses seven aspects:

1. Creating an ethos, policies and behaviours that support mental health and resilience that everyone understands
2. Helping pupils to develop social relationships, support each other and seek help when they need to
3. Helping pupils to be resilient learners
4. Teaching pupils social and emotional skills and an awareness of mental health
5. Early identification of pupils who have mental health needs and planning support to meet their needs, including working with specialist services
6. Effectively working with parents and carers
7. Supporting staff to develop their skills and resilience

We also recognise the role that stigma can play in preventing understanding and awareness of mental health issues and aim to create an open and positive culture that encourages discussion and understanding of mental health issues. We aim to be a 'talking school' with an 'Open Door Policy'.

## **The Role of Parents**

We recognise the important role parents and carers have in promoting and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children, and in particular supporting their children with mental health needs. Evidence shows that the first few years of a child's life are critical in terms of social and emotional wellbeing. This means that the role of parents is central, particularly in the early years. Parents have a key role to play in building the skills necessary for strong emotional wellbeing such as resilience, coping and positive self-esteem. It is important that parents can identify concerns in their child's behaviour and know where to go to seek help if required. Parenting programmes including Parenting NI have a range of programmes available, which support parents to build a supportive home environment, develop communication skills and tools for boundary setting, deal with stress, increase knowledge and understanding of child development. Early Years services such as Sure Starts play a critical role in early emotional wellbeing, in particular supporting maternal mental health and the wider role of new parents, and therefore in encouraging strong attachment and development of resilience in babies and toddlers. A wide range of family support services are available, delivered by large voluntary organisations such as NSPCC, Barnardos, or Action for Children, as well as smaller community-based services including the Family Support Hub.

## **The Role of School**

At St Mary's, we aim to promote positive mental health and well-being for our whole school community; pupils, staff, parents and carers, and recognise how important mental health and emotional well-being is to our lives in just the same way as physical health. We recognise that children's mental health is a crucial factor in their overall wellbeing and can affect their learning and achievement.

Our role in school is to ensure that the children are able to manage times of change and stress, be resilient, are supported to reach their potential and access help when they need it. We also have a role to ensure that pupils learn about what they can do to maintain positive mental health, what affects their mental health, how they can help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues and where they can go if they need help and support.

Research shows that schools matter greatly in terms of children's emotional health, well-being and resilience, as well as their academic achievement. The effects can be long-lasting and can be an important part of a child's supportive and protective processes. Early intervention in childhood can help reduce physical and mental health problems in later life.

On average, children spend more than 7700 hours in compulsory education, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2014). This, coupled with the evidence that parents are more likely to seek advice from their child's teacher if they have a concern about their child's mental health (Young Minds and NCB, 2017) means that schools are ideally placed to support emotional wellbeing, particularly across the life course. The school day provides a substantial opportunity to promote positive wellbeing, identify mental health concerns and support pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

The Department for Education (NI) recognises that, "Educational settings have a unique role in the lives of children & young people and play a central role in creating the optimum environment for the development of their personality, abilities and talents, supporting their disabilities, promoting their wellbeing and identifying and responding to children's mental health difficulties. Indeed, for some of our most vulnerable children, educational settings can be a refuge away from other aspects of their life and in this act as a protective factor".

Schools can be a place for children to experience a nurturing and supportive environment that has the potential to develop self-esteem and give positive experiences for overcoming adversity and building resilience. For some, school will be a place of respite from difficult home lives and offer positive role models and relationships, which are critical in promoting pupils' well-being and can help engender a sense of belonging and community.

At St Mary's Primary School, we believe that we have a valuable role to play in identifying and meeting the needs of pupils with respect to emotional health and well-being and that school-based activities have the potential to make significant and lasting positive impacts on our pupil's well-being.

In St. Mary's we do this through teaching health and wellbeing education (Personal Development and Mutual Understanding) and weaving these topics and skills throughout the broader curriculum and school life. Health and wellbeing will be reinforced throughout the curriculum and the time that the child is in school. Through developing the children's social and emotional skills we aim to help them understand and manage their feelings, develop empathy, establish positive relationships, set goals, build resilience and boost self-esteem and confidence.

Our aim is to help develop the protective factors which build resilience to mental health problems and be a school where:

- all pupils are valued
- pupils have a sense of belonging and feel safe
- pupils feel able to talk openly with trusted adults about their problems without feeling any stigma
- positive mental health is promoted and valued
- bullying is not tolerated

### **Aims**

At St Mary's Primary School, we have a supportive and caring ethos and we are committed to supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of our pupils. We view relationships as central to pastoral care, happiness and wellbeing. All members of St Mary's staff have a responsibility for the pastoral care and wellbeing of the pupils. Our team of staff support pupils' needs, encouraging and supporting them in every aspect of their learning journey as they form new relationships with both children and adults and learn about managing their own feelings and behaviour.

We know that everyone experiences life challenges that can make us vulnerable and at times, anyone may need additional emotional support. We are committed to identifying those children in need of intervention and ensuring that additional support is provided to address their individual needs.

It will be our aim in St. Mary's Cabragh to ensure that the children:

- Understand their emotions and feelings better
- Feel comfortable sharing any concerns or worries
- Develop a sense of worth, uniqueness and self-esteem.
- Develop an understanding of themselves as individuals, recognising their strengths and areas for improvement, their personal qualities, their attitudes and values.
- Develop good communication skills.
- Develop good relationships, and identify the features of healthy relationships both within the school and wider community
- Develop a healthy, safe lifestyle and make and act on informed decisions including e -safety
- Achieve to the best of their ability.
- Develop emotional resilience and manage setbacks
- Feel safe within a stimulating school environment.
- Understand and practise acceptable behaviour.
- Are equipped to manage their academic, personal and social lives in a positive, safe and healthy way
- Understand and follow boundaries and rules



We recognise that there are common competencies which support emotional wellbeing, such as:

- ✓ Resilience
- ✓ self-regulation
- ✓ motivation
- ✓ self-awareness
- ✓ problem-solving skills.

We will use a range of approaches to strengthen these characteristics and skills and will focus on the following:

- Self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-belief
- Emotional literacy, including recognising and managing emotions
- Motivation and associated factors such as problem solving, persistence, resilience
- Relationship building, empathy and compassion

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

We believe that all staff have a responsibility to promote positive mental health, and to understand about protective and risk factors for mental health. Some children will require additional help and all staff should have the skills to look out for any early warning signs of mental health problems and ensure that pupils with mental health needs get early intervention and the support they need.

All staff understand about possible risk factors that might make some children more likely to experience problems; such a physical long-term illness, having a parent who has a mental health problem, death and loss, including loss of friendships, family breakdown and bullying. They also understand the factors that protect children from adversity, such as self-esteem, communication and problem-solving skills, a sense of worth and belonging and emotional literacy.

### **Lead Members of Staff**

Whilst all staff have a responsibility for pastoral care provision and to promote the mental health of pupils, staff with a specific, relevant remit include:

- Miss Lauren Cush (Designated Child Protection Officer and Wellbeing Ambassador)
- Mrs Donna Quinn (Deputy Designated Child Protection Officer)
- Mrs Louise Quinn (School Principal)
- Mrs Eilis Kelly (SENCO)

Their duties shall include:

- Keeping up to date with all relevant legislation.
- Keeping teachers and ancillary staff informed as to their responsibilities.
- Providing advice and support to staff and organising training and updates.
- First point of contact and communicates with mental health services.
- Leads on and makes referrals to services.
- Leads on and works with other staff to coordinate whole school activities to promote positive mental health.
- Keeping a record of any concerns notified to them by any members of staff (teaching or non-teaching) outside agencies or others.
- Keeping the governors informed.
- Reporting any suspected abuse to the relevant authorities.
- Supporting the child and the class teacher.

These lead members of staff are responsible for the Pastoral Care and Wellbeing Policy throughout the school. Any member of staff who is concerned about the mental health, wellbeing or safety of a pupil should speak to the lead in the first instance and record their concerns.

We recognise that many behaviours and emotional problems can be supported within the school environment, or with advice from external professionals. Some children will need more intensive support at times, and there are a range of mental health professionals and organisations that provide support to pupils with mental health needs and their families. Support includes:

- Safeguarding/Child Protection Team
- Support staff to manage mental health needs of pupils (Mrs Kathryn Tierney)
- SENCO who helps staff understand their responsibilities to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including pupils whose mental health problems mean they need special educational provision.
- Relax Kids
- The Calm Kit (Katy Carey)
- School nurse
- CAMHS
- Counselling Services
- Art/Play/Lego Therapy
- Education Welfare Officer
- School Psychologist

### **Board of Governors**

The Board of Governors play a very active role in the management of the school and the pastoral care and wellbeing of all of the children is at the centre of all their decisions. The principal's documentation at each meeting informs governors of Pastoral or Child Protection issues.

The Board of Governors of St. Mary's sees its role with regard to Pastoral care as follows:

- To ensure it is effectively meeting its statutory obligations.
- To ensure that the safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff in St. Mary's is safeguarded and promoted.
- To ensure that roles, responsibilities, procedures and practices of the school are clear to all and are implemented systematically and consistently.
- To ensure through effective monitoring and evaluation that further developments and training issues are addressed.

### **The Principal**

The Principal will work with Governors and school staff to ensure the policy and practice is consistent with statutory requirements. The Principal retains overall responsibility for the school and school life, including Pastoral Care. The school principal is responsible for:

- Prioritising student wellbeing within the school community, policy and school development plans.
- Planning, embedding and evaluating a whole school approach to student wellbeing within the school's overall vision, philosophy of learning, catholic faith and tradition.
- Promoting a shared belief and understanding that all staff and pupils are responsible and accountable for contributing to a positive, safe and supportive learning environment
- Appointing a wellbeing and safeguarding team
- Promoting a safe, inclusive and responsive environment for pupils with diverse needs
- Supporting pupil wellbeing programs and initiatives based on the needs of pupils
- Communicating, liaising and collaborating with parents, parish, and wider community to develop a shared understanding of pupil wellbeing and promote an inclusive school culture.

- Ensuring all staff are aware of relevant policy, responsibilities and procedures related to pupil wellbeing.
- Facilitating staff development opportunities, including annual Child Protection / Safeguarding training

## **The Class Teacher**

The class teacher is a key figure in the Pastoral Care system and should have a good knowledge of the needs, emotional development, progress and academic attainment of each pupil in their class.

### **Role of the Class Teacher**

- To have a clear vision of the school, what it means for them, for the children and for the community.
- To promote a caring environment where pupils learning is related to the child's individual needs and ability.
- To contribute to the development of policies which establish principles for action throughout the school.
- To avail of opportunities for professional development.
- To treat children with the highest levels of care, courtesy and respect.
- To foster relationships where children feel happy and secure and find staff approachable at all times.
- To recognise each child will have different experiences and reactions.
- To encourage children to talk about how they're feeling and be there to listen if they need to discuss anything.
- To build confident, open, healthy and trusting relationships with pupils to help them feel safe. Positive relationships with a trusted adult are an important protective factor for children, helping them thrive, remain resilient and learn effectively.
- To help children understand and manage their emotions by developing their social and emotional skills.
- To help children to make good choices and informed decisions in all aspects of school life.
- To integrate social and emotional skills across the curriculum and school life. This can be during health and wellbeing education and broader curriculum lessons, PDMU, assemblies, or through whole-school programmes.
- To notice any changes in mood, behaviour and presentation (attention and concentration, interaction with peers, agitation, sadness or lethargy. personal appearance, physical symptoms or sickness) and to intervene early if a child is in distress.
- To speak to the designated safeguarding lead if concerned about a child's emotional health and wellbeing and feel that the child might need further follow up and action. The wellbeing team can work with pupils, and parents where appropriate, to determine if support is needed.
- To establish and maintain routines and a calm classroom. Predictable routines and known boundaries support pupil mental health and wellbeing, promote learning engagement and support positive behaviours.
- To create a resilient learning environment for pupils. Developing resilience will enable pupils to overcome setbacks and manage pressure.
- To provide reassurance that school is a safe place to be and to remind pupils that school is a community in which everyone cares for one another.
- To build connectedness/belonging to school and create a warm and positive classroom climate.
- To listen. Listen without asking too many questions or interrupting and do not make any promises, including not telling anyone about the conversation. Encourage the pupil to seek further help and offer to go with them to see someone from the school wellbeing team.
- To look after their own mental health.

## **Classroom Assistants**

Classroom Assistants are highly valued in St Mary's and are an integral part of our school family. They make a major contribution to the work of our school through their support for pupils as individuals, as groups and as classes. Classroom assistants play a key role in supporting the pupil's social and emotional development as well as promoting appropriate standards of behaviour.

### **Role of the Classroom Assistant**

- To understand the ethos of the school and be in agreement with it.
- To work with the teachers to promote a caring attitude.
- Treat children with the highest levels of care, courtesy and respect.
- To adhere to child protection and all relevant legislation and policies.
- To promote positive relationships and behaviour in the classroom, playground and the wider school community.
- To be guided by the school's policies and procedures with regards to promoting positive behaviour and relationships.
- To provide emotional support to pupils.
- To establish good relationships with pupils.
- To build confident, open, healthy and trusting relationships with pupils to help them feel safe.
- To respond to the pupils' learning and wellbeing needs.
- To build up children's self-esteem and confidence.
- To promote inclusion.
- To help children to make good choices and informed decisions in all aspects of school life,
- To avail of opportunities for professional development.
- To speak to the class teacher or designated safeguarding lead if concerned about a child's emotional health and wellbeing.
- To look after their own mental health.

### **Ancillary Staff**

Ancillary staff (The secretary, caretaker, bus drivers, cleaners and cooks etc.) play a vital role in promoting pastoral care in St Mary's Primary School. It is the responsibility of these staff to be vigilant and to:

- Understand the ethos of the school and be in agreement with it.
- Work with the teachers to promote a caring attitude.
- Treat children with the highest levels of care, courtesy and respect.
- To ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone by following robust policies and practice.
- To ensure everyone feels happy, safe, respected and included in the school environment.
- To promote positive behaviour in the classroom, playground and wider school community.

Everyone within our learning community shares a responsibility for creating and maintaining a positive ethos in which pupils are:

- nurtured
- active
- respected
- responsible
- included
- safe
- healthy
- achieving

## Early Identification - How are wellbeing concerns identified?

Our identification system involves a range of processes. We aim to identify children, with mental health and emotional well-being needs as early as possible to prevent things getting worse. We do this in different ways including:

- Observations by staff
- Pupils raising concerns
- Worry Box / Keeping Safe Box
- Pupil wellbeing questionnaires at the start of the year
- Parent questionnaires EG- Pre - Relax Kids parent questionnaire
- Induction meetings for new P1 entrants / families joining St Mary's
- Analysing behaviour, visits to the Nurture room, attendance and behaviour records
- Staff report concerns about individual pupils to the SENCO and Designated Safeguarding Team
- Worry boxes in each class for pupils to raise concerns which are checked by the class teacher
- Weekly staff meetings- staff to raise concerns about individual children
- Gathering information from a previous school at transfer or transition -Visits to Panda Playgroup to identify needs of new entrants
- Parental meetings
- Enabling pupils to raise concerns to class teacher and support staff
- Enabling parents and carers to raise concerns through the school class teacher or to any member of staff - we have an 'Open Door Policy'
- Drop-ins with School Nurse, Education Welfare Officer, or Educational Psychologist

## Warning Signs

School staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a pupil is experiencing mental health or wellbeing issues. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should communicate their concerns to Miss Lauren Cush, Mrs Donna Quinn, Mrs Eilis Kelly or Mrs Louise Quinn (School Principal)

Possible warning signs include: (this is not an exhaustive list)

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- Changes in eating habits- picky eating leading to 'failure to thrive'.
- Sleeping difficulties (difficulty settling, or waking through the night)
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Changes in activity and mood
- Increased aggressive behaviour and tantrums (beyond those considered 'normal' for young children)
- Increased anxiety and inability to be comforted by primary caregiver
- Children may be more likely to exhibit bullying behaviour or experience bullying behaviour
- Difficulty establishing or maintaining friendships.
- Lowering of academic achievement
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- Changes in clothing - e.g. long sleeves in warm weather
- Secretive behaviour
- Noticeable changes in appearance/behaviour/attitude
- Skipping PE or getting changed secretly
- Lateness to or absence from school
- Repeated physical pain or nausea with no evident cause
- An increase in lateness or absenteeism
- Small challenges prompting proportionally 'over the top' responses (lack of resilience).

Staff are aware that mental health needs such as anxiety might appear as non-compliant, disruptive or aggressive behaviour which could include problems with attention or hyperactivity. This may be related to home problems, difficulties with learning, peer relationships or development.

**If there is a concern that a pupil is in danger of immediate harm, then the school's child protection procedures are followed.**

### **Verbal Disclosures by Pupils**

We recognise how important it is that staff are calm, supportive and non-judgmental to pupils who verbally disclose a concern about themselves or a friend. The emotional and physical safety of pupils is paramount, and staff listen rather than advise. Staff are clear to pupils that the concern will be shared with the Designated Safeguarding Team and recorded in order to provide appropriate support to the pupil.

### **Non-Verbal Disclosures by Pupils**

Staff also recognise persistent and unusual non-verbal disclosures in behaviours. We recognise that behaviour may be an unmet need or message.

### **Confidentiality**

All disclosures are recorded and held on the pupil's confidential file, including date, name of pupil and member of staff to whom they disclosed, summary of the disclosure and next steps.

## Assessment, Interventions and Support

All concerns are reported to the Designated Safeguarding Team and recorded. We then implement our assessment system based on levels of need to ensure that pupils get the support they need, either from within the school or from an external specialist service. Our aim is to put in place interventions as early as possible to prevent problems escalating. We recognise that just like physical health, mental health and emotional well-being can vary at any given time and is fluid and changes, there are no absolutes.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Need</b></p> <p>The level of need is based on discussions with key members of staff</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Evidence-based Intervention and Support</b></p> <p>The kinds of intervention and support provided will be decided in consultation with key members of staff, parents and pupils For example,</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Monitoring</b></p>
<p><b>Highest need</b></p>	<p>CAMHS- assessment, 1:1 or family support or treatment, consultation with school staff and other agencies</p> <p>Educational Psychologist Involvement</p> <p>External agency support that provides 1:1 support and group work</p> <p>Therapy/Counselling on site</p>	<p>All pupils needing targeted individualised support will have an Individual Care Plan drawn up setting out -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The needs of the pupils</li> <li>• How the pupil will be supported</li> <li>• Actions to provide that support</li> <li>• Any special requirements</li> </ul> <p>Pupils and parents/carers will be involved in the plan. The plan and interventions are monitored, reviewed and evaluated to assess the impact</p> <p>Multi-agency meetings and regular reviews and feedback with parents/carers</p>
<p><b>Some Need</b></p>	<p>Access to school Nurture / Sunshine Room</p> <p>1:1 intervention, small group intervention, (Miss Lauren Cush-Well-being Ambassador)</p> <p>1:1 intervention, small group intervention, (Mrs Kathryn Tierney)</p>	<p>A log is kept and there are regular safeguarding team meetings</p> <p>Weekly staff meetings</p>
<p><b>Low need</b></p>	<p>General support e.g. Class teacher, classroom assistant Classroom Calm Area Classroom Calm Boxes</p>	<p>Check-ins from Miss Cush (Well-being Ambassador)</p>

## **Loss and Bereavement**

Schools and teachers have a significant role to play in the life of the bereaved child. Teachers can help by creating a supportive atmosphere whereby the child feels they can talk and share their story and their feelings:

- Allow the child to cry or be angry and encourage expression of feelings.
- Bereavement is also a learning experience for the rest of the class; it can help them to understand that grief is normal and natural.
- Teachers should be aware of changes in behaviour and of different ways that children may express their grief.
- All children will act differently, and it may be a considerable time before they show the impact of the death.
- Be aware of the child's need for privacy, but do not separate them from their peers.
- A network of support will be established when required with one member of staff taking on the role of a support person for the child for as long as necessary.
- Where appropriate, acknowledge the death by some sort of memorial in the school, and remember anniversaries.
- Create links with home.
- The same supportive and caring atmosphere will be effective for members of staff who experience loss or bereavement.

## **Pastoral Care Provision and Supporting Positive Mental Health and Well-being in St Mary's Primary School**

A range of Pastoral Care activities will be catered for in St Mary's. The Pastoral dimension of our school is something which should be clearly evident in every aspect of school life, whether it be in the classrooms, on the corridors, in the playground or even discipline procedures.

The school is a community, an extension of family where everyone is working not only for themselves but for each other. Parents are always welcome, and their views are always respected, and it is important we let our parents know that we welcome them. While there are times set aside each year for planned visits, parents will be constantly reminded that they are welcome to visit (or telephone if it is more convenient). School life is very much a partnership. There must be a strong bond between teacher, pupil and parent.

The school is also part of the wider community and from time to time we will be depending on the community to assist us. Visits from the doctor, the nurse, the psychologist, the fireman or safety advisers will be part of the school life. Good relations will be built up with neighbouring schools and links will be made with health and welfare agencies.

We encourage older children to help and care for younger children in the school and encourage the children to be helpful, co-operative and sympathetic to the needs of others. The school will be kept clean and tidy and the children will be encouraged to do their best to help.

Classrooms should be neat, clean and colourful and have children's work displayed. At all times every effort will be made to be fair in our approach to discipline and be ready to reward when appropriate.

St. Mary's Primary School aims to foster positive attitudes to learning, develop pupils' confidence, self-esteem and motivation by giving attention to their emotional, social and physical well-being within the teaching and learning context of the curriculum.

We believe that the provision of quality education for each child is integral to our pastoral provision and improved pupil achievement affirms the positive outworking of our pastoral policy.



At St Mary's we believe we have a key role in promoting and supporting the positive mental health and well-being of our pupils.

Our school has developed a range of strategies and approaches including;

- A strong school ethos which values positive emotional wellbeing and promotes a sense of caring, belonging and respect for difference and diversity.
- A whole child, holistic approach, embedded within the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities.
- Providing an emotionally secure and safe environment and spaces.
- Robust policies and procedures, supported by staff and governors, and communicated to all staff, parents and children.
- Assemblies to raise awareness about mental health
- Anti-bullying policy and procedures. Anti-bullying assemblies and events.
- Establishing clear rules, routines and expectations about behaviour for learning and social cohesion.
- Encouraging positive, caring and constructive relationships
- Recognising parents and carers as being integral to the school and the child's wellbeing and adopting an inclusive and partnership approach, working with parents, pupils and the wider staff group as well as relevant external stakeholders.
- Recognising that teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships are crucial for wellbeing. A whole person approach is adopted, founded on a caring school ethos with opportunities to build supportive relationships between staff and pupils.
- Having active listeners, to whom a child may turn
- Opportunities for pupil leadership, through school council, eco-council, prefects, bus prefects, head boy and head girl and buddy system.
- A child rights approach and a strong commitment to pupil voice.
- An emphasis on praise and reward. Positive behaviour strategies are used including Star of the Week, House/Point System, Golden Time, sticker charts etc
- Opportunities for reflection and spiritual development through art, literature and the RE curriculum
- Targeted interventions- Mrs Kathryn Tierney is employed by St Mary's one day a week and assigned to work with identified children using a range of therapy strategies including CBT.
- Nurture sessions (led by Miss Lauren Cush in our Sunshine/Nurture Room) for general wellbeing and interventions dealing with anxiety or emotions.
- Use of DE Funding, including 'Healthy Happy Minds', to employ therapists, counsellors, Art/Play therapists etc to work with identified children.
- The provision of physical space within the school, dedicated to emotional wellbeing, so that there is a safe space for a child to seek or receive support.
- Enhancing school and classroom layout, facilities and resources, such as our Sunshine/Nurture Room, Sensory Garden and Fairy Garden. Each classroom will have a calm area with access to a wide range of resources including; sensory pop-up tent, calm boxes, sensory/fidget toys, weighted blankets etc
- Worry Boxes in each classroom and 'Keeping Safe' Box in the main school building.
- Recognising the background of individual pupils and their physical, social and emotional needs
- Consistent support for vulnerable children and those with SEN from trained teams of pastoral and learning support, classroom assistants and other agencies where appropriate.
- A balanced curriculum with opportunities for intellectual, physical, emotional and expressive development.
- Teaching about Mental Health and Emotional Well-being through PDMU lessons. We teach the knowledge and social and emotional skills that will help pupils to be more resilient, understand about mental health and help reduce the stigma of mental health problems.
- Using a range of teaching styles such as Circle Time appropriate to pupils' age, ability and level of maturity
- Time-tabled Relax Kids lessons for Primary One- Primary Four pupils, provided by Mrs Paula Mc Gilligan, Relax Kids coach
- Time-tabled wellbeing workshops, delivered by Katy Carey, 'The Calm Kit' for Primary Five - Primary Seven pupils.

- REIM E-Safety Workshops for Primary 6, Primary 7 and parents (Parents and pupils educated about the internet and the risks and dangers there for wellbeing).
- The Buddy Bench in the playground. This is an area where a child can go if they are feeling lonely or have no-one to play with. Other pupils, playground assistants and teachers keep an eye out and go to sit with them if they spot someone on the Buddy Bench. The Buddy Bench is part of a wider wellbeing education strategy. Children take part in lessons to discuss feelings and ideas of loneliness and feeling left out. This helps to make them more aware of other's feelings and encourage them to watch out for anyone using the bench and to reach out to them.
- After-school activities to promote positive wellbeing. To encourage engagement, the range of activities offered in St Mary's include not only sports, but music, drama, art, STEM, ICT and gardening clubs for example. Extracurricular activities are driven by the belief that school is not just about academic achievement but about making friends, interacting, learning new skills and also having fun.
- Supporting the transition period between primary and post-primary schools. Moving from a small, safe and comfortable environment to a new environment, often without their close group of friends can be difficult for children. Primary 7 pupils will take part in a range of activities including the 'Boundaries and Transitions' programme delivered by REIM. Parents will also have the opportunity to take part in this programme alongside their children. The children will also have inter-school activities with the nearby post-primary schools, from Primary 6 onwards, including the Extended Schools After School Club at St Ciaran's College and sports events including the Dungannon Academy Blitz.

### **Supporting Components and Practices**

Regular school practices to support pupils' wellbeing and holistic development include:

- PDMU Curriculum
- Relax Kids Programme
- 'The Calm Kit' Programme
- REIM E-Safety workshops for Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils and parents.
- REIM 'Boundaries and Transitions' programme for Primary 7 pupils
- 'I-Smart' E-Safety programme for Primary 5 pupils. (Delivered by Love For Life)
- RSE "Wonder" Programme for Primary 3 and 4 pupils. (Delivered by Love For Life)
- RSE "Choices and Changes" Programme for Primary 6 pupils. (Delivered by Love For Life)
- RSE "What's Inside" Programme for Primary 7 pupils. (Delivered by Love For Life)
- Circle time programme
- School assemblies/Golden Time - academic/non-academic areas
- Road Safety Programme
- The Safety Bus
- Sue Wright- Safety Workshops P1-7
- Healthy Eating School
- Class/school reward systems- House System
- Star of the Week
- Anti-bullying week
- School Council / Eco Council
- Extra-curricular activities e.g. Extended Schools' programme of activities, choir, Sports day, School productions
- CAMHS
- NIABF bullying resource
- NSPCC support material

## **Child Protection Procedures**

1. Children should be listened to and taken seriously.
2. In any incident the child's welfare is paramount. This overrides all other considerations.
3. A proper balance must be struck between protecting children and respecting the rights and needs of parents and families. Where there is a conflict the child's interests must come first.

With this in mind, we have appointed Miss Lauren Cush as Designated teacher for Child Protection. In her absence, her role will be undertaken by Mrs Donna Quinn (Deputy Designated Teacher) and Mrs Louise Quinn (School Principal).

Abuse may take a number of forms including:- neglect, physical injury, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and exploitation. (See Child Protection Policy).

## **Supporting and Training Staff**

St Mary's Primary School staff are caring, compassionate and helpful. We seek to promote a supportive team approach to pastoral care and other issues where responsibility is shared by all. We want all staff to be confident in their knowledge of mental health and wellbeing and to be able to promote positive mental health and wellbeing, identify mental health needs early in pupils and know what to do and where to get help. Pastoral care remains a permanent feature of our School Development Plan and subsequently staff development and training are considered essential to support this. Our on-going staff development programme helps teachers identify attitudes, values, skills and knowledge which will enable them to carry out their pastoral roles.

Training will be provided through:

- School based courses/ dissemination of good practice
- External courses /providers
- Other outside agencies where necessary e.g. School Nurse, EWO, Educational Psychologist etc.
- Visits to other schools/ cluster meetings

## **Staff Wellbeing**

To help try and maintain high staff morale and individual self-esteem, St Mary's Primary School staff will make efforts to respect, value and appreciate each other. Supporting and promoting the mental health and wellbeing of staff is an essential component of a healthy school and we promote opportunities to maintain a healthy work life balance and wellbeing.

We support the mental health and wellbeing of all staff through:

- Whole school training events, including Safeguarding.
- Access to appropriate external training (eg AB Coaching).
- Involving all staff in decision making.
- Provision of non-contact time to allow for planning and preparation.
- Consultation on training and support needs through regular review.
- Staff health and wellbeing day.
- Encouragement of social events inside and outside school.
- Marking special occasions e.g. the birth of a baby, marriage, birthday celebrations etc
- Principal awareness of roles and responsibilities of all staff and ensuring their workload is manageable.
- Providing support in terms of long-term illness or domestic issues or bereavement.
- Recognising signs of possible stress in colleagues.
- Supporting teachers and their assistants who are coping with children who have significant educational needs.

- Signposting staff to 'Inspire Workplaces' a free service who offer wellbeing support and guidance for staff members.
- Signposting staff to the EA Health and Wellbeing Hub.
- Displaying EA Health and Wellbeing staff programmes on the Staff Noticeboard.

### **Involving Parents and Carers**

We recognise the important role parents and carers have in promoting and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children, and in particular supporting their children with mental health needs.

To support parents and carers:

- We provide information and signposting to organisations on our school website / Facebook on mental health issues and local wellbeing and parenting programmes.
- We have an Open - Door Policy.
- We support parents and carers with children with mental health needs through sensitive and supportive regular meetings and signposting.
- Share and allow parents to access sources of further support e.g. through the Family Support Hub, RISE (NI) etc
- Ensure that all parents are aware of who to talk to, and how to go about this, if they have concerns about their child.
- Make our pastoral care and wellbeing policy easily accessible to parents.
- Share ideas about how parents can support positive mental health in their children.
- Keep parents informed about the mental health topics their children are learning about in PDMU and share ideas for extending and exploring this learning at home.

When a concern has been raised the school will:

- Contact parents and carers and meet with them.
- In most case parents and carers will be involved in their children's interventions, although there may be circumstances when this may not happen, such as child protection issues.
- Offer information to take away and places to seek further information.
- Be available for follow up calls.
- Make a record of the meeting.
- Agree an Action Plan.
- Discuss how the parents and carers can support their child.
- Keep parents/carers up to date and fully informed of decisions about the support and interventions.

We see ourselves as partners with parents in the education and pastoral care of our pupils. Mutual support and co-operation is an essential element in achieving our objectives.

On-going activities to ensure communication and parental involvement include:

- School website
- School Facebook
- Google Classroom
- Annual parent/teacher meetings
- Prospectus
- Induction morning and parent information session for new P1 intake
- Monthly newsletters
- E-mail to parents
- Annual Pupil Reports
- Annual Reviews and SEN meetings

- School Policies
- School Calendar
- Verbal Communication (Telephone Calls/Messages/Notes from Teacher)
- Verbal Communication (Initiated by Parents)
- Parent Volunteers
- Contact through external agencies including Education Welfare Officer (EWO), School Nurse, Educational Psychologist, Behaviour Support Team, Autism Support Team etc.
- School Mass, Celebrating the Sacraments and Class Assemblies, Do This in Memory Programme
- Friends of Cabragh- Parent Support Group
- Christmas Concert/Carol Services
- Questionnaires regarding school life which contribute to school policies e.g. Anti-Bullying
- Parent Workshops

### **Working with other agencies and partners**

The staff of St. Mary's is committed to having good working relationships with relevant external support agencies to enhance, protect and support individual pupils' and teachers' social and emotional welfare. The following agencies work in partnership with St Mary's Primary School:

- The school nurse
- Educational psychology services
- Behaviour support team
- Autism support team
- Paediatricians
- CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health service)
- Counselling services
- Family support workers
- Therapists
- RISE (NI)
- Children and Young People's Service (CYPS)
- Education Welfare Officer
- NSPCC
- PSNI
- CCMS Staff Welfare Officer

## **Supporting Policies**

Whilst all policies and procedures within St. Mary's take cognisance of the pastoral care of pupils and staff, some support it in very specific areas. Cross referencing the following policies is essential in the delivery of the pastoral care and wellbeing policy.

- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy
- Acceptable use of the Internet
- E-Safety Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Complaints procedure
- Educational Trips Policy
- Critical Incident Policy
- Intimate Care Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Recruitment, Selection and Vetting of staff and volunteers
- Relationships and Sexuality Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Use of Reasonable Force Policy

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

On-going monitoring is an integral part of our policy. Procedures are discussed at regular staff meetings to ensure that the policy is implemented as planned.

The school will carry out evaluations of the pastoral dimensions to determine ways of improving the quality of provision for the benefit of all pupils and teachers.

## Appendix 1- Tips for teaching and support staff

Potential conversation starters:

- You don't seem your usual self today. Would you like to talk about anything?
- You look sad/worried today. Do you want to have a chat about it? Is there anything I can do to help?
- You said something interesting in circle time about how you felt when... How do you feel about it now?

Points to remember:

- Find an appropriate time and relaxed place to have the conversation.
- If a child discloses in class, offer empathy, invite them to talk in a safer, more private setting and talk to your designated safeguarding lead (Miss Lauren Cush) for advice about how the situation should be managed.
- If you invite a young person to tell you their personal issues, be clear what you will do with this information. Consider how you will respond if asked 'not to tell anyone'.
- Sit on a low chair if you can – so there is less height difference and you will be more approachable.
- Check with the child if there are other trusted adults (parents, the wider family, teachers) or friends they have talked to or could talk to.
- Listen carefully, be patient and friendly and give your full attention.
- Check your body language so that the child knows you are focusing on them.
- Take what they're saying seriously. Don't over-react but don't try to minimise or dismiss what they are saying. Ask open questions to encourage them to talk.
- Be calm and acknowledge their feelings.
- For young children drawing, modelling or playing with toys while the conversation is progressing can be helpful.
- Offer empathy and understanding rather than solutions. When a child receives empathy they begin to develop trust.
- Remember we are all different and children will respond in their own unique way to their experiences.
- Remember that children with SEND (special educational needs & disability) may struggle even more to articulate their feelings and thoughts and may need extra support.

**Note:** When protecting and supporting children, there are always limits to confidentiality. Talk to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Miss Lauren Cush, or Deputy Designated Teacher, Mrs Donna Quinn, if you are at all concerned and follow the school's safeguarding policy/procedures. Make sure the child knows you may seek advice or guidance from other professionals.

## Appendix 2- Supporting your child's mental health

### Tips for Parents- Improving your child's wellbeing

#### 1. Confidence and self-esteem

Being confident is all about believing in our skills, qualities, and capabilities, and accepting ourselves for who we are.

We know that sometimes a child's confidence may take a knock. For example, exam stress, the pressure to fit in, or being bullied or cyberbullied can all take a toll on a child's self-esteem.

The good news is that there are small steps your child can take to boost their confidence – and you can support them. For instance, you could:

**Encourage them to look after themselves** – By looking after their health on the outside, they might feel better on the inside. So, encourage them to sleep well, eat a balanced diet, stay active and spend time with friends and family.

**Challenge any unkind thoughts** – If a child criticises themselves, challenge it and let them know how you, and others, see them. Remind them of their positive qualities.

**Encourage them to voice their ideas and opinions** – By helping them to be more assertive, they may learn to set boundaries and value their own opinions.

**Encourage them to try new challenges and discover new talents** – Finding something they're good at or overcoming a challenge, might boost your child's feelings of self-worth. For instance, you could encourage them to join a club, group, or activity. Building confidence takes time though, so start small.

**Celebrate their efforts rather than perfection** – Sometimes children can miss out on trying new things because they're worried about failing or letting people down. Remind your child that it's okay to make mistakes. It's all part of life and it's how we learn. Building confidence can take time and practice and it might feel a big step for them to make any changes. So let them go at their own pace and don't put too much pressure on them. Remember that sometimes even the smallest changes can make a big difference.

#### 2. Practising gratefulness

Gratitude is all about recognising all the positive things in your life and expressing thanks or appreciation for them. It's not about ignoring the negative things in life or sweeping them under the carpet. It's simply about taking time to be thankful for the positives too.

Research has shown that practising gratitude can make us feel happier and more hopeful. So, it's a good skill to teach our children early on in life. For instance, you could encourage your child to keep a gratitude diary where they list things that they're grateful for. This could range from simple joys of having their favourite meal or going for a calm nature walk, or the feeling of thanks that comes from recovering from an illness.

On days when they're feeling low or anxious, they can then read through their notes and remind themselves of happier times.

#### 3. Practising mindfulness

Mindfulness means noticing what's happening in the present moment, in an accepting and non-judgemental way. When you're being mindful, you might focus on your mind, body, or surroundings.

For instance, you and your family could try:

- **Mindful eating** – This involves slowing down and simply paying attention to the sight, taste, and textures of what you're eating. This allows us to better appreciate every meal, and every mouthful. Of



course, life can be hectic and filled with distractions, so this isn't an everyday task but something to try from time to time.

- **Body scanning** - This is where you focus your attention slowly through different parts of your body. Starting from your head you might focus on clenching and relaxing each body part down to the end of your toes.
- **Mindful meditation** - This involves sitting quietly, reflecting on your thoughts, and breathing.

Practising mindfulness can be a great tool when looking after our mental wellbeing. That's because being aware of our thoughts and feelings, can help us feel more in control and less overwhelmed.

Just like any skill, mindfulness takes a bit of practice. They might not see the benefits right away - and that's okay. It's all about seeing what works for them.

#### 4. Practising kindness

Have you ever noticed that when you do a random act of kindness, it often makes you feel good inside? Research has shown that helping others make us feel good too. So why not give it a go with your family? For instance, you could encourage your child to:

- ✓ write a letter to someone
- ✓ paint a picture for someone
- ✓ cook a meal or bake some goodies for someone
- ✓ help someone with a household chore.

If you want to better your life as well as the lives of others, your family could even try volunteering, donating, or fundraising for a cause/charity that's close to your heart.

Remember that kindness doesn't just mean being kind to others though. It's also just as important to teach your children the importance of self-kindness.

Mistakes and slip-ups are bound to happen in life but, often, it's not the end of the world. Supporting your children that they can grow and learn from these mistakes is an important lesson and the first step towards self-compassion.

#### 5. Developing resilience

Resilience is all about your ability to deal with challenging life events and situations, and how you can recover from these. For example, how you cope with the death of a loved one, how you deal with moving schools or home, or how you manage when a stressful exam is just around the corner.

Building resilience doesn't mean that you don't experience difficult emotions, such as anger, sadness, or disappointment. It simply means that you're strong enough to keep going when you face obstacles or challenges.

Building resilience is something that takes time and patience. You can help your child increase their emotional resilience by:

- helping them find ways to deal with negative thoughts or feelings
- supporting them to find stress-busting techniques
- encouraging them to challenge their inner critic and not to be so hard on themselves
- reminding them that failure and mistakes are just a part of life - it's how we learn and grow
- encourage them to set challenges or goals for themselves, such as learning a new language
- empowering your child to make age-appropriate decisions about the things that affect them.

## 6. Coping with stress

Stress is how we react when we feel threatened, under pressure or out of control. A bit of stress is normal. Sometimes it can even be helpful or motivate us. But if stress is making your child feel overwhelmed, there are things you can try that may help. For instance, you could encourage them to:

- **Be active** – Exercise won't eliminate their stress, but it may make it feel less intense and help them to clear their thoughts.
- **Take control but accept the things they can't change** – Focus on the things they can control and make changes. Then encourage them to let go of the things that aren't in their power to fix or change. This will help them to feel empowered and less stressed.
- **Plan** – Keeping a to-do list, managing their time well and preparing for stressful events may help them feel less overwhelmed.
- **Take time to relax** – Encourage them to schedule some 'me' time to do things that help them unwind. This might involve going for a bath, reading, or baking.
- **Talk to others** – Chatting to a friend, family member, or a teacher, may help them see things in a new light.
- **Try calming breathing exercises** – Encourage your child to make their exhale longer than their inhale and keep going until they find a rhythm that's right for them and they feel calmer.

## 7. Using social media purposefully

For most young people today, being online is a part of day-to-day life. It's how they learn, spend their 'me' time, have fun and keep in touch with friends and family. But it can have a negative impact too. Cyberbullying or digital fallouts might happen, they might feel pressure to look a certain way or 'fit in,' or maybe they've stumbled across distressing content.

Whether they're gaming, chatting, posting, or streaming, the internet should improve and simplify our lives, not be a cause of distraction, worry or upset. So, we should help children learn how to navigate and enjoy the internet safely and talk to them about looking after their digital wellbeing.

Although it can be hard, if your child is worried or getting upset about being online, it might also be worth encouraging them to cut down on their screentime. For instance, you could encourage them to:

- **Identify the signs they've been online for too long** – From headaches and feeling irritable to withdrawing from friends and family, recognising the signs that they've been online too long can help them see its impact.
- **Encourage them to use the internet in a purposeful way** – When it comes to using the internet, it's all about quality not quantity. Instead of mindlessly scrolling for hours on end, encourage your child to use the internet in a purposeful way
- **Try offline activities together** – Whether they fancy playing football or going to the park, creating meaningful experiences with your child will help them strike a balance between offline and online life.

## 8. Challenging negative thoughts

Negative thoughts often pop into our heads and, if we start believing them, it can become a problem. That's why it's important to remind your child that just because we have a thought doesn't mean it's true. Very often, it's not based on any facts.

The good news is that there are strategies you can use to help stop negative thoughts in their tracks. The first step is to help your child identify the negative thoughts they're having. For instance, next time they have a negative thought you could encourage them to jot it down in a notebook.

Once you start recognising these negative thought patterns you can then try challenging them. Together, you could ask:

- what facts or evidence there is to support this thought?
- could there be another explanation?
- what would other people say?
- could we be jumping to conclusions?

Often, it's not black and white and there are other factors at play. The next step is to then replace the negative ones with more helpful or realistic ones. Although it can be difficult at the start, over time and with practice, positive thoughts might come more naturally.

## 9. Resolve bullying

Bullying is when someone intentionally hurts someone else. It might involve name calling, teasing, spreading rumours or physically hitting or pushing someone. It can happen anywhere – at school, home, or online – and if left unchecked, it can take a toll on a child's mental and emotional wellbeing.

We know just how difficult it can be for children to admit if they're being bullied. But bullying is something that no one should have to deal with alone.

Whether it's happening now, or happened in the past, it's important to remind your child that bullying is never okay, and that they can talk to you about how they're feeling whenever they want.

If they don't want to talk to you, you could suggest that they have a chat with another trusted adult such as a teacher or family member.

If the bullying is online, you can show them how to block or report their bully online. Or if it's happening at school or a club, you could talk to the person in charge and ask if they have an anti-bullying policy and what actions they're going to take.

## 10. Sleep better

Getting a good night's sleep is important for our mental wellbeing. So, if you find that your child is struggling to get enough sleep, here are a few changes that could help:

- **Create a relaxing environment** – Most people find that dark, quiet, and cool places are best for sleeping.
- **Create a routine** – Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day will help your child sleep better
- **Make dietary changes** – Tea, coffee and other caffeinated drinks can stop your child from drifting off to sleep
- **Cut down on screentime** – Scrolling through their phone or watching TV just before bed can make your child feel wired and awake. So, try to switch off devices at least an hour before bed.

If your child is tired or exhausted for a long period of time, it might be worth chatting to your GP as it may be a sign of another problem, such as insomnia or depression.

## 11. Exercise more

Staying active is vital for children's physical health, but it can also boost their mood too. That's because when we exercise the body releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins.

Here are a few ways you can encourage your child to move more:

- **Encourage them to take up an active hobby** - Whether they fancy joining a football team or want to get stuck into gardening, a hobby can be a great way for your child to socialise and stay active.
- **Challenge them** - Why not engage their competitive side with an activity challenge? For instance, you could see who can take the most steps in a day. Not only will it encourage them to get moving, but it will also give them a sense of achievement.
- **Do it together** - From a brisk walk in the park to a family game of kickabout, finding ways you can be active together is a great way to connect and create good habits.

## Appendix 3- Anxiety in children and young people

If your child is feeling anxious, nervous or panicky, there are small steps you can take to help them – including understanding the reasons why they're feeling anxious, providing emotional support and find the right professional help, if they need it.

Just like adults, children and young people feel anxious, worried, or uneasy from time to time. They might worry about friendships, feel a knot in their stomach on their first day at school, or get sweaty palms when they are under stress, like at exam time. During times like this, feeling a little anxious can be perfectly normal. The good news is this feeling usually passes with time. However, anxiety can become a mental health condition if they constantly feel worried, tense, or afraid, and it stops them from living their life as fully as they'd like to.

Here are some of the signs of anxiety, simple ways you can support your child, and some of the services we offer to help young people stay happy and healthy.

Some support you may be able to access yourself. This is called a self-referral. Other times, a GP, teacher, or social worker will need to request this support for you.

### 1. Signs of anxiety

Anxiety feels different for everyone. But if your child has been excessively anxious or worrying for a few months about different events or activities, it's worth reaching out for help. Some young people may be anxious about certain things. For example, if you have an overwhelming fear of social situations, it is sometimes called social anxiety disorder (social phobia). When a young child is feeling anxious, they might not be able to understand or put into words how they're feeling. Instead, they might:

- become irritable, tearful, or clingy
- struggle to sleep
- wake up in the night
- start wetting the bed
- have bad dreams.

Older children may experience physical, mental, or emotional symptoms such as:

- feeling nervous, restless or “on edge” all the time
- having lots of negative thoughts or believing that terrible things are going to happen
- feeling tired and fatigued
- difficulty concentrating
- feeling grumpy and irritable
- having difficulty sleeping
- feeling lightheaded and dizzy
- headaches or stomach aches
- sweating
- trembling or shaking
- loss of appetite
- withdrawing from friends and family
- feeling disconnected from their mind, body, or the world around them.
- 

It can be difficult to know if there's something worrying a child. But you know your child better than anyone. If you are concerned, talk to them about how they're feeling and remind them that you're here to help.

### 2. Why is my child anxious?

Everyone experiences anxiety differently, so it's not always easy to pinpoint a cause.

There are a lot of reasons why a child may feel anxious. But they may be more likely to feel anxious if they:

- have experienced a lot of change in a short space of time, such as moving house or school

- are around someone else, such as a parent, who is very anxious
- struggle at school and feel overwhelmed by work and exams
- have responsibilities beyond their age, for example, if they're a young carer
- have gone through a distressing or traumatic experience, such as being bullied or being in a car accident or house fire
- have experienced family conflict, abuse, or neglect
- have experienced grief or bereavement.

### 3. How to help a child with anxiety

No one wants to see their child feeling anxious or panicky. But thankfully there are ways you can help them better manage their anxiety and cope. Not all of these will work for every child and that's okay. It's all about trying things and figuring out what works for them.

If your child is in the **middle of a particularly anxious moment**, here are some ways you can support them:

- **Breathe slowly and deeply together** – Encourage your child to make their exhale longer than their inhale and keep going until they find a rhythm that's right for them and they feel calmer.
- **Encourage them to use their five senses** – Concentrating on what they can see, touch, hear smell and taste may help your child focus on the present moment rather than difficult thoughts or feelings. For example, you could think together about five things they can see, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell and one thing they can taste.
- **Reassure them that this moment will pass** – When we're feeling anxious, it can feel constant and never-ending. But the truth is this feeling will eventually pass. Remind them that they won't feel like this forever. If they're older, it might be helpful to describe it as a wave that they can surf until it ebbs away again.
- **Encourage them to do something that helps them feel calmer** – For example, maybe they could listen to their favourite music, tune into a new TV show, or express how they're feeling creatively.

There are also ways you can help your child to manage their anxiety better **over time**. For instance, you could:

- **Be there to listen** – Regularly ask how your child is doing so they can get used to talking about any difficult thoughts and feelings. You might be tempted to downplay or dismiss their worries because you want to reassure them, but it might be more helpful to validate what they're going through and then ask how you can get help.
- **Help them recognise the signs that they're getting anxious** – When they're anxious some children may find that their heart races or their hands tremble. Getting to know these signs can make them less frightening.
- **Try relaxing or creative activities** – Relaxing activities like yoga, exercise or meditation might be helpful or you could encourage them to express how they're feeling through creative activities like drawing, painting, or playing music. Some people find these activities more helpful than others, so it's all about finding what works for them.
- **Make a self-care kit** – A self-care kit is a box that's packed with objects that ground your child and help them when they're feeling anxious. Usually they engage the five senses: touch, hearing, smell, taste, and sight. For example, you could include quotes, fidget toys or their favourites sweets.
- **Encourage them to make changes to what they eat and drink** – Cutting down on tea, coffee and other caffeinated drinks can help because these can trigger the physical symptoms of anxiety.
- **Seek professional help** – If they've been struggling with their anxiety for a while and self-help strategies are not making the situation better, it might be helpful to encourage them to seek professional help.
- **Take care of yourself** – Looking after someone else can take a toll, so make sure you're looking after yourself. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, or a carer, remember that your mental health is important too.

#### 4. Treatment for anxiety in children

If your child's anxiety is impacting their day-to-day life, don't hesitate to get help. There are different places you can get support. For instance, they could speak to:

- **Their GP** - They can provide information, advice and discuss therapy and medication if needed. They can also refer them to a mental health specialist or to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), depending on your child's needs.
- **School** - If your child is struggling, it can sometimes help to speak with the school to let them know what's going on. However, make sure your child feels comfortable with this beforehand. As well as counselling, their school might be able to provide mental health support such as drop-in chat sessions or a peer buddy. Depending on your circumstances, they can also refer your child to CAMHS or other mental health services.
- **A counsellor or therapist** - Your child's GP or school may be able to refer them to a counsellor or therapist. They will be able to help your child better understand any difficult thoughts and feelings and teach them healthy ways to cope.
- **Charity helplines** - Sometimes it can help just to have a listening ear and a safe space where you can talk about what's troubling you. If your child is struggling and they don't know where to turn, they could contact helplines from charities such as Childline.

What treatment your child is offered will depend on their age and the cause of their anxiety. It may include:

##### Therapy

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is one of the most common forms of talking therapy for anxiety. It's based on the idea that your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and actions are all connected. It also teaches us that people can learn unhelpful thinking patterns, which can leave them feeling stuck in a negative loop, but that we can break free from them. By tuning into our feelings and noticing negative thinking patterns, CBT can teach us how to change things and deal with problems in a more positive way.

If a child is struggling with anxiety, they might also find counselling useful. Counselling is a type of talking therapy where a trained therapist will listen to you talk about any emotional problems you're facing and help you find better ways to cope.

##### Mental health support

It takes courage to admit that you're struggling with anxiety. But the good news is that you don't have to tackle it alone. Agencies including Barnardos (<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/northern-ireland>) offer mental health services to help children, young people and families who are dealing with anxiety, such as:

- cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- one-to-one and group counselling
- school-based programmes that teach young people about emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Some support you may be able to access yourself. This is called a self-referral. Other times, a GP, teacher, or social worker will need to request this support for you.

A referral to the CAMHS service can be made by a GP or any other health/social care professional or education professional only. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) do not accept self-referrals.

## **Appendix 4- Depression in children and young people**

If you are worried that your child is feeling low or struggling with depression, here is some advice on how you can help them.

We all have times when we feel low, unhappy or fed up. However, if these feelings are making a young person's life difficult, last for a long period of time, or come back over and over again, it may be a sign that they're experiencing traits of depression.

We know it can be worrying to learn that your child might be feeling this way. But remember that lots of young people experience depression and come through the other side.

Here are just a few signs of depression and some ways you can support your child and help them to stay happy and healthy.

### **1. Signs of depression**

It can be difficult to know if your child is struggling with depression. So here a few of the common signs and symptoms:

When a child is depressed, they might:

- feel sad or have a low mood for a long time
- lose interest in things that used to bring them joy
- feel tired or exhausted all the time
- feel irritable or grumpy
- feel empty or numb
- feel tearful, miserable, lonely, or hopeless
- feel more self-critical or less confident
- 

They may also:

- have trouble sleeping or sleep more than usual
- struggle to concentrate
- withdraw from friends and family
- eat less than usual or overeat
- feel guilty or unworthy
- self-harm or have thoughts about self-harm.

Remember that you know your child better than anyone else. So, if they have been feeling low for a while and you're worried, talk to them about how they're feeling and remind them that you're here to help.

### **2. Why is my child depressed?**

Some people find that they become depressed without any obvious reason. However, some things may make children more vulnerable to depression, such as:

- bullying
- family difficulties
- neglect
- losing someone close to you
- physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- family history of depression or other mental health problems
- challenging events such as their parents separating or a bereavement.



### 3. How to help a child with depression

It is concerning for any parent or carer to learn that your child is feeling sad or low. But there are small steps you can take to help them deal with their emotions and get the mental health back on track.

#### **Start the conversation**

If you think your child may be depressed, the first step is to try to talk to them about what they're going through. You could start the conversation by letting them know that you've noticed that they don't seem very happy at the moment.

Let them know your worries in a caring and compassionate way, and if they open up, try not to quickly 'fix' everything or downplay their sadness.

#### **Listen and try to understand how they're feeling**

Listen and empathise with what they're going through and remind them they can talk to you for as long or as often as they need to. Most importantly let them know that you love them and that these feelings won't last forever.

Some young people find it hard to open up about what they're feeling because they don't want to worry or upset those around them. So, if they don't want to talk to you, you could encourage them to speak to someone else, whether that's a friend, family member, a charity helpline, or a combination of these sources of support.

#### **Help them look after themselves**

By working together, you can help your child look after their mental wellbeing. For example, you could cook them healthy meals, make sure they get enough sleep or help them cut down on their screen time, if it's making them feel low.

You could also gently encourage them to do the things they enjoy. This might be things like exercising, expressing themselves creatively through colouring or painting, or going for a walk in the park.

#### **Take care of yourself**

Looking after someone else can take a toll, so make sure you're looking after yourself. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, or a carer, remember that your mental health is important too.

### 4. Treatment for depression in children

If the situation isn't getting any better and you're worried, it might be worth getting some professional support. Remind your child that this isn't something they're expected to deal with by themselves, and there's nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about.

There are plenty of places you and your child can turn to, such as:

- **Their GP** - If your child is struggling with low mood and you're not sure where to turn, their GP is a good place to start. Not only can they provide information and advice, but they can also discuss therapy and medication. They can also refer your child to a mental health specialist or to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), if needed.
- **School** - It might also be worth letting your child's school know what's going on, however, discuss this with your child beforehand to make sure that they're comfortable. Their school may be able to provide mental health support such as counselling and drop-in chat sessions. Plus, they can also refer your child to CAMHS or other mental health services, if needed.
- **A counsellor or therapist** - From talking therapies and counselling, to art and play therapy, there are many ways a counsellor or therapist can help your child.
- **Charity helplines** - If your child doesn't feel comfortable opening up to you, they could contact charity helplines, such as Childline.

The treatment your child is offered will depend on what age they are and how serious their symptoms are. It may include:

**Therapy**

A counsellor or therapist will help your child make sense of how they're feeling, untangle difficult thoughts, and teach them healthier ways to cope.

Sometimes this might involve talking through their thoughts and feelings with a trained professional. This is called talking therapy.

Other times, especially when working with younger children, therapists may help children express their emotions through art or play. This is helpful if they're struggling to put their feelings into words.

## Appendix 5 -Where to get information and support

### For support on specific mental health needs-

- Anxiety UK [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)
- OCD UK [www.ocduk.org](http://www.ocduk.org)
- Depression Alliance [www.depressoinalliance.org](http://www.depressoinalliance.org)
- Eating Disorders [www.b-eat.co.uk](http://www.b-eat.co.uk) and [www.inourhands.com](http://www.inourhands.com)
- National Self-Harm Network [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)
- Self-Harm [www.selfharm.co.uk](http://www.selfharm.co.uk)
- Suicidal thoughts Prevention of young suicide UK - PAPYRUS: [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)
- Support and information for young people experiencing bullying. <https://www.kidscape.org.uk/>
- Support for children after the death of a parent or sibling. <https://www.winstonswish.org/>
- Support and information for women and children who have experienced domestic violence. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/>
- Support and information about ADHD <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>
- Charity for autistic people and their families. <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

### For general information and support-

<https://southerntrust.hscni.net/service/camhs/> Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (Southern Health and Social Care Trust).

<https://southerntrust.hscni.net/service/family-therapy-service/> Family Therapy Service (Southern Health and Social Care Trust).

<https://southerntrust.hscni.net/service/riseni/> RISE NI (Regional Integrated Support for Education in N.Ireland) RISE NI is a regional early intervention service which supports children in pre-school educational and mainstream primary school settings by working closely with parents and education staff to help children develop the foundation skills for learning i.e. speech, language, communication, sensory-motor, visual perception, social, emotional and behaviour skills.

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) champions young people's mental health and wellbeing

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) advice and support on mental health problems

[www.minded.org.uk](http://www.minded.org.uk) MindEd is a free educational resource on children, young people, adults and older people's mental health

[www.time-to-change.org.uk](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk) tackles the stigma of mental health

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) challenges attitudes towards mental health

<https://www.headstogether.org.uk/> A campaign to tackle stigma and change the conversation on mental health

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/> Providing information & support to families when a child is bereaved.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health> Offers information, advice to those experiencing troublesome thoughts, feelings and actions.

<https://www.samaritans.org/> A registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress or struggling to cope

<https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/> National charity which aims to promote strong family life & help those who face family difficulties

<https://www.annafreud.org/> children's charity dedicated to providing training & support for child mental health services

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/> Parenting and family support

<https://happymaps.co.uk/> Advice and support for parents, children and young people on a range of mental health issues.

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/> Advice and support for those suffering from anxiety and panic.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/> A charity campaigning and working in child protection