

DEMOS

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

WHY EVERYONE NEEDS
GOOD EMOTIONAL HEALTH
- AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

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PREVENTION
IN PRACTICE

FEBRUARY 2024

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Any errors remain the author's responsibility.

Alice Dawson

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper is part of a Demos project exploring the role that emotional health can play in building the foundations of good mental health. This is the second of two papers we have written for this project. In the first paper, [Strong Foundations: Why emotional health is critical for mental health](#), we explored the concept of emotional health and defined the relationship between emotional health and mental health. In this second paper, we will set out our recommendations for how the UK Government can achieve good emotional health for all.

This project is also part of Demos' *prevention in practice* series, which is a series of policy papers outlining how we can bring about a preventative state across different policy areas.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK is facing a significant mental health crisis which is having an adverse impact on individuals' quality of life and our collective endeavours as a nation. The most recently published *NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity survey* from 2014 found that one in six adults in England had a common mental health condition, which included a range of diagnosable anxiety and depressive disorders. The scale of the problem has increased at a concerning rate in recent years - especially among young people. The 2023 Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey found that around 20% of 8 to 16 year olds had a probable mental health disorder, up from 12.5% in 2017. Overall, the survey found that one in five people aged 8 to 25 living in England had a probable mental health disorder in 2023.

The problem is urgent - according to research by the London School of Economics, mental health problems cost the economy around £118 billion a year. Further, official forecasts have predicted that spending on disability benefits will rise by £17 billion a year by 2030, with mental health conditions being the most expensive conditions contributing to these costs. In addition, NHS mental health services in England received a record 4.6 million referrals during 2022, up 22% from 2019.

While the UK Government has developed a number of strategies and approaches to improve mental health, these have mostly focused on increasing spending on mental health care. Demos has estimated that if recent trends continue, NHS England spending on mental health will reach £37.6 billion by 2040, overtaking the £32.4 billion that the UK government currently spends on defence. While investment in mental health care is welcomed and undoubtedly vital for those who are already suffering from severe mental health problems, more must be done to prevent mental ill-health.

In *The Preventative State*, Demos called for a bold new approach to prevention which gets radically upstream; fixing the foundations, not always jumping to design a new service or intervention.

In a mental health context, these foundations include our emotional health: the skills and beliefs which shape our feelings, thoughts, and behaviours in relation to our social and emotional functioning. The emotional health model that has been developed by The Centre for Emotional Health outlines seven social and emotional competencies that can help us to understand and manage our own emotions and behaviours, as well as develop supportive and healthy relationships with those around us. In our previous paper, we explored the concept of emotional health and the critical role it can play as a protective factor for mental health.

In this second paper we will set out our recommendations for how the government can achieve good emotional health for all.

WHY EMOTIONAL HEALTH IS CRITICAL FOR MENTAL HEALTH

In the first paper *Strong Foundations: Why emotional health is critical for mental health*, we highlighted how emotional health can play a crucial role in promoting the foundations of good mental health, by equipping individuals, families and communities with skills and resources to protect their mental health. Having good emotional health has been associated with improved mental health outcomes. For example, a 2015 study by the Early Intervention Foundation found that the strength of someone's emotional skills during childhood can be a predictor of their mental health in adult life. Further, a 2014 study found that emotional health in childhood is the most important predictor of adult life satisfaction - a factor that can substantially influence mental health and wellbeing - even more so than intellectual development and family income.

The role of interpersonal relationships is particularly important here. Having good emotional health can help us develop and maintain positive relationships by enabling us to be aware of and manage the beliefs we hold about others, our social awareness

and our relationship skills. In turn, good relationships help us to develop and maintain good emotional health, it's a reciprocal process. Healthy and supportive relationships are a vital protective factor for mental health - according to the Mental Health Foundation, studies have shown that negative social interactions and relationships, especially with partners and spouses, have been found to increase the risk of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. On the other hand, positive interactions reduce the risk of these negative mental health outcomes.

It is important to acknowledge that the existing research has not established a cause-effect relationship between emotional health and mental health outcomes. However, the evidence does show a strong association between them even when other determinants have been accounted for, such as socioeconomic status. It is likely then that emotional health does have a significant level of influence over people's mental health outcomes. This does not mean that tackling risk factors such as poverty, poor quality housing and experiences of discrimination are unimportant in efforts to prevent mental ill-health - they are crucial. Emotional health should be looked at as one of a number of critical factors that can help protect and promote good mental health.

THE LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY IN PREVENTING MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

Currently, the government lacks a clear and comprehensive plan on preventing mental ill-health, accompanied by limited consideration of the importance of emotional health and the mechanisms that can be put in place to achieve good emotional health for all. This feels extremely out of step with the needs of the nation given the scale and societal and economic impacts of mental health problems.

In 2022, the government introduced the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan which demonstrated a comprehensive, cross-government commitment to preventing mental ill health. However, in January 2023, this plan was scrapped and replaced with the Major Conditions Strategy which addresses mental health alongside a range of physical health issues. While the strategy recognises the importance of prevention through addressing the wider determinants of health and empowering people to live healthy lives, there is limited detail on how this can be done in relation to mental health and appears too narrow in scope to achieve systemic change.

Efforts to develop people's emotional health are most prevalent in government education policy in the form of Social and Emotional Learning in schools. However, lack of clear government guidance, time and ongoing training have been cited by teachers as barriers to implementing effective emotional learning and the government has been criticised for deprioritising emotional learning.

To take a truly preventative approach to tackling mental-ill health, there needs to be much greater value and investment from the government placed on developing foundational policy that can enable and empower people to look after their mental and emotional health. Polling carried out by YouGov for The Centre for Emotional Health found that 70% of people believe that it is important for the government to invest in education and training to develop good emotional health.¹ Supporting everyone, at all stages of their life, to develop and utilise their emotional health assets must be a crucial part in building the foundations of good mental health.

¹ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2094 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th - 18th January 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

TABLE 1
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING GOOD EMOTIONAL HEALTH FOR ALL

PROBLEM	POLICY SOLUTIONS
<p>There is currently no standalone, comprehensive cross-government plan for preventing mental ill-health.</p> <p>Mental health is considered alongside a range of physical health conditions in The Major Conditions Strategy. However, the strategy lacks clear detail on how everyone can be supported and empowered to look after and protect their mental health. Further, combining mental and physical health conditions into one strategy appears to have left insufficient scope for the complex and pertinent risk factors of mental ill-health to be truly addressed.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The UK Government should re-commit to a cross-government mental health and wellbeing plan. A preventative, strengths and asset-based approach that recognises the importance of good emotional health for empowering people to look after their mental health should form the basis of this plan. 2. The UK Government should incorporate emotional health into a long-term plan to ensure that all aspects of health are considered in all policies. For example, the impact of different government policies, from housing to education, on enabling and disabling people’s emotional health assets and skills should be considered. This would build on ideas such as Labour’s mission-led approach to government.
<p>Efforts to implement emotional learning in schools and support children and young people’s emotional development are often undervalued and inconsistent.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Researchers should aim to build the evidence base around the causal link between emotional health and improved mental health outcomes, helping to demonstrate the value of emotional health as a protective factor for good mental health. 4. The Department for Education should develop clear evidence-based guidance for schools and colleges on how to best implement learning about emotional health. This guidance should be co-designed with teachers and students to ensure the implementation of learning about emotional health is good-quality, effective and sufficiently accounts for the barriers schools currently face to supporting young people’s emotional development.
<p>A person’s emotional health is impacted by the psychosocial environments they are in, and we know that many people are not in ‘emotionally healthy’ environments.</p> <p>For example, loneliness, toxic workplace cultures, poor family relationships, and experiences of poverty can be barriers to people having good emotional health as well as risk factors for poor mental health.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The UK Government should address the foundational factors that influence people’s emotional and mental health. As Demos argued in <i>The Preventative State</i>, we need to see a shift towards investing in foundational factors that affect people’s lives directly; we called this foundational policy. These should include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Measures to directly reduce poverty, such as income and benefits payments. b. Efforts to strengthen social capital and social networks locally. 6. The UK government should consider ways it can better support local government and relevant civil society organisations to create spaces that support relationship building and community cohesion.

PROBLEM

POLICY SOLUTIONS

7. The UK government should invest in evidence-based training and programmes on emotional health that can be delivered in and tailored to a range of settings including workplaces, families, educational institutions (such as alternative education providers), prisons and in local communities.

Those designing and delivering this training should also consider how to best incentivise uptake. For example, workplaces may be more likely to take up emotional health training if it can be shown to also support workers' professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health problems are a significant and growing health challenge facing the UK which is having an adverse impact on individuals' quality of life and our collective endeavours as a nation. The most recently published *NHS Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey* from 2014 found that one in six adults had a common mental health condition, which included a range of diagnosable anxiety and depressive disorders.² The scale of the problem has increased at a concerning rate in recent years - especially among young people. The 2023 Mental Health of Children and Young Survey found that 20% of 8 to 16 year olds had a probable mental disorder, up from 12.5% in 2017.³ Overall, the survey found that 1 in 5 people aged 8 to 25 living in England probably had a mental disorder.⁴

The problem is urgent - according to research by the LSE, mental health problems cost the UK economy at least £118 billion a year due to factors like lost productivity, economic inactivity and the costs incurred by unpaid carers.⁵ Further, official forecasts have predicted that spending on disability benefits will rise by £17 billion a year by 2030, with mental health conditions being the most expensive conditions contributing to these costs.⁶

In addition, NHS mental health services in England received a record 4.6 million referrals during 2022, up 22% from 2019.⁷

While the UK Government has developed a number of strategies and approaches to improve mental health, these have mostly focused on increasing spending on mental health care. In 2022/2023, the NHS England spent £15.9 billion on mental health services in England which made up 14% of local NHS funding allocations.⁸ Demos has estimated that if recent trends continue, NHS England spending on mental health will reach £37.6 billion by 2040, overtaking the £32.4 billion that the UK government currently spends on defence.⁹ While investment in mental health care is welcomed and undoubtedly vital for those who are already suffering from severe mental health problems, a greater focus on prevention of mental ill-health is urgently needed.

The existing research into the causes and risk factors for mental ill-health tell us that an individual's mental health can be heavily influenced by the conditions in which they are born, grow, study, live and work.¹⁰ This can include an individual's family environment as well as their workplaces, educational settings or

2 NHS England, *Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2014*. NHS England, September 2016. Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey-survey-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-england-2014> [accessed 05/02/2024]

3 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up#:~:text=Key%20Facts,20%20to%2025%20year%20olds>

4 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up#:~:text=Key%20Facts,20%20to%2025%20year%20olds>

5 McDaid, D and Park, A. The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK. Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, LSE and the Mental Health Foundation, February 2022. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Investing-in-Prevention-Report-Summary.pdf> [accessed 01/12/2023]

6 Smyth, C. Millions more will claim disability benefits as mental illness soars. The Times, January 2024. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/two-million-brits-classed-disabled-benefits-2029-6bbztwz7r#:~:text=Two%20million%20more%20people%20will,more%20than%2050%20per%20cent> [accessed 04/02/2024]

7 British Medical Association (BMA). *Mental Health Pressures in England*. BMA, 2023. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/mental-health-pressures-data-analysis#:~:text=Between%202017%20and%2022%2C%20rates,10%20to%201%20in%204> [accessed 01/12/2023]

8 NHS England. *NHS Mental Health Dashboard*. NHS England. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/taskforce/imp/mh-dashboard/> [accessed 04/02/2024]

9 Our estimate of future spending on mental health is based on the assumption that the growth rate in NHS England mental health spending seen between 2016/17 and 2022/23 continues to 2040. The data is drawn from the NHS Mental Health Dashboard and can be found here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-mental-health-dashboard/>

10 Kousoulis, A. *Prevention and mental health: Understanding the evidence so that we can address the greatest health challenge of our times*. The Mental Health Foundation, 2019. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Prevention-report-2019.pdf> [accessed 04/02/2024]

neighbourhoods.¹¹ A range of societal interventions including reducing loneliness, protecting children from trauma and educating young people to understand and manage their emotions can therefore help prevent mental ill-health.¹²

However, current interventions often happen when mental health problems have already arisen and are expensive to address. As described in *The Preventative State*, a recent Demos essay, this is a challenge across public services. That essay called for a bold new approach which gets radically upstream; fixing the foundations and not always jumping to design a new service or intervention.¹³

In a mental health context, these foundations are our emotional health: the skills and beliefs which shape our feelings, thoughts and behaviours. The emotional health model outlines seven social and emotional competencies; assets which form the foundations of good emotional health (this framework can be found in Part 1 of this report). These competencies, and the interactions between them, can help us to understand and manage our own emotions and behaviours, as well as develop supportive and healthy relationships with those around us. In doing this, emotional health can form the basis of an asset-based approach to preventing mental ill-health by helping build our resilience, relationships and communities, rather than devising ever more interventions and increasing demands on services.

Amidst increasing pressures on the NHS and the impact of ill-health on the UK economy, there has been a renewed interest in prevention among policymakers. For example, a key component of The Labour Party's health mission is to prioritise prevention of ill-health and develop a "health in all policies" approach that would encourage cross-departmental working to address the wider determinants of health and create the "building blocks" of good health.¹⁴ When it comes to good mental health, the emotional health model is in a strong position to help create these building blocks.

In our previous paper, we explored the concept of emotional health and the critical role it can play as a protective factor for mental health. In this paper we will set out our recommendations for how the Government can achieve good emotional health for all.

The methodology we used to develop these recommendations included:

- An evidence review on the relationship between emotional and mental health
- A review of existing government policies and efforts to address mental ill-health
- Two roundtables with key stakeholders and experts from across policy, academia, the public sector and civil society

11 Kousoulis, A. Prevention and mental health: Understanding the evidence so that we can address the greatest health challenge of our times. The Mental Health Foundation, 2019. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Prevention-report-2019.pdf> [accessed 04/02/2024]

12 Mental Health Foundation. Prevention and mental health. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/prevention-and-mental-health> [accessed 04/02/2024]

13 Curtis P, Glover B and O'Brien A. *The Preventative State: Rebuilding our local, social and civic foundations*. Demos, April 2023. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-preventative-state-rebuilding-our-local-social-and-civic-foundations/> [accessed 04/02/2024]

14 The Labour Party. *Build an NHS Fit for the Future*. Available at: <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Mission-Public-Services.pdf> [accessed 04/02/2024]

PART 1

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In this section we explore the concept of emotional health and why it's important for mental health. Fundamentally, emotional health can play a crucial role in efforts to prevent mental ill-health by supporting individuals, families and communities to develop the assets they need to protect their own mental health and the mental health and wellbeing of others.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL HEALTH?

Emotional health refers to the underlying skills and beliefs we have that impact our thoughts, feelings and behaviours in relation to our social and emotional functioning. It is affected throughout our lives by our relationships and psychosocial environments. These skills enable us to be aware of, understand and manage the whole range of emotions we experience throughout our lives, and also the way we respond to and interact with the people around us.¹⁵

There are a range of skills, or “assets”, that make up our emotional health. Importantly, these assets do not work in isolation, they are interconnected and complement and influence one another.¹⁶

Some of these assets are *intrapersonal*, meaning they relate to the ‘self’ and the way we understand and manage the thoughts we have about ourselves.¹⁷ On the other hand, the beliefs we have about others, our social awareness and relationship skills are interpersonal and focus on the way we think about and interact with others.¹⁸ Using this model allows us to assess the link between having good emotional health and being able to develop and maintain healthy and supportive relationships. In turn, we can explore the impact of supportive relationships on a person’s mental health.

An individual’s emotional health is also shaped by the different environmental contexts they are immersed in on a daily basis. These environmental contexts, which can include families, schools, communities and workplaces, can either support the development of someone’s emotional health

15 The Centre for Emotional Health. *Good emotional health can be transformative*. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/good-emotional-health-can-be-transformative> [accessed 04/02/2024]

16 The Centre for Emotional Health. *Good emotional health can be transformative*. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/good-emotional-health-can-be-transformative> [accessed 04/02/2024]

17 The Centre for Emotional Health. *Good emotional health can be transformative*. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/good-emotional-health-can-be-transformative> [accessed 04/02/2024]

18 The Centre for Emotional Health. *Good emotional health can be transformative*. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/good-emotional-health-can-be-transformative> [accessed 04/02/2024]

competencies, or they can undermine and disable them.^{19,20}

Table 2 outlines the different assets that make up someone’s emotional health. This model has been developed from an extensive evidence review and discussion carried out by The Centre for Emotional Health alongside key stakeholders associated with emotional health.²¹

TABLE 2
THE EMOTIONAL HEALTH ASSETS

ASSET	DEFINITION
Self beliefs	The set of beliefs we hold about our self identity, including our skills, abilities, and sense of value and worth.
Self awareness	Our awareness of our own thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
Self regulation	Our ability to manage our thoughts, feelings and behaviours.
Self agency	The set of beliefs we hold about our capacity to influence our lives and wider environment.
Beliefs about others	The set of beliefs we hold about others, including how trustworthy they are and how they will respond to us.
Social awareness	Our awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others, and the impact our behaviour may have.
Relationship skills	Our ability to form and maintain positive relationships with others.

Source: Institute for Public Policy Research and Centre for Emotional Health, *Emotional Health at Work: why it matters and how you can support it*. March 2018, IPPR.²²

Having good emotional health does not mean someone will be happy all the time. It’s normal and appropriate to feel difficult emotions in response to adverse life events, like losing a job or the death of a loved one. This does not mean our emotional health is ‘bad’. The way someone is feeling at any given time, whether happy, sad or stressed, can more accurately be referred to as

their **emotional wellbeing**.²³ While having good emotional health does not mean someone will always be free from difficult emotions, our emotional health competencies can support people to understand and navigate these.²⁴

19 Institute for Public Policy Research and Centre for Emotional Health, *Emotional Health at Work: why it matters and how you can support it*. March 2018, IPPR. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/emotional-health-at-work> [accessed 05/02/2024]

20 The Centre for Emotional Health. *Good emotional health can be transformative*. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/post/good-emotional-health-can-be-transformative> [accessed 04/02/2024]

21 Institute for Public Policy Research and Centre for Emotional Health, *Emotional Health at Work: why it matters and how you can support it*. March 2018, IPPR. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/emotional-health-at-work> [accessed 05/02/2024]

22 Institute for Public Policy Research and Centre for Emotional Health, *Emotional Health at Work: why it matters and how you can support it*. March 2018, IPPR. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/emotional-health-at-work> [accessed 05/02/2024]

23 The Centre for Emotional Health. *Difference between wellbeing, emotional intelligence, emotional and mental health*. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: [Difference between wellbeing, emotional intelligence, emotional and mental health \(familylinks.org.uk\)](https://www.familylinks.org.uk) [accessed 01/12/2023]

24 The Centre for Emotional Health. *Difference between wellbeing, emotional intelligence, emotional and mental health*. The Centre for Emotional Health. Available at: [Difference between wellbeing, emotional intelligence, emotional and mental health \(familylinks.org.uk\)](https://www.familylinks.org.uk) [accessed 01/12/2023]

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

It's important to recognise that emotional health is different to mental health in that mental health encompasses cognitive and neurological functioning, as well as social and emotional functioning.²⁵ Cognitive functions refer to mental processes like decision making, memory and learning. Neurological functions refer to how the brain works.²⁶

While the term mental health can be used in different ways by both practitioners and the public, it is often used in the context of mental illness which refers to diagnosable conditions such as anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder.²⁷ As such, mental health interventions are typically, although not always, targeted at those who have or are at risk of developing a mental health condition.²⁸ Emotional health assets are universal and developing them can be beneficial for everyone at any time of their life, regardless of whether they have a mental health condition or not.²⁹

Despite these differences, emotional and mental health are fundamentally intertwined, and our emotional health assets can be invaluable in helping to protect and promote good mental health.

WHY GOOD EMOTIONAL HEALTH IS CRITICAL FOR MENTAL HEALTH

In the first paper, *Strong Foundations: Why emotional health is critical for mental health*,

we highlighted how emotional health can play a crucial role in promoting the foundations of good mental health, by equipping individuals, families and communities with skills and resources to protect their mental health.³⁰

Having good emotional health has been associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing a mental health problem. A 2015 study by the Early Intervention Foundation found that the strength of someone's emotional skills during childhood can be a predictor of their mental health in adult life.³¹ A 2014 study found that emotional health in childhood is the most important predictor of life satisfaction, more so than intellectual development and family income.³² Life satisfaction is an important factor in maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing.^{33,34} Further, a study by Bangor University found that both children and adults with high resilience resources, which included emotional and social skills, are less likely to have a diagnosable mental health condition, including those who had experienced adversity during childhood, like domestic violence or emotional neglect.³⁵

It is important to acknowledge that existing research has not established a cause-effect relationship between emotional health and mental health outcomes. However, it has still found a strong association between them even when other factors were accounted for, such as socioeconomic status.^{36,37} It is likely then that emotional health can have a significant influence over people's mental health outcomes and emotional health should be looked at as one of a number of factors, rather than

25 Haisman-Smith, N. *What Is Emotional Health And How Does It Relate To Mental Illness?* Huffington Post, May 2017. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nick-haismansmith/what-is-emotional-health-and-how-does-it-relate-to-mental-illnes_b_16528782.html [accessed 03/12/2023]

26 Haisman-Smith, N. *What Is Emotional Health And How Does It Relate To Mental Illness?* Huffington Post, May 2017. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nick-haismansmith/what-is-emotional-health-and-how-does-it-relate-to-mental-illnes_b_16528782.html [accessed 03/12/2023]

27 Haisman-Smith, N. *What Is Emotional Health And How Does It Relate To Mental Illness?* Huffington Post, May 2017. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nick-haismansmith/what-is-emotional-health-and-how-does-it-relate-to-mental-illnes_b_16528782.html [accessed 03/12/2023]

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29 Haisman-Smith, N. *What Is Emotional Health And How Does It Relate To Mental Illness?* Huffington Post, May 2017. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nick-haismansmith/what-is-emotional-health-and-how-does-it-relate-to-mental-illnes_b_16528782.html [accessed 03/12/2023]

30 Dawson, A. *Strong Foundations: why emotional health is critical for mental health*. Demos, December 2023. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/research/strong-foundations-why-emotional-health-is-critical-for-mental-health/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

31 Early Intervention Foundation. *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life*, 2015. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/social-and-emotional-skills-in-childhood-and-their-long-term-effects-on-adult-life> [accessed 04/02/2024]

32 Layard et al. *WHAT PREDICTS A SUCCESSFUL LIFE? A LIFE-COURSE MODEL OF WELL-BEING*. Econ J (London), November 2014. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25422527/> [accessed 04/02/2024]

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34 <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/20/18/6777>

35 Hughes, K, Ford, K, Davies et al. Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences. Bangor University, 2018. Available at: https://common.bangor.ac.uk/system/files/uploaded_files/news/School%20of%20Healthcare%20Sciences/2018/01/ace_resilience_report_en_pdf_11162.pdf [accessed 03/12/2023]

36 Early Intervention Foundation. *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life*, 2015. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/social-and-emotional-skills-in-childhood-and-their-long-term-effects-on-adult-life> [accessed 04/02/2024]

37 Loades, M. The overlap between low self-esteem and anxiety/depression in CAMHS. The Association for Child and Adult Mental Health, January 2022. Available at: <https://www.acamh.org/research-digest/self-esteem-anxiety-depression/> [accessed 03/12/2023]

a sole remedy, that can help protect and promote good mental health.

Having good emotional health is also a crucial element in helping people develop and maintain supportive relationships. This is because our self-agency, the beliefs we hold about others, our social awareness and our relationship skills can all impact the quality of our relationships. For example, an evaluation of the Nurturing Programme, the core programme offered by The Centre for Emotional Health that aims to develop good individual and collective emotional health, found that after taking part in the programme, people reported that the quality of their family relationships and environments at home had improved and had also become more supportive.³⁸

The quality of a person's relationships can impact their mental health and their emotional wellbeing, with unhealthy relationships having a negative impact and healthy relationships having a positive impact.³⁹ According to the Mental Health Foundation, studies have shown that negative social interactions and relationships, especially with partners and spouses, have been found to increase the risk of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation.⁴⁰ On the other hand, positive interactions reduce the risk of these negative mental health outcomes.

For example, a 2022 study found that social connectedness (defined as having social support, networks and the absence of perceived social isolation) can protect adults from depressive symptoms and disorders.⁴¹

Given the impact that healthy relationships and strong communities have on mental health outcomes, equipping people with the skills and resources they need to build and maintain healthy relationships should be imperative to any approach

promoting good mental health. With the focus on relationship skills and creating supportive and emotionally healthy environments, strategies to develop people's emotional health can play an important role in doing this.

AVOIDING OVER-MEDICALISATION

In recent years, concerns have been raised by mental health experts and practitioners that normal experiences of distress are sometimes being inappropriately medicalised.^{42,43} It has been argued that, too often, the inherent stresses of life are confused with psychiatric disorders, and the current public conversation around mental health has unintentionally promoted the message that all negative emotional states are health problems that need fixing.⁴⁴ For example, in 2023, psychologists Dr Lucy Foulkes and Jack L Andrews put forward the "prevalence inflation hypothesis."⁴⁵ The hypothesis argues that while increased awareness has had a positive impact and led to more people accurately recognising and seeking help for mental health conditions, it may also be causing some individuals to interpret, label and report milder or short-term emotional difficulties as disorders that need "treating."⁴⁶

While there is currently insufficient evidence to determine how prevalent over-medicalisation is, the issue raises important questions about how we, as a country, are responding to the mental health crisis. A fundamental implication of over-medicalisation is that it can cause non-medical support to be overlooked. This can be disempowering to individuals and lead to additional pressures on NHS mental health services. For example, a 2023 article written by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) clinicians, highlights examples of

38 Ghate D. *The Family Links Nurturing Programme - Findings and recommendations from a strategic review and development project*. Family Links and The Colebrook Centre for Evidence and Implementation, August 2015. Available at: https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/64e5fc_4b58698f035f400abbc5dbfaf28c6d50.pdf [accessed 03/12/2023]

39 Mental Health Foundation. *Relationships and community: statistics*. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/statistics/relationships-community-statistics#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20from%20Ireland%20and,the%20risk%20of%20these%20issues>. [accessed 03/12/2023]

40 Mental Health Foundation. *Relationships and community: statistics*. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/statistics/relationships-community-statistics#:~:text=Recent%20studies%20from%20Ireland%20and,the%20risk%20of%20these%20issues>. [accessed 03/12/2023]

41 Wickramaratne PJ et al. *Social connectedness as a determinant of mental health: A scoping review*. PLoS One, October 2022. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9560615/> [accessed 03/12/2023]

42 Beeker T, Mills C, Bhugra D, te Meerman S, Thoma S, Heinze M and von Peter S. *Psychiatrization of Society: A Conceptual Framework and Call for Transdisciplinary Research*. Front. Psychiatry, June 2019. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2021.645556/full> [accessed 04/02/2024]

43 Massey, A. *Medicalising everyday life doesn't help anyone's mental health*. The Guardian, June 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/24/medicalising-mental-health-illness-nhs> [accessed 04/02/2024]

44 Dr Lucy Foulkes. *What we're getting wrong in the conversation about mental health*. The Guardian, March 2021. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/mar/opinion-what-were-getting-wrong-conversation-about-mental-health> [accessed 04/02/2024]

45 Foulkes, L and Andrews, J L. *Are mental health awareness efforts contributing to the rise in reported mental health problems? A call to test the prevalence inflation hypothesis*. New Ideas in Psychology, April 2023. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0732118X2300003X?via%3Dihub#bib70> [accessed 04/02/2024]

46 Foulkes, L and Andrews, J L. *Are mental health awareness efforts contributing to the rise in reported mental health problems? A call to test the prevalence inflation hypothesis*. New Ideas in Psychology, April 2023. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0732118X2300003X?via%3Dihub#bib70> [accessed 04/02/2024]

young people experiencing “temporary distress”, but who did not meet the threshold for having a psychiatric disorder, being referred to CAMHS services.⁴⁷ In these cases, the social support these individuals had was effective in helping them to deal with what they were experiencing and the medical interventions were not needed.⁴⁸

This issue was also reflected in comments made by several of our roundtable participants. They told us that, in their experience, when people are dealing with difficult emotions, the primary message they receive is that they have a “problem” and need help from a mental health professional. As a result, they can feel disempowered to explore ways of navigating these emotions, for example, by building their emotional health assets and leaning on the social support around them.

The number of people in the UK with diagnosable conditions who need clinical help is clearly concerning. Increasing access to good quality mental health care is undoubtedly necessary and must be a priority for policymakers. At the same time, approaches that support individuals, families and communities can also play a valuable role, building the emotional health assets they need to protect their own mental health and the mental health and wellbeing of others. Polling carried out by YouGov for The Centre for Emotional Health found that 70% of people believe that it is important for the government to invest in education and training to develop good emotional health.⁴⁹ We encourage the government to invest in, enhance and promote these non-medical assets, which are crucial in providing the foundations of good mental health.

47 Fergusson, E., Reed-Purvis, S. & Foulkes, L. *Overmedicalization of young people's distress is undermining and disempowering families*. Nat. Mental Health, June 2023. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s44220-023-00071-7> [accessed 04/02/2024]

48 Fergusson, E., Reed-Purvis, S. & Foulkes, L. *Overmedicalization of young people's distress is undermining and disempowering families*. Nat. Mental Health, June 2023. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s44220-023-00071-7> [accessed 04/02/2024]

49 *All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2094 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th - 18th January 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).*

PART 2

HOW PREVALENT IS EMOTIONAL HEALTH IN GOVERNMENT POLICY AND GUIDANCE?

In this section we explore the prevalence of emotional health in current government policy with a focus on three key areas - mental health, education and work.

Emotional health can most commonly be seen in government education policy in the form of social and emotional learning initiatives in schools. Social and emotional learning refers to the process of developing social, emotional and behavioural skills.⁵⁰

Emotional health is more limited in government mental health and work policies but, as we will see, these policies contain pertinent elements that the emotional health model is in a strong position to address.

MENTAL HEALTH

Currently, the government lacks a clear and comprehensive strategy on mental health and wellbeing, accompanied by limited consideration of the importance of emotional health and the mechanisms that can be put in place to achieve good emotional health for all.

In 2022, the government introduced the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan which demonstrated a cross-government commitment to addressing the UK's mental health challenge.⁵¹ The plan aimed to take a "whole-society" approach to promoting positive wellbeing and preventing mental-ill health, putting the plan in a strong position to effectively tackle the complex causes of mental ill-health and promote the foundations of good mental health.⁵²

50 Granada, A. Catalysing Social Emotional Learning in Schools in England. The Centre for Education and Youth, December 2022. Available at: <https://cfey.org/reports/2022/12/catalysing-sel/> [accessed 04/02/2024]

51 Department of Health and Social and Care. Mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper. Department for Health and Social Care, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper-and-call-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper> [accessed 05/02/2024]

52 Department of Health and Social and Care. Mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper. Department for Health and Social Care, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper-and-call-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper> [accessed 05/02/2024]

In January 2023, this plan was scrapped and replaced with the Major Conditions Strategy which addresses mental health alongside a range of physical health issues - the government has said a joined up strategy will ensure mental health conditions are considered alongside physical health conditions.^{53,54} The reasons for scrapping a standalone mental health plan are unclear and this decision has been widely criticised by a variety of mental health organisations who have expressed concern that the mental health aspect of the Major Conditions Strategy is too narrow to truly address the mental health challenge that the nation is facing.⁵⁵

The Major Conditions Strategy aims to improve health outcomes in England by focusing on six conditions that account for the majority of cases of ill-health and early death - these are cancers, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, dementia, chronic respiratory disease, and mental ill-health.⁵⁶ While the concept of emotional health is not explicitly recognised, the prevention strand of the strategy does contain elements that the emotional health model is in a strong position to address.

First, the strategy highlights the importance of promoting positive health behaviours and empowering people to manage their own health.⁵⁷ However, there is limited detail on how this can be achieved in relation to mental health, except through targeted measures such as extending *mental health support teams* in schools and colleges, and also the publication of a national suicide prevention strategy.⁵⁸ While these are much needed interventions, more consideration of how everyone at all stages of life can be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to protect their mental health - before a problem arises - is needed.

Further, the strategy also recognises the importance of people's environmental contexts in shaping their mental health, including the role of material conditions such as housing and poverty as well as interpersonal relationships.⁵⁹ For example, the strategy references the Start For Life programme as a way to support parent-infant relationships to help prevent adverse physical and mental health outcomes as children grow.⁶⁰ As discussed earlier, a person's psychosocial environment, including their interpersonal relationships, can have an enabling or disabling effect on their emotional health. Having good emotional health can also enable people to develop supportive relationships which can be a valuable protective factor against mental ill-health.

While it is promising to see these wider determinants and the importance of relationships addressed to at least some extent, The Major Conditions Strategy is too narrow to truly achieve systemic change. Combining mental and physical health into one strategy instead of having a standalone mental health plan appears to have left insufficient scope to tackle the risk factors that are particularly pertinent to mental health. For example, important risk factors for mental ill-health like adverse childhood experiences, involvement in the criminal justice system, and loneliness are not currently covered in the Major Conditions Strategy, but were in the standalone Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan.⁶¹

Further, there is insufficient consideration of the full range of settings that can influence people's emotional and mental health. For example, the role of community and workplace environments in preventing mental-ill health is not recognised in the Major Conditions Strategy to the same extent that

53 Garratt, K. Mental health policy and services in England. House of Commons Library, October 2023. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7547/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

54 Garrat, K. Mental health policy and services in England. House of Commons Library, October 2023. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7547/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

55 Mental Health Foundation. The government must deliver a comprehensive mental health plan, say mental health charities. January 2023. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/about-us/news/government-must-deliver-mental-health-plan-say-mental-health-charities> [accessed 05/02/2024]

56 Department of Health and Social and Care. Major conditions strategy: case for change and our strategic framework. Department for Health and Social Care, August 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework--2> [accessed/05/02/2024]

57 Department of Health and Social and Care. Major conditions strategy: case for change and our strategic framework. Department for Health and Social Care, August 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework--2> [accessed/05/02/2024]

58 Department of Health and Social and Care. Major conditions strategy: case for change and our strategic framework. Department for Health and Social Care, August 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework--2> [accessed 05/02/2024]

59 Department of Health and Social and Care. Major conditions strategy: case for change and our strategic framework. Department for Health and Social Care, August 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework--2> [accessed 05/02/2024]

60 Department of Health and Social and Care. Major conditions strategy: case for change and our strategic framework. Department for Health and Social Care, August 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework/major-conditions-strategy-case-for-change-and-our-strategic-framework--2> [accessed 05/02/2024]

61 Department of Health and Social and Care. Mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper. Department for Health and Social Care, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper-and-call-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper> [accessed 05/02/2024]

they were in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan.⁶²

To achieve good emotional health for all and build the foundations that will promote good mental health, a much more comprehensive, standalone government plan for mental health and wellbeing is urgently needed.

EDUCATION

Mental health problems often start early in life. Half of all mental health problems have been established by the age of 14, rising to 75% by age 24.⁶³ Therefore, it is important to consider the role of schools and education policy in supporting young people to develop their emotional health assets.

The importance of developing young people's emotional skills has been long recognised in government education policy. For example, in 2005, the government introduced the Social Emotional Approaches to Learning (SEAL) programme in schools.⁶⁴ The implementation of this programme was widespread with around 90% uptake in primary schools and 70% uptake in secondary schools.⁶⁵ Further, in 2019, the then education secretary Damian Hinds set out a vision for "character and resilience" which involved proposals to "ensure young people build strong and positive relationships and the resilience needed to deal with life's inevitable challenges."⁶⁶

In current policy, there appears to be less explicit emphasis placed on emotional learning in schools. The SEAL programme was phased out between

2010-15, and currently, interventions to teach young people how to build their emotional health skills fall under the broader PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) curriculum.⁶⁷ The relational aspects of emotional health can also be seen in statutory Relationships Education which teaches children about developing healthy relationships.⁶⁸ Beyond the direct teaching of emotional skills in schools, efforts to create school environments that can enable the development of emotional skills can be seen in the government guidance for Promoting Mental Health and Well-being in Schools and Colleges.⁶⁹ This guidance advises schools to adopt a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. This includes creating a school culture that positively influences young people's emotional and mental health and enables strong relationships between staff and pupils and between students.⁷⁰

Despite these existing efforts to support the development of young people's emotional skills in schools, research has found there are multiple issues and challenges with implementation. According to research by the Centre for Education and Youth, PSHE in schools is inconsistent and can be poor quality.⁷¹ Lack of clear government guidance, time and ongoing training have been cited by teachers as barriers to implementing effective emotional learning in schools.^{72,73}

Further, social and emotional learning generally appears to be undervalued by the government in comparison to academic achievement. Education reforms made by the 2010-2015 coalition government have been criticised for shifting the focus of England's school system toward academic

62 Department of Health and Social and Care. *Mental health and wellbeing plan: discussion paper*. Department for Health and Social Care, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper-and-call-for-evidence/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper> [accessed 05/02/2024]

63 Mental Health Foundation. *Children and Young People Statistics*. Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/statistics/children-young-people-statistics> [accessed 05/02/2024]

64 Department for Education. *Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme in secondary schools: national evaluation*. GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-and-emotional-aspects-of-learning-seal-programme-in-secondary-schools-national-evaluation> [accessed 05/02/2024]

65 Department for Education. *Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme in secondary schools: national evaluation*. GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-and-emotional-aspects-of-learning-seal-programme-in-secondary-schools-national-evaluation> [accessed 05/02/2024]

66 Department for Education and The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP. *Education Secretary sets out vision for character and resilience*. GOV.UK, February 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-sets-out-vision-for-character-and-resilience> [accessed 05/02/2024]

67 Granada, A. *Catalysing Social Emotional Learning in Schools in England*. The Centre for Education and Youth, December 2022. Available at: <https://cfey.org/reports/2022/12/catalysing-sel/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

68 Department for Education. *Relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education: FAQs*. GOV.UK, April 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education-faqs> [accessed 05/02/2024]

69 Department for Education. *Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges*. GOV.UK, June 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges> [accessed 05/02/2024]

70 Department for Education. *Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges*. GOV.UK, June 2021. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges> [accessed 05/02/2024]

71 Granada, A. *Catalysing Social Emotional Learning in Schools in England*. The Centre for Education and Youth, December 2022. Available at: <https://cfey.org/reports/2022/12/catalysing-sel/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

72 Granada, A. *Catalysing Social Emotional Learning in Schools in England*. The Centre for Education and Youth, December 2022. Available at: <https://cfey.org/reports/2022/12/catalysing-sel/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

73 Education Endowment Foundation. *Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools*. Education Endowment Foundation, October 2021. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/primary-sel> [accessed 05/02/2024]

attainment at the expense of teaching young people life skills, including emotional skills.⁷⁴ Indeed, 2020 polling by the University of Manchester found that 68% of primary school teachers said that the pressure to focus on other priorities, including academic subjects, was a key barrier to implementing social and emotional learning.⁷⁵

The de-prioritisation of young people's emotional learning can also be seen in government funding decisions. While the government has increased funding and staffing for mental health support in schools, it has been criticised for minimising post-covid 'catch-up' budgets and prioritising academic 'catch-up' over broader outcomes, including social and emotional learning.⁷⁶

Universal social and emotional learning has been found to be particularly effective in enhancing young people's emotional skills and protecting their mental health, more so than other interventions like mindfulness or mental health literacy.⁷⁷ To take a truly preventative approach to young people's mental health, there needs to be much greater value placed on supporting young people to build their emotional health skills.

WORK

Our working conditions can have a significant impact on our mental health – 'good' work can be a protective factor against mental ill health.⁷⁸ Features of good work include positive and supportive

relationships between colleagues as well as work that is physically and mentally healthy for people.⁷⁹ However, bad working environments can contribute to poor mental health.⁸⁰ Good mental health at work can also be beneficial for the economy - better mental health among workers has been linked to a reduction in productivity losses, for example.⁸¹ With the UK facing increasing rates of mental health related economic inactivity, the relationship between work and mental health, and the role of employers in keeping workers healthy, is a particularly salient issue for policymakers.⁸² It is therefore crucial to consider the role emotional health can play in promoting and protecting good mental health at work.

The most recent work specific government guidance on mental health and wellbeing is the Thriving at Work standards developed in 2017.⁸³ The guidance sets out six core standards for what employers can do to support the mental health and well-being of all their employees, including the role they can play in preventing mental ill health that is caused or worsened by work.⁸⁴

While the concept of emotional health is not explicitly recognised in the guidance, it does outline two key aims relating to universal support for good mental health. The first of these aims is that employees across all employment sectors will have good work.⁸⁵ The second is that all employees will have the knowledge and skills they need to look after their own mental health.⁸⁶ Emotional health training can play a critical role in addressing both of these aims, outlining the key knowledge and skills

74 Granada, A. *Catalysing Social Emotional Learning in Schools in England*. The Centre for Education and Youth, December 2022. Available at: <https://cfey.org/reports/2022/12/catalysing-sel/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

75 Wiglesworth, M et al. *Programmes to Practices: Results from a Social & Emotional School Survey*. The University of Manchester, January 2020. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED612309.pdf> [accessed 05/02/2024]

76 Granada, A. *Catalysing Social Emotional Learning in Schools in England*. The Centre for Education and Youth, December 2022. Available at: <https://cfey.org/reports/2022/12/catalysing-sel/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

77 Clarke, A et al. *Adolescent mental health: A systematic review on the effectiveness of school-based interventions*. Early Intervention Foundation, July 2021. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adolescent-mental-health-a-systematic-review-on-the-effectiveness-of-school-based-interventions> [accessed 05/02/2024]

78 World Health Organisation. *Mental Health at Work*. World Health Organisation, September 2022. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work> [accessed 05/02/2024]

79 CIPD. *CIPD Good Work Index 2023*. CIPD, June 2023. Available at: <https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2023-pdfs/2023-good-work-index-report-8407.pdf> [accessed 05/02/2024]

80 World Health Organisation. *Mental Health at Work*. World Health Organisation, September 2022. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work> [accessed 05/02/2024]

81 The London School of Economics and Political Science. *Good mental health linked to a reduction in productivity losses to the economy*. The LSE, October 2022. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2022/j-October-22/Good-mental-health-linked-to-a-reduction-in-productivity-losses-to-the-economy> [accessed 05/02/2024]

82 Department for Work and Pensions. *New plans to boost health in the workplace to keep people in work*. GOV.UK, July 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-plans-to-boost-health-in-the-workplace-to-keep-people-in-work> [accessed 05/02/2024]

83 Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care. *Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers*. GOV.UK, October 2017. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers> [accessed 05/02/2024]

84 Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care. *Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers*. GOV.UK, October 2017. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers> [accessed 05/02/2024]

85 Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care. *Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers*. GOV.UK, October 2017. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers> [accessed 05/02/2024]

86 Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care. *Thriving at Work: a review of mental health and employers*. GOV.UK, October 2017. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/thriving-at-work-a-review-of-mental-health-and-employers> [accessed 05/02/2024]

that employees need for good mental health and wellbeing, alongside identifying and enabling the key features of 'good work', such as positive and supportive relationships between colleagues.

There is evidence that the Thriving At Work Standards have had a positive influence on workplace mental health and well-being policies. For example, in response to the guidance, the civil service developed a new Mental Health Support Sense Check to help its departments in England and Wales assess how well they were meeting the standards in the guidance, while NHS England developed a health and wellbeing framework, into which the standards were embedded.⁸⁷ However, too many people are still in working environments that are harmful to both their emotional and mental health. A 2023 study by the Chartered Management Institute found that a third of people have quit their jobs due to the toxic workplace cultures while 29% of people say they have left a job in the past due to a negative relationship with a manager.⁸⁸

In light of increasing concerns around mental health related economic inactivity, there is an opportunity here for policymakers to better consider how emotional health can help protect good mental health in the workplace, and how employers can be supported to achieve good emotional health for their employees and create emotionally healthy cultures that enable supportive relationships.

87 Farmer, P. *What progress has been made when it comes to Thriving at Work?* Mental Health at Work. Mental Health At Work. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/blog/what-progress-has-been-made-when-it-comes-to-thriving-at-work/> [accessed 05/02/2024]

88 Stewart, H. *Bad management in the UK has prompted one in three UK workers to quit, survey finds.* The Guardian, October 2023. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/oct/15/bad-management-has-prompted-one-in-three-uk-workers-to-quit-survey-finds> [accessed 05/02/2024]

PART 3

ACHIEVING GOOD EMOTIONAL HEALTH FOR ALL

From our review of existing government policies, we have identified several key issues that need addressing and the urgent need for the government to do more to build the foundations of good mental health.

In the final chapter of this report, we set out our recommendations for how good emotional health can be achieved for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving good emotional health for all through strategic and long-term planning

There is currently no standalone, comprehensive cross-government plan for preventing mental ill-health, accompanied by limited consideration of the importance of emotional health. The Major Conditions Strategy lacks clear detail on how everyone can be supported and empowered to look after and protect their mental health. Further, combining mental and physical health conditions into one strategy appears to have left insufficient scope for the complex and pertinent risk factors of mental ill-health to be truly addressed. We recommend that:

1. **The UK Government should re-commit to a cross-government mental health and wellbeing plan.** A preventative, asset-based approach that recognises the importance of good emotional health for empowering people to look after their mental health should form the basis of this plan.

Having a standalone plan to address the UK's mental health and wellbeing challenges will ensure that the social determinants and root causes of mental ill-health are adequately addressed. Making emotional health a core part of this plan will ensure measures are in place to help everyone develop and utilise the assets they need to protect their mental health.

2. **The UK Government should incorporate emotional health into a long-term plan to ensure that all aspects of health are considered in all policies.** For example, the impact of different government policies, from housing to education, on enabling and disabling people's emotional health assets should be considered. This would build on ideas such as Labour's health mission to prioritise prevention of ill-health and develop a "health in all policies" approach.

Supporting the development of children and young people's emotional health

The government has recognised the importance of schools in supporting and protecting young people's mental health. However, efforts to implement emotional learning in schools and support children and young people to develop the emotional skills they need to protect their mental health are often undervalued and inconsistent. To better support the development of children and young people's emotional health, we recommend that:

3. **Researchers should aim to build the evidence base around the causal link between emotional health and improved mental health outcomes**, helping to demonstrate the value of emotional health as a protective factor for good mental health.
4. **The Department for Education should develop clear evidence-based guidance for schools and colleges on how to best implement learning about emotional health.**

This guidance should be co-produced with teachers and students to ensure the implementation of learning about emotional health is good-quality, effective and sufficiently accounts for the barriers schools currently face to supporting young people to develop their emotional skills.

Creating emotionally healthy environments and addressing the barriers to achieving good emotional health for all

A person's emotional health is significantly impacted by the environments they are immersed in on a daily basis. In turn, having good emotional health can help create supportive environments. However a range of factors, including experiences of loneliness, poverty, trauma and toxic workplaces, can make it difficult for people to develop their emotional health assets as well as be risk factors for mental health problems. We recommend that:

5. **The UK government addresses the foundational factors that influence people's emotional and mental health.** As Demos argued in *The Preventative State*, we need to see a shift towards investing in foundational factors that affect people's lives directly; we called this foundational policy. These should include:
 - a. Measures to directly reduce poverty, such as incomes and benefits payments.

- b. Efforts to strengthen social capital and social networks locally.

6. **The UK government should consider ways it can better support local government and relevant civil society organisations to develop initiatives and create spaces that enable relationship building and community cohesion.**

As discussed earlier, relationships are a key enabler of good emotional health. There are many examples of initiatives by local councils and organisations to enable and strengthen relationships in local communities, for example through local volunteering opportunities or social activities. Expanding and investing in more initiatives like this can play an invaluable role in enabling more people to develop their emotional health and protect their mental health.

7. **The UK government should invest in evidence-based training and programmes on emotional health** that can be delivered and tailored to a range of settings including workplaces, families, educational institutions and in local communities.

Having good emotional health can help people develop and maintain supportive relationships. Therefore training to develop people's emotional health assets in different settings can be highly conducive in creating supportive psychosocial environments. As mentioned in Part 1 of this report, polling carried out by YouGov found that the majority of people (70%) believe that it is important for the government to invest in education and training to develop good emotional health.⁸⁹

It's important that, where possible and appropriate, this training is in person, delivered collectively and on a regular basis, rather than as a one-off session.

Those designing and delivering this training should also consider how to best incentivise uptake. For example, one of our roundtable participants told us that workplaces may be more likely to take up emotional health training if it can be framed as being useful for workers' professional development.

⁸⁹ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2094 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th - 18th January 2024. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

CONCLUSION

The urgent and escalating challenges of mental health in the UK require a comprehensive and strategic response from policymakers. While the government has increased spending on mental health services, it is vital that we do more to prevent mental ill-health.

This report has delved into the critical role of emotional health as a foundation for good mental health and set out a series of recommendations for policymakers on how they can achieve good emotional health for all. By equipping individuals, families and communities with the skills and resources they need to build resilience, foster healthy relationships and create supportive environments, an emotional health approach can play a crucial role in protecting good mental health.

Our analysis of existing government policies has revealed gaps in the consideration of and value placed on emotional health as a protective factor for good mental health. There is an urgent need for the UK Government to recommit to a standalone, comprehensive cross-government mental health and wellbeing plan - a preventative, strengths and asset-based approach that recognises the importance of good emotional health for empowering people to look after their mental health should form the basis of this plan.

Importantly, emotional health is not solely an individual responsibility but is significantly influenced by the environmental contexts we are immersed in such as families, schools, communities, and workplaces. To create environments that enable people to have both good emotional and mental health, the government must shift towards foundational policy that includes measures to reduce poverty and initiatives to enhance social networks. Such an approach is critical if we are to deliver a truly preventative approach to addressing mental ill-health.

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