NHS
Central and North West London
NHS Foundation Trust

PARENT/CARER NEWSLETTER

E: cnwl.mhst@nhs.net T: 01908 725691

May 2025

WHO ARE THE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM (MHST)? WHAT CAN THEY OFFER? HOW CAN WE ACCESS SUPPORT?

In this newsletter you will read about supporting your young person, things we offer like groups and webinars as well as sign-posting to other services. MHSTs are a joint initiative between the Department of Education and NHS England they hope to improve access to psychological therapies for children and young people with emerging mental health and wellbeing concerns.

The MHST is commissioned to work in schools in three different ways:

1. Offering interventions to young people and parents, these could be groups, one-to-one or psychoeducation workshops. These are evidence based short-term interventions for mild to moderate mental health difficulties.
2. Supporting the Senior Mental Health Lead in each school or college which we work with to develop whole setting approaches to emotional wellbeing.
3. Giving advice in a timely way to school staff and signposting and speaking to other specialists to get the right support for your young person.

We are a NHS team to which your child may be referred. The referral and subsequent appointments will be recorded on your child's electronic health care record.

We support children and young people experiencing difficulties with:

- Anxiety
- Unhelpful thinking styles
- Low mood
- Behavioural difficulties (primary aged)
- Emotional dysregulation
- Sleep difficulties

We offer a safe and confidential space where parents and young people can talk about their difficulties and learn low-intensity CBT informed approaches. We hope to help individuals to learn new skills and manage their difficulties.

Anyone attending an MHST school or college can be considered for support using the referral form. If our service is not the most suitable for you we will signpost you to a more appropriate source of support.

In Primary Schools we use a parent-led approach, we often offer support for behavioural difficulties, anxiety or emotional dysregulation.
Please speak to your school or college or GP to refer to the MHST. You can also access self-referrals using the QR code at the end of the newsletter.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Your feedback plays a vital role in shaping and improving the MHST – not just for today, but for the future. When you share your experience, you help us build services that are stronger, more effective, and able to last.

Here's how your feedback makes a difference:

- It shows what's working and where we need to do better.
- It helps us adapt to meet real needs and offer the right support.
- It motivates staff and helps us train and improve.
- It strengthens the service, so it stays reliable for you and others.
- It provides evidence that supports long term changes.

Please use the QR code to complete a short google form.

It should take you no longer than 5 minutes.

Survey closes on 6th June.

Parents/Carers

https://forms.gle/AGmETjNUwk1Vby8C6

Young People

https://forms.gle/wJi7d33nq9pPrPrV7

How we will use your feedback?

In the coming months, the MHST seeks to use your feedback in our continuing conversations with schools and other partner agencies, as we explore what is working well and how we can make the MHST even better.

You'll hear from us about what we've learned and how we'll be using it to improve.

THANK YOU!

By sharing your experience, you're helping us grow a service that listens, learns, and lasts.

EXAM STRESS EDITION

It's that time of year when our thoughts turn to exams and testing, from our primary age children taking SATs all the way up to our nearly grown-ups taking A-Levels it can be a stressful time of year for everyone. In this edition of the parent and carer newsletter we think about how we help our young people manage the season, how we can manage our own stresses, how do we know when more help is needed and thinking about how we measure success. Even if you don't have children taking exams this year, we hope you will find something helpful this time or something to put in your back pocket for future use! Also don't miss the last page which advertises our summer holiday anxiety groups.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH EXAMS: WHAT HELPS AND WHAT DOESN'T

1.**Asking your child how they would like you to support them - do they want a cheerleader or a stoic, quiet supporter?** Do they want help with deadlines and revision or just cups of tea and sticking to routine? Having an open dialogue about exams and being respectful of boundaries and desires is important to maintaining a harmonious relationship. The earlier you can have discussions and agree on the support the better for everyone.

2.**Don't ban screen time.** Having limits and boundaries around devices, social media and screens is important, particularly with younger children that may struggle to self-regulate. If you try and ban screen time this can cause resentment and cause young people to find ways around a ban. Being clear with expectations and boundaries and discussing the reasons behind them will make reducing screen time easier. Thinking about ways to spend downtime together or facilitating socialising with friends IRL (in real life!) can help to naturally reduce screen time without young people feeling isolated.

3.**Encourage rest and routine.** Some young people can find switching off from revision challenging and want to cram or work late into the evening. Helping them set boundaries around revision that feel manageable can be supportive. Looking together at exam timetables so they can plan their revision, social time, family time, eating and movement breaks can help them to plan and consider the importance of breaks.

4.**Don't compare your child to anyone else, it can be easy to do and can have a detrimental impact on self-esteem and confidence.** Consider how your child might feel being compared to someone else, it isn't likely to motivate them and everyone learns and copes differently with stress.

5.**Offer practical support, do they need support with revision books, some nice new stationery, finding revision skills or something else?** Helping them find a quiet and non-distracting study space can make a big difference to their ability to concentrate and study. Consider encouraging siblings to respect their need for space and quiet and ensure that during study sessions they can be left alone as much as possible.

6.**Don't use rewards or punishments as motivating tools** – this can lead to added pressure and stress that may make it harder to study in the long run. When rewards feel out of reach or linked to performance children may feel they are unachievable and can result in anxious thoughts and additional stress.

7. **Do praise effort and not results –** effort is something that for most young people is something they can control, for some children it is more challenging. Praising small steps, effort and attitude can be beneficial as the young person has an ability to influence these and it can be a boost to morale and self-esteem. When offering praise make it authentic and specific, tell them how their efforts make you feel and what you are seeing that you are praising.

8. **Don't minimise their concerns** – it can be easy to say "don't worry" or "it will all be fine" but this can feel dismissive and lead to young people shutting down and not sharing their concerns. Instead offer empathy and validation and make sure they feel heard "I can see this is really important to you, do you want to tell me how you are feeling about things?" showing curiosity and letting them know you are seeking to understand.

9. **Stay positive and calm, it doesn't help to add your own stress to theirs!** Being a calm person around the home and checking in gently and empathetically about feelings and thoughts will help to promote discussing things and remaining in a positive mind set.

10. **Try not to apply pressure**, telling them they must get top marks or that they must do well may have good intentions but can increase stress and pressure that will make it harder to concentrate and stay positive.

LOOKING AFTER YOU: MANAGING YOUR OWN WELLBEING

As parents and carers it can be easy to look after other people and not spend time looking after yourself. A simple evidence-based framework for looking after your wellbeing is "Five ways to wellbeing"

Connect

-Find ways to connect with family, friends and your children. Could you plan a trip to the park with friends, a coffee and a chat or try a new experience?
-Have a meal with family with no tech, eat somewhere different or use it as a chance to play a game such as two truths and a lie to build bonds and have a fun interaction
-Think about reaching out to an old friend, making a call instead of a text or walking to speak to a colleague instead of sending an email.
Strong relationships are key to emotional resilience, we aren't meant to carry the load alone so finding small ways to connect can really improve mood and wellbeing.

Get Active

-Go on a walk, run or bike ride, Milton Keynes and Bletchley have so many outdoor spaces that can be enjoyed for free
-Why not try a new way of getting active, take the kids ice skating, climbing or swimming perhaps?
-Add in short bursts or exercise through your day, get out for a ten-minute walk at lunch time, get off the bus a stop early or even do some squats while the kettle boils
-How about a good kitchen disco, turn on some music and get dancing, it all counts
Moving regularly helps you stay grounded, boosts health and releases endorphins, it doesn't have to be hours in the gym unless that's your thing!

Take Notice

-Life can be so busy that it can go by without us noticing, pausing and noticing what is around you can help us reduce stress and improve mood
-Look at the trees, in such green surroundings you can see so many shades and colours as the seasons change, notice the blossom and the improvement in the weather (at time of writing it is 20 degrees and gorgeous…)
-Spend five minutes being in the moment, enjoy a warm drink without any distractions, listen to your favourite song or enjoy a moment to yourself without multitasking
Mindfulness helps calm the mind and improve patience, even a few minutes can help a busy and overloaded brain!

Keep Learning

-Try out a new hobby, from cross stitch to kayaking learning a new skill is great for your wellbeing and positivity
-Stay curious, is there something you've always wanted to learn, could you build it in to your life in micro moments?
-Is there something you could learn as a family, rules for a new game, a new sport or even learn to tie knots and make a den in the woods!
As we get older we can stop learning new things, but learning can help us stay young at heart, increase positivity and make us more interesting people! This can help with your own sense of identity which can get lost over time.

Give

-Could you volunteer? There are so many ways to give time from parent helping at Scouting or Guiding groups, reading at schools, marshalling at parkrun or supporting a food bank. It doesn't have to be a huge commitment and could mean you meet new people and have some fun new experiences.
-Give a compliment, spreading positivity and lifting up others helps with our own mood and wellbeing and it only takes a second!
-Give yourself compassion, modern life is hard and we can often put pressure on ourselves to be the perfect friend, colleague, parent or partner. Give yourself the same compassion you would give to someone else, we are all doing our best and that's good enough!
Giving starts with kindness, it could be time, attention or a thoughtful word. It gives us a sense of wellbeing and pride that boosts our positivity and mood.

HOW CAN WE TELL WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE NEED MORE HELP?

The mental health support team is an early intervention service and we support children and young people with, amongst other things, worry. It's useful to consider what normal worry and exam stress looks like.

It's completely normal:

-To worry about their performance and what will happen
-Feel more tired or irritable
-Spend more time revising or talking about their exams
-On some occasions struggle to sleep

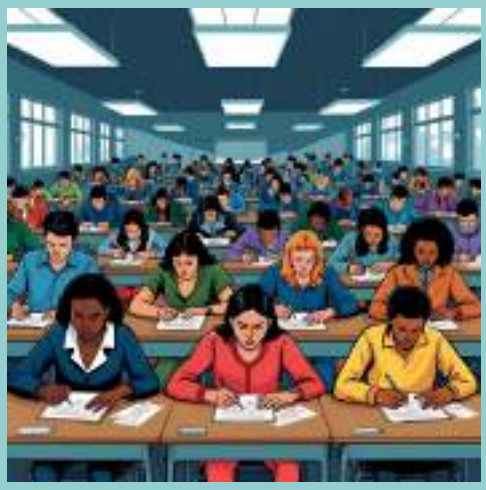
These are all temporary and tend to ease once the exams have finished and life goes back to normal.

When to be more concerned:

There are some signs which signal that the struggles may need more support
-Changes in mood, persistent sadness, anger or feeling hopeless
-Changes in behaviour, such as avoiding friends, school or studies altogether
-Loss of interest in things, this could look like giving up or not getting enjoyment from life
-Persistent negative self-talk – "I'm a failure" or "I can't do anything right"
-Disrupted eating or sleeping, this could be more or less than before.

What can parents and carers do?

-Keep conversations going, gently enquire about wellbeing, thoughts and feelings
-Validate their feelings, try not to say "It'll be fine" or "just relax" as this can be unhelpful. Instead try "It's ok to feel like this" or "that sounds really tricky"
-Gently reflect back what you are seeing. Try "I've noticed…" or "I'm curious about…" and offer space to talk
-Know when to reach out for support, this could be through the school mental health lead, your GP or if in Crisis please see crisis contacts at the end of this newsletter. If you feel unable to keep your child safe you can visit A&E or call 111 and select the mental health option.



SUCCESS ISN'T JUST A GRADE

.Sometimes it can be helpful to support our young people to see their worth beyond numbers or letters on a screen or piece of paper. Of course exams are important, but they are just one way of measuring success. It's easy for young people (and their families!) to tie self-worth to exam results. However, success can come in many different forms and recognising this can help with wellbeing and to reduce the pressure around testing.

What else counts as success?

Here are some things that matter and are worth celebrating both in our young people and in ourselves

-Resilience: Keeping going even when it's hard

-Effort: Putting in the work and trying your best, regardless of the outcome

-Growth: Learning from the past and moving forward, grow through what you go through!

-Courage: Asking for help when need it is a sign of strength

-Kindness: Supporting a friend or loved one

-Balance: Knowing when to take a break and look after yourself is an important skill for life.

Why does it matter?

If we feel that only our exam results define us it can increase feelings of anxiety or low mood making it more difficult to succeed. There is an increased risk or burnout or perfectionism which can get in the way of doing the best we can and thinking clearly. It can also result in a fear of failure and avoidance of trying new things.

How can we support young people to see success differently?

We can take time to praise the process and the effort and not just the outcome, making it normal to give praise and notice hard work. We can spend time reflecting with them the skills they have developed to support themselves and show that we value these. We can share our own experiences of when things haven't turned out in the way we hoped and how we coped afterwards. We can also encourage variety, make room for sports, hobbies and socialising and explain the need for balance for a healthy, fulfilled life.

OTHER CRISIS SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE:

FOR URGENT OR OUT OF HOURS SUPPORT, PLEASE CALL OUR ALL-AGE MENTAL HEALTH URGENT ADVICE LINE ON 0800 023 4650. OPENING HOURS FOR THE URGENT ADVICE LINE IS: 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK, 365 DAYS A YEAR.

SHOUT PROVIDES FREE 24/7 CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT VIA TEXT FOR ANYONE IN CRISIS AND STRUGGLING TO COPE. TEXT SHOUT TO 85258.

CHILDLINE – CALL 0800 1111

YOUNG MINDS - 0808 802 5544 (PARENT'S HELPLINE OPEN MONDAY TO FRIDAY 9.30AM – 4PM) WEBSITE: HTTPS://YOUNGMINDS.ORG.UK/ - THIS WEBSITE ALSO OFFERS A FREE 24/7 TEXT MESSAGE CRISIS LINE, IF YOU NEED URGENT HELP TEXT YM TO 85258.

NHS
Central and
North West London
NHS Foundation Trust

The Mental Health Support Team (MHST) is an NHS service. A referral to the team will result in a mental health episode of care being opened in your/ the child's shared NHS electronic records and may include an assessment of need and subsequent clinical documentation being saved there.

MK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM

SUMMER GROUPS: CHILD ANXIETY

A summer group aimed for children aged 8 - 12 years old and their parents/carers to equip them with knowledge and skills to manage feelings of anxiety.

AIMS OF THE GROUP

- to gain an understanding of what anxiety is and how it might feel in our bodies
- to learn about the links between anxious thoughts and anxious behaviours
- to be able to manage anxiety more effectively and confidently using evidence-based strategies

DETAILS

Date: Summer Holidays 2025
Location: TBC
Session Duration: 2 hours
Length: 4 sessions in total
Group Size: ...

WHO IS IT FOR?

Children (8-12 years old) who are struggling with increased anxiety and worry and their parents/carers who together would like to learn CBT-informed skills to support and overcome these feelings.

Sessions will involve children and their parents/carers.

If you are interested in accessing the summer groups for your child (or any support from the MHST), you now have multiple ways you can refer to our service:

1) Self refer through our website. Use this QR code and then click 'Self Referral' at the bottom of the page

2) Speak to your school mental health lead

3) By visiting your GP