

Children's Mental Health & Wellbeing Policy

At Malvern Special Families (MSF) we are committed to keeping every child safe, and this includes promoting good mental health.

Why is it important to promote children's mental health and wellbeing?

Promoting children's wellbeing is a key part of keeping them safe, helping them develop and ensuring they have positive outcomes into adulthood (Public Health England, 2015).

Mental health plays a key role in a child's overall wellbeing and can be affected by various factors, including:

- environment
- stress
- family circumstances
- abuse and neglect.

Negative experiences can adversely affect a child's mental health, just as positive experiences can help improve it.

Everyone's responsibility

Anyone who works with children has a responsibility to promote their wellbeing, recognise any concerns about a child's welfare and know what action to take to keep children safe.

Signs that something is wrong

It can be difficult to know if there is something upsetting a child, but there are ways to spot when something is wrong. MSF staff are in the unique position to know the children well, if they are worried, first think if there has been a significant, lasting change in their behaviour. These warning signs should always be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should alert the Playleader and DSL at the club.

Possible warning signs, which staff should be aware of include:

- Physical signs of harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental
- Changes in eating / sleeping habits
- Talking or joking about self-harm or suicide
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope
- withdrawing from social situations
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Increased isolation from friends or family, becoming socially withdrawn
- Significant changes in activity and mood
- Changes in clothing – e.g. long sleeves in warm weather
- Increase in not attending their booked club dates
- Secretive behaviour
- not wanting to do things they usually like

We recognise some children are at greater risk of experiencing poorer mental health. For example, those who are in care, young carers, those who have had previous access to CAMHS, those living with parents/carers with a mental illness and those living in households experiencing domestic violence.

Make space and time to talk

As club staff, there are ways we can support children to give them the best chance to stay mentally healthy. MSF staff will:

- Create an open environment where children can talk about how they feel without judgement.
- Make time to check in with the children they support. Talk about how they are feeling, in large or small groups or on a one-to-one basis as appropriate.
- Give children space to talk, where appropriate, about what is happening globally, nationally, or locally – such as climate change, the pandemic, terrorism, crime, or a bereavement.

- Recognise that some children may be coming to terms with family problems, loss, or changes, to their living situation.

Encouraging children to speak out

MSF staff will:

- Build trusting relationships so that the children can open up to them about any worries, concerns, or questions they may have. Just knowing there is someone to turn to when they need to can have a positive impact on a child's mental health.
- Make sure the children know that they are there for them. Remind them they do not need to deal with concerns on their own and talk to them regularly about where they can access support. This might include teachers, family members and services such as [Childline](#).

Top tips to support children and young people



Be there to listen

Regularly ask how they're doing so they get used to talking about their feelings and know there's always someone to listen if they want it. Find out how to create a space where they will open up.

[How to start a conversation with your child](#)



Support them through difficulties

Pay attention to their emotions and behaviour, and try to help them work through difficulties. It's not always easy when faced with challenging behaviour, but try to help them understand what they're feeling and why.

[Help with difficult behaviour and emotions](#)



Stay involved in their life

Show interest in their life and the things important to them. It not only helps them value who they are but also makes it easier for you to spot problems and support them.



Encourage their interests

Being active or creative, learning new things and being a part of a team help connect us with others and are important ways we can all help our mental health. Support and encourage them to explore their interests, whatever they are.



Take what they say seriously

Listening to and valuing what they say, without judging their feelings, in turn makes them feel valued. Consider how to help them process and work through their emotions in a more constructive way.

[The Anna Freud Centre support guide](#)



Build positive routines

We know it still may not be easy, but try to reintroduce structure around regular routines, healthy eating and exercise. A good night's sleep is also really important – try to get them back into routines that fit with school or college.

[Sleep tips for children](#)

Get support

If you are concerned about a child's mental health, speak to your playleader, and discuss your concerns with the parent/carer.

- [Action for Children](#) has lots of tips to help you spot signs of mental health issues in children and advice on the action you can take to help.
- Barnardo's has also set up the [See, Hear, Respond support hub](#) – a dedicated service to help children, young people and their families or carers with problems caused by the coronavirus outbreak.
- Experiencing the loss of a friend or loved one can be extremely difficult. The [Childhood Bereavement Network](#) has information and links to national and local organisations you or the child you look after might find helpful.
- Any professional that works with children should be able to help you get support. You could talk to a teacher, school nurse, social worker, or GP.
- If you are worried about a child who has or may have an eating disorder, check if your local Children's Community Eating Disorder Team accepts self-referrals and contact them as soon as possible.

- [Mencap](#), the [Mental Health Foundation](#) and [the National Autistic Society](#) all have excellent resources and support for parents or carers of children with learning disabilities or autism.

Do not hesitate to get [support](#) if you think either you or a child needs it.

MSF staff can get support from their playleaders. Playleaders and their teams can get support from:

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and

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