

## **‘Somewhere to talk - Someone to listen’**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **The Emotional Needs of Young People**

##### **The Role of Voluntary Youth Clubs**

Youth clubs provide many factors identified as important for good mental health and resilience in children and young people, for example

- safe and supportive environments
- a chance to form lasting friendships
- a committed mentor or other person from outside the family
- opportunities to learn and achieve
- opportunities to engage in creative and challenging activities
- opportunities to ‘make a difference’ by helping others or through part time work
- challenging situations which provide opportunities to develop coping skills

Research evidence has shown that young people who attend youth clubs are

- more likely to have a positive relationship with their parents and friends
- more engaged in their education
- more aware of their strengths and skills

Significantly it has been shown that involvement in out of school activities such as attending a youth club reduces the risk of depression during the teenage years

‘Mental health’ however is often considered a concern for specialist rather than universal children’s services and so many workers in voluntary youth clubs may not recognise the important role they play in supporting the mental health of young people. Young people have said that specialist mental health support is not always what they need, and what they have found helpful is support from informal, community services, places where they can go and just have a friendly chat with a supportive adult, such as a youth worker who knows them and who they can trust (Mental Health Foundation, 2007). Many young people who attend youth clubs will be experiencing ‘low level’ mental health problems. Consequently youth clubs could play a key role in reducing the risk of these vulnerable young people developing a more severe mental health problem, which could potentially have a devastating impact on their life.

#### **Difficulties facing young people**

Research suggests that our children and young people experience more emotional difficulties growing up in this country than any other in the western world e.g. the UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Western Europe and our young people are among the highest users of alcohol in Europe.

The UK received the lowest score for child wellbeing in a UNICEF inquiry into the wellbeing of children and young people living in the world's richest countries.

There is some concern that the values and lifestyle choices within our society play a significant contribution to the difficulties faced by young people today e.g. that modern culture promotes '*consumerism, aggression and unhealthy living*'.

It is also thought that the increasing health and safety concerns within society are limiting the kinds of activities that children and young people can get involved in. Significantly, adventurous play has been shown to be important for social and emotional wellbeing as well as healthy brain development.

As they mature into early adulthood, children and young people experience a variety of changes which make their mental health particularly vulnerable.

### **What is mental health?**

There is a significant amount of *stigma* attached to the term 'mental health'. This often acts as a barrier to people talking about mental health or emotional wellbeing within our society. In recent years a number of celebrities and sports stars who have personal experience of mental health problems such as Marcus Trescothick, Stephen Fry and Jo Brand, have spoken out in an attempt to battle this stigma. The following terms are often used when describing mental health:

*Mental or emotional well-being* describes our ability to cope with life's problems and make the most of life's opportunities; it is about feeling good and functioning well, as individuals and collectively.

*Mental health problems* generally refers to difficulties we may experience with our mental health which affect our ability to cope with their everyday life and make it very difficult to do everyday things such as go to work, sleep well, or socialise with friends. These may result in a person receiving a psychiatric diagnosis such as depression.

*Mental illness* is a term used by some people to describe serious, long term mental health problems such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or severe depression. People experiencing these problems often require treatment from specialist mental health services.

The Mental Health Foundation (1999) has identified that mentally healthy children should have the ability to:

- Develop emotionally, creatively and intellectually
- Develop and maintain good relationships with other people
- Play and learn
- Understand 'right' from 'wrong'
- Face problems, setbacks and learn from them

*Low Level mental health problems*

Many children and young people will experience 'low level' mental health problems which are not severe enough to be classified with a psychiatric diagnosis but leave them vulnerable to developing more serious problems if the right support is not available.

Voluntary youth clubs work with many such young people in a range of settings such as youth clubs, counselling services, mental health projects and outreach programmes.

Data from voluntary youth counselling services identify the most common problems experienced by young people as

- anxiety and stress
- low self esteem
- depression
- difficulties related to relationships with families and/or peers
- communication difficulties
- isolation / loneliness
- self harm
- eating disorders
- sexuality

Traumatic experiences include:

- bullying at school
- abuse (emotional, physical and sexual)
- bereavement
- divorce

You can find more information about mental health and emotional well being on the following websites

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)  
[www.thesite.org](http://www.thesite.org)  
[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)  
[www.youthaccess.org.uk](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk)  
[www.handsonscotland.co.uk](http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk)