



# PARENT'S NEWSLETTER

WELLBEING SPECIAL FOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

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*May 2020*

# Wellbeing: Just a buzz word?

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Talk of Wellbeing might seem like it's only come into fashion within recent years but in truth the principles are centuries old. The challenges we face as a society however are perhaps greater now than at any other time. 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health difficulty in 2020 and the trend is always rising. Long before Covid 19 landed on our shores, children and young people faced a mental health crisis like we had never seen before and the pressures on schools, colleges, specialist services and parents alike reached breaking point. Why teenagers' mental health has spiralled downward for decades has been long debated. The increase in exam pressures, the introduction of fast food and microwave meals, the pressures caused by social media, popular culture and gaming and their impact on social interactions, sleep patterns and the under-researched impact on the development

of the adolescent mind are all thought to be leading causes. One thing we can all agree on however is that there are no quick fixes and it will take a collaborative effort to tackle this non viral pandemic.



At Sparsholt College we have decided to produce this newsletter to support parents to navigate the world of Wellbeing and Mental Health. We can't promise it will all be a pleasant read but we sincerely hope it will inform and empower our wonderful community of parents.

# Wellbeing & Pastoral Care @ Sparsholt College

At Sparsholt College we provide a vast network of support for students struggling to maintain positive wellbeing and for those suffering with a diagnosed mental health condition. From a comprehensive tutorial programme to individualised one to one support, we are proud of the work we do to meet the complex and diverse needs of our student cohorts each year. Let me introduce you to the team:



Kymmy



Sally



Corrina



Amie



Meg



Emma



Rachel



Maria



Jo



Clair



Dawn



Hannah



Alicia



Jayne



Alice



Lucy



Bridget



Claire

# Mental Ill health: what are the warning signs?

It's normal for teenagers to be moody at times. But when are an adolescent's mood swings a sign of something more like mental illness?

The most common mental illnesses in teens are:

- **Generalised anxiety** - Excessive worry
- **Social phobias** - Severe insecurity in social settings
- **Depression** - Persistent feelings of sadness

For most teens, changes in social habits including pulling away from school, friends & activities that your child has enjoyed participating in previously could be warning sign.

**Symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder include:**

- Feeling restless, wound up, or on edge
- Becoming fatigued easily
- Struggling with concentration
- Having difficulty keeping worry levels under control
- Struggling with sleep, such as difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep, or not feeling well-rested

**Social anxiety disorder symptoms include:**

- Feeling very anxious at the thought of being around others and struggling to talk to other people

- Worrying about being judged
- Experiencing extreme self-consciousness & fear of humiliation, rejection, or offending people
- Avoiding places where other people will be
- Struggling to make and keep friends



**Signs of depression include:**

- Feeling persistently sad, anxious, or empty
- Experiencing hopelessness or pessimism
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Losing interest in hobbies or activities that used to be enjoyable
- Struggling with fatigue or lack of energy
- Feeling restless
- Struggling with concentration, memory, and/or decision-making
- Experiencing unexplained changes in appetite
- Having thoughts of death or suicide
- Unexplained aches or pains that don't go away

# Talking to my teen

Can we be honest? We don't always want to talk to them. They can be grumpy, snappy, irrational... Okay I'll stop there before I say too much. The truth however is that they are going through huge hormonal changes and they aren't all developing into the best communicators but in many ways they need us more than ever. We asked our students (your children) to complete a Wellbeing scale questionnaire earlier this academic year called the WEMWBS scale. A staggering 17% of them told us that in the past 2 weeks they have not at all or rarely felt loved, 25% said they have not at all or rarely felt good about themselves and 27% said that they have not at all or rarely felt relaxed. With all the things that distract us from family time, from work and school to chores and x-box or Instagram there is less and less time



for us to unify our familial bonds. Stress too plays a huge part in how families communicate with one another. The seemingly never-ending cycle of rushing from one responsibility to another really impacts our capacity to respond to each situation as we might if we just had the time to stop, think and talk. Within the Wellbeing Department, when we are supporting students through difficult times in their lives, we so often hear 'please don't tell my parents'. Obviously, we know that as parents you want to know what is going on with your children and we know you are often the very people they need to talk to most. That said, we have to navigate these difficult situations and encourage them to open up at home, whilst respecting their rights and opinions as adolescents maturing into young adults. It can be difficult talking to your teenager at the best of times but especially about things that are bothering them. Sometimes it's hard to find the words to help. Overleaf is some advice for situations like this and a link to an interesting article is just below.

[heysigmund.com  
talking-about-teen-depression/](https://heysigmund.com/talking-about-teen-depression/)

## 1. FIND A GOOD TIME

Busy lives often take over. Setting aside protected time to talk can help them feel as though their worries are being taken seriously. For some children, this might just be 5 or 10 minutes a day. For others, they might need longer. Think about when this is. Personally I'd avoid when they are getting ready to go somewhere, are 'busy' (probably on their x-box or social media) or are hungry or tired.... but maybe that's just my experience.

## 2. FIND A GOOD PLACE

For some, having their parent/carer's undivided attention is marvellous, but for others it can feel a little intimidating to focus solely on their problems. You know your teen best. It might help going for a walk or drive where it is just the two of you. You might find that doing a shared enjoyable activity gives them the space they need to talk (e.g. going for a coffee or doing an activity). It might even be that face to face is too difficult and that communicating with them via text or email might be an initial way in...

## 3. ASK THE QUESTION

So often young people are very good at hiding the fact that they are struggling or as parents perhaps we too often assume they are 'just being teenagers.' I would urge you all from time to time to ask the question. How are you? Honestly, how are you? Or 'Talk me through what is going on.' Teens particularly are not the best at starting the conversation, so they may need your help in getting the ball rolling.

## 4. AND THEN... JUST LISTEN

It can be really difficult to just listen and let things play out, (especially when we know the answers) but listening non-judgementally and with compassion are amongst the most important things we can do to support our teens as they muddle their way through to adulthood. It is easy to make assumptions and second guess what they might say and do. It is very important to try and hold back from jumping in with solutions and solving problems before they have told you the full story. That way, you will help them work things out for themselves.

# How to cope as a parent with a mental health problem

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Ill mental health doesn't just affect 1 in 4 of our children each year, it affects 25% of us too. Many people worry about their capacity to cope with parenting if they have a mental health problem. It is natural to be concerned about the impact this will have on you and your children. However, with the right support and resources, it is perfectly possible to be a good parent while managing a mental health problem, and to care for and support your children in a positive way. All parents face challenges, but if you are coping with a mental health problem, you may face additional difficulties. The link below will take you to an article, on the website 'Mind', a leading national mental health charity, on how to cope as a parent affected by ill mental health.

[mind.org.uk how-to-cope-as-a-parent  
with-a-mental-health-problem](https://www.mind.org.uk/how-to-cope-as-a-parent-with-a-mental-health-problem)



# Maintaining Positive Wellbeing

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By maintaining a sense of positive wellbeing we can hope to avoid many common mental health disorders. Below is a short list of the top tips to maintaining that zen into your everyday!

1. Try your best to establish a work-life balance
2. Take regular exercise, even if it's just a daily walk in the local park/woods
3. Try your best to maintain a healthy balanced diet. Avoiding processed foods, ready meals and reducing your consumption of red meat
4. Stay hydrated - Water not wine (sorry)
5. Try your best to get into a good sleep pattern
6. Try mindfulness, meditation or Yoga
7. Stay connected to family and friends, preferably in person and not just online (post-Covid)
8. Spend time outdoors, preferably in nature
9. Build in time for yourself, whether its a hobby, a class or just 'me time', do something you enjoy
10. Show and feel gratitude for what you have



# Domestic Abuse

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It is a sad and shocking truth that domestic abuse has sharply increased during this period of lockdown and to that end, we couldn't not include an article on this very issue. Our Wellbeing and Safeguarding teams remain in close contact with vulnerable members of our community, providing advice, guidance and support. Additionally, we want to take this opportunity to signpost advice more widely and directly. Please note that the household isolation instruction as a result of coronavirus does not apply if you need to leave your home to escape domestic abuse.

- If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police.
- If you are in danger and unable to talk on the phone, call 999 and listen to the questions from the operator and if possible, respond by coughing or tapping the head set.
- If prompted, press 55 to [Make Yourself Heard](#) and this will transfer your call to the police.
- Pressing 55 only works on mobiles and does not allow police to track your location.
- Call the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) for free and confidential advice, 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247.



# What Support Is Available For Parents?

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When you are worried about your child's health and emotional wellbeing this can be a very anxious time for you and the whole family.

There is a range of support available with you can discuss with your GP, or you can reach out to us at College and we can advise and direct you.

This support could be delivered by a variety of agencies including CAMHS, Health Visitors, Children's Centres, Voluntary organisations or children's Social Care services. Support may include: Individual work, counselling, Family support and Family therapy.

[Click here for more information & guidance](#)



## Training

In order to strengthen your understanding of mental health you may choose to complete a MH Awareness course for free online. Link below:

<https://distance-learning-courses.co.uk/courses/level-2-awareness-of-mental-health-problems/>

You may also choose to complete free Save a Life training. This is suicide prevention training that might help you save a life. Link below:

<https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/>

## Events

CAMHS hold regular event aimed directly towards parent, supporting them to develop awareness of mental health and the channels to access support. Link below:

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/events/>

## Local Support

Hampshire CAMHS

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk>

Wiltshire CAMHS

<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/wiltshire/>

Andover Mind

<https://www.andovermind.org.uk>

## Advice for Parents and Carers

<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/carers/>



# Help and further information

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Our [A-Z guide](#) is a useful overview of key mental health topics

[Mumsnet](#), provide advice for parents by parents and have lots of great advice on parenting on [their website](#).

[Mind](#) have a whole range of information and support information for children and parents on their website:

[Young Minds](#) provide useful information for young people and their parents about mental health, seeking treatment and the mental health system.

The [NHS website](#) is a useful place to find out about all kinds of illnesses, including mental health problems.

[Mind Ed for Families](#) is a website developed by Health Education England and the Department of Education to help families understand and support their children, from parenting tips to getting help in a crisis.

From all of the staff at Sparsholt College please can we thank you for the support you provide us in the work that we do and for taking the time to read this Wellbeing Special Edition of our Parents' Newsletter