



Executive summary

Growing up can be great. It can also be hard, confusing and upsetting. The way in which a child or young person approaches and tackles these opportunities and challenges is a good indicator of their mental health and psychological well-being.

Mental health and psychological well-being is affected positively and negatively by a child's own make-up; the influence of their parents, carers, families and wider communities; and by their everyday experiences in places such as nurseries, schools and youth services. Unless a person is feeling mentally healthy, it is difficult for them to have optimum physical health and well-being.

In this independent Review, we have been charged with finding out how children's health, education and social care services are contributing to the mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people.

We have focused on progress since 2004, a period in which services have been working hard to realise the aspirations of the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services and Every Child Matters. We have also considered how services can be improved further to meet the educational, health and social care needs of all children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, mental health problems.

Our analysis

Since 2004 there has been significant progress within all services contributing to mental health and psychological well-being. In addition to positive trends in mapping data from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and inspection reports, we have found numerous examples of approaches that are making a real difference to children and young people of all ages all around the country. There are new programmes to support infant mental health, some improvements in waiting lists for CAMHS, new projects being developed for children who are particularly vulnerable, the introduction of the Behaviour and Attendance programme in schools, the Healthy Care programme for children in care, more positive developmental activities for young people and a range of approaches to divert young people from offending. Around the country, local organisations are developing innovative approaches to improve the skills of families and those who work with children and young people on a daily basis. Together, they are changing the way services are delivered. All these approaches make a vital contribution – either directly or indirectly – to improving mental health and psychological well-being.

But we have found that improvements in mental health and psychological well-being are still not as comprehensive, as consistent or as good as they could be, despite the detailed policy that exists. Our analysis is that this is because:

- Parents, carers and everyone in day-to-day contact with children and young people need a better understanding of child development, the causes of mental health problems and things they can do themselves to build resilience and deal with issues as they emerge, whatever age their child is.
 - Children and young people say that services are not as well known, accessible, responsive or child-centred as they should be. Those who access specialist services do not always have the opportunity to develop trusting relationships with staff for the length of time they need.
 - When problems arise, parents, carers, children and young people and the people who are working with them on a daily basis need swifter, more effective input from practitioners who are able to address the full range of needs, to ensure that a holistic approach is taken.
 - Long-standing problems persist for some particularly vulnerable children and young people in accessing a full range of appropriate support, at whatever age. This is despite numerous national reports highlighting the problems and possible solutions.
 - Administrative and legal processes, unhelpful thresholds for access to services and some entrenched professional views can 'parcel up' children into individual services and prevent their needs being met in a holistic, flexible and responsive way, or leave their needs unaddressed.
 - Unacceptable variations in service provision exist between regions and within local areas, leading to inequalities in the level and type of support offered to children and young people with similar needs.
 - Much of the research and evidence about risk and protective factors and effective interventions is not well understood or able to be accessed by very busy professionals.
- Bleak though this appears, we feel there are a number of powerful forces available now, which create an environment in which there should be both the ability and the will to address these long-standing issues. In particular:
- Children's mental health and psychological well-being is now a priority concern for many people – and society as a whole – rather than just a specialist interest.
 - The sea change brought about by Every Child Matters and the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services provides the vehicle to identify children's needs and reshape the way in which those needs are met, through organisations and professions working effectively together around children and families.
 - There are numerous examples of good practice involving children and young people, parents, carers and workers that are literally transforming lives. These have relevance across the country.
 - The evidence base for interventions and practice that improves mental health and psychological well-being is better than ever before.
- The challenges identified by the Review are not all the responsibility of children's services. There are challenges with improving the collaboration between services for adults and children. There is also continuing stigma surrounding mental health, and a negative attitude towards some children and young people that reduces the likelihood of all our children and young people having strong mental health and psychological well-being.

To meet these challenges, we suggest that three fundamental changes need to take place.

1. Everybody needs to recognise and act upon the contribution they make to supporting children's mental health and psychological well-being. And they need to recognise the contribution others make. For parents and carers, this means helping them to understand the importance of psychological well-being in their child's life, and what they can do to promote this.

2. Local areas have to understand the needs of **all** their children and young people – at population and individual level – and engage effectively with children, young people and their families in developing approaches to meet those needs. For parents, carers, children and young people, this means being listened to, knowing what is available and being able to access help quickly and in places they choose to go to.

3. The whole of the children's workforce needs to be appropriately trained and, along with the wider community, well informed. For practitioners, this involves having access to the best evidence and knowledge on improving outcomes for children and young people. For parents, carers, children and young people this means having the confidence that the people they are in daily contact with, as well as specialists, understand about mental health and psychological well-being and what works best if things go wrong.

To support these changes, the Government needs to emphasise its commitment by ensuring that there is a unified drive across all relevant departments to put a spotlight on mental health and psychological well-being.

These changes do not require substantial shifts in policy. They do, however, require the full implementation of existing policies, as well as shifts in thinking and behaviour within many services. They may also need focused resources – if not of money, then certainly of time and commitment.

This spotlight on mental health and psychological well-being will be especially important over the next three to five years to show how all the pieces of this complex jigsaw fit together and how everyone can play their part. This will be a challenge, given the other priorities that local areas have to address. Nonetheless, we believe this is a priority worth focusing on, given the impact that poor mental health has on children, their families, friends and also their communities.

Based on our findings, the recommendations that follow will support these changes. Some are about improvements we want parents, carers, children and young people to see in their day-to-day experiences. Others are about the 'behind the scenes' changes we want local services and regional and national bodies to make in order to build the country's capacity to improve mental health and psychological well-being.

Our vision

Improving the mental health and psychological well-being of all children and young people can help realise the ambition set out in the Children's Plan¹ "to make England the best place in the world to grow up in".

Our vision is that the recommendations in this report will enable a number of important changes to take place over the next three to five years, to improve children and young people's mental health and psychological well-being:

- Everybody will recognise the part they can play in helping children grow up, have a good understanding of what mental health and psychological well-being is and how they can promote resilience in children and young people, and know where to go if they need more information and help.
- Children's services will work effectively together to provide well integrated child- and family-centred services to improve mental health and psychological well-being. As part of this:
 - universal services will play a pivotal role in promotion, prevention and early intervention
 - specialist services will deliver support that is easy to access, readily available and based on the best evidence.
- Staff across these services will have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and those of others, and will have an appropriate range of skills and competencies.

The implications of these changes for children, young people and their families are that:

1. All parents, carers, children and young people throughout the country should have:

- a more positive understanding of mental health and psychological well-being as a result of national media activity
- up-to-date information, in a range of formats, about mental health and psychological well-being and what services are available locally to help them
- good telephone and web-based help and advice
- confidence that staff in the services they use every day:
 - understand child development and mental health

- actively promote strong mental health and psychological well-being
- use language that they understand
- take them seriously
- can identify needs early
- can help their child and can draw on support from others to make sure needs are addressed.

2. Children and young people who need more specialised support, and their parents and carers, should have:

- a high-quality and purposeful assessment, which informs a clear plan of action and which includes, at the appropriate time, arrangements for support when more specialised input is no longer needed
- a lead person to be their main point of contact, making sure other sources of help play their part, and co-ordinating that support
- clearly signposted routes to specialist help and timely access to this, with help available during any wait
- clear information about what to do if things don't go according to plan.

3. Children and young people and their families who are vulnerable (such as children in care, children with disabilities and children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties) should be confident that, in addition to the above:

- their mental health needs will be assessed alongside all their other needs, no matter where the need is initially identified
- an individualised package of care will be available to them so that their personal circumstances, and the particular settings in which they receive their primary support, appropriately influence the care and support they receive

- for those experiencing complex, severe and ongoing needs, these packages of care will be commissioned by the Children's Trust and delivered, where possible, in the local area. Effective regional and national commissioning will occur for provision to meet rare needs.

4. Young adults who are **approaching 18** years of age and who are being supported by CAMHS should, along with their parents and carers:

- know well in advance what the arrangements will be for transfer to adult services of any type, following a planning meeting at least six months before their 18th birthday
- be able to access services that are based on best evidence of what works for young adults, and which have been informed by their views
- have a lead person who makes sure that the transition between services goes smoothly
- know what to do if things are not going according to plan
- have confidence that services will focus on need, rather than age, and will be flexible.

There are a number of changes that need to take place at local, regional and national levels to ensure that this happens. To facilitate this, we make a number of recommendations, which we summarise here and set out in greater detail in the main report:

1. A **National Advisory Council** should be established with a remit to ensure that:

- promoting mental health and psychological well-being remains a national priority
- the recommendations in this Review are effectively addressed

- the Government is held to account for its progress.

2. The Government's **national support programme** should be strengthened to facilitate consistency, improvement and sustainability in service delivery. This should include the following elements:

- A national multi-agency support team, built upon existing service improvement teams, should be established to facilitate and support sustainable cultural change at national, regional and local levels.
- The Government should set out clear expectations for government offices and strategic health authorities to deliver a coherent performance management and 'support and challenge' role to local areas which promotes a consistent approach to service improvement and delivery. We also recommend that regional boards for mental health and psychological well-being are established to facilitate this role.
- Legislation should be strengthened to require Children's Trusts to set out in their Children and Young People's Plan how they will ensure the delivery of the full range of children's services.
- Children's Trusts should be encouraged to set up local boards (or other appropriate local arrangements) to ensure effective commissioning and delivery of the full range of services to support mental health and psychological well-being.

3. To support the **children's workforce** in meeting these challenges, we recommend that:

- All bodies responsible for the initial training of members of the children's workforce should provide basic training in child development and mental health and psychological well-being. This should be in place within two years.

- The children's workforce development strategy should set out minimum standards in practice in relation to mental health and psychological well-being to cover both initial training and continuing professional development.
- The delivery of early intervention work in universal services should be supported through additional training, formal supervision and access to consultation from specialist services.
- The Government should ensure that those who need it should have access to the latest training in evidence-based therapies.

4. To deliver the highest **quality of practice** across children's services, we recommend that:

- National work on outcome measures for services should continue.
- There should be a clear strategic approach – at national, regional and local level – to monitoring, outcomes-focused evaluation, service improvement and inspection across all children's services.
- The body of knowledge about children's mental health and psychological well-being should be made accessible to all professions in a way that is relevant to their role.

This drive and focus to improve the mental health and psychological well-being of our children and young people needs to be accompanied by reflection and change in all of us, as members of families, communities, services and organisations. It is not about other people or agencies shifting their perspectives or practice, but about how each of us thinks about the needs of children and young people and what we do to help them be resilient.