



National Children's
Bureau

Gender-sensitive approaches to addressing children and young people's emotional and mental health and well-being

Examples of promising practice

Emily Hamblin and Harley Young – January 2017, updated August 2017

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Introduction

This document is for decision-makers, service providers and practitioners whose work impacts on children and young people's emotional and mental health and well-being. It features practice that explicitly addresses gender as a relevant factor in such work. In sharing these examples, NCB aims to help further thinking and practice in this area.

Children and young people's mental health is one of the most challenging health issues of our times. It is estimated that half of all mental health problems emerge before the age of 14, with three quarters having appeared by the age of 24 (Kessler and others 2005). The serious consequences of emotional and behavioural problems for children and young people's life outcomes in many domains, and even their life expectancy, are well-documented (Goodman and others 2011; Richards and others 2009). The use of effective, evidence-based interventions with children, young people and families can help to avert such consequences and save public money (Khan 2016).

In 2014, the Department of Health and NHS England established a taskforce to examine how to improve child and adolescent mental health and well-being, as part of a government commitment to achieve better access to mental health care for people of all ages by 2020 (DH 2014). The taskforce published its report, *Future in Mind* (DH and NHSE 2015), making clear proposals for whole-system change. Major transformation programmes for both child and adult mental health services are now underway.

Mental health is a gendered issue, with research identifying gender differences in:

- the general picture of children and young people's emotional and mental health
- the prevalence of specific difficulties and issues among children and young people
- children and young people's coping strategies and help-seeking behaviours
- responses to children and young people's emotional and mental health needs from parents and carers, schools, and public services
- service responses to the needs of some particular groups of children and young people.

Awareness and media coverage of these gender dimensions is growing, particularly in terms of girls' well-being and self-esteem; young male suicide; and the experiences of trans and gender variant children and young people. However, 'gender blindness' can inhibit understanding of such issues and the potential of policy making and service design and delivery to address them.

From 2009-2017, NCB was a Health and Care Voluntary Sector Strategic Partner to the Department of Health, NHS England and Public Health England. This role included supporting the children's mental health transformation agenda outlined in *Future in Mind*. In this capacity, NCB brought together research evidence, young people's voices and examples of promising practice relating to gender dimensions in children and young people's mental health. In seeking examples of gender-sensitive approaches to share with the health system and voluntary and community sector, NCB publicised a call for examples via its networks and those of other Strategic Partner organisations. These included the Men's Health Forum, National LGB&T Partnership and Women's Health and Equality Consortium. This document presents case studies based on examples submitted; it does not represent the full range of existing practice, and examples have not been

evaluated by NCB. These examples are shared with the aim of inspiring new thinking and encouraging conversations about gender-sensitive approaches.

NCB would like to thank all individuals who contributed case studies, and colleagues who publicised the call for examples.

Find out more

Other outputs from this project include:

- *Gender and children and young people's emotional and mental health: manifestations and responses – A rapid review of the evidence*
- *Just getting on: Young people's views on gender, emotional well-being and mental health.*

All publications are available at <https://www.ncb.org.uk/genderandmentalhealth>. A wide range of other resources from NCB on children and young people's health and well-being can also be found on our website.

Terminology

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Cisgender – a person whose gender identity is congruent with the gender they were assigned at birth is described as cisgender.

Gender – refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for males and females.

Gender blindness – 'the failure to recognise that the roles and responsibilities of men/boys and women/girls are given to them in specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts and backgrounds. Projects, programmes, policies and attitudes which are gender-blind do not take into account these different roles and diverse needs, maintain the status quo and will not help transform the unequal structure of gender relations' (UN Statistics Division, 2013).

Gender identity – a person's internal sense of their own gender.

LGBTQ+ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer/questioning. The term LGBTQ+ aims to include people with a wide range of non-normative gender identities and/or sexual orientations.

Trans – an umbrella term for various people who experience a mismatch between their gender identity and the sex that they were assigned at birth. It includes transgender and transsexual people as well as anyone else who is in any way gender variant. 'Trans*' is sometimes preferred, including by contributors to this document: the asterisk is intended to represent inclusion of many identities.

VAWG – violence against women and girls.

What do we mean by 'gender-sensitive approaches'?

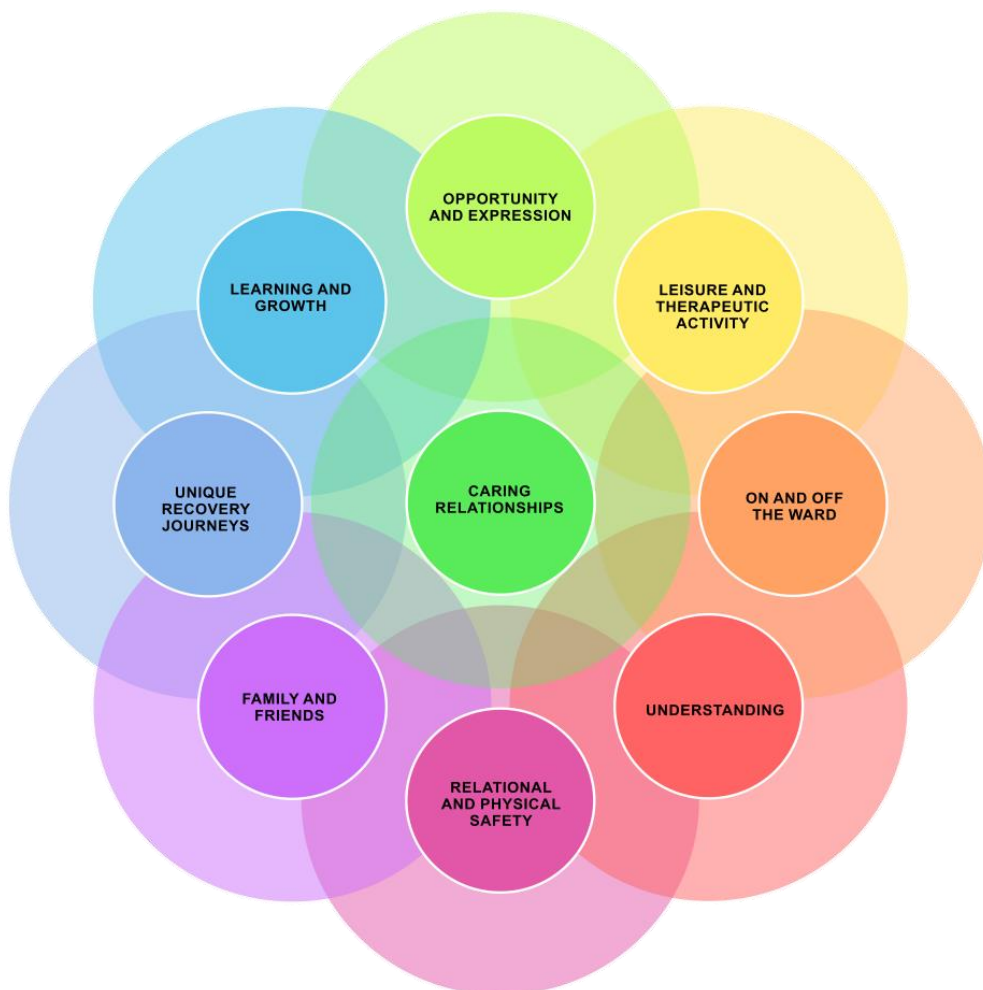
NCB sought examples of 'gender-sensitive approaches to address children and young people's emotional and mental health needs'. This was defined as:

- Gender-specific work to address the needs of particular groups of children and young people, including trans and non-binary children and young people
- Work that responds to gendered ways in which mental health issues affect children and young people (in response to a disproportionate impact, e.g. of eating disorders upon young women, or addressing minority experiences, e.g. of young men who have eating disorders)
- Activities in which children and young people are encouraged to explore the role of gender in their emotional and mental health and well-being
- Work relating to mental health that takes account of gender in service planning and delivery, e.g. to improve inclusion and access.

CAMHeleon

CAMHeleon is a colourful collection of ideas, articles, quotes, research and resources for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) wards and services. Whilst not a practice example itself, it demonstrates how the sharing of good practice and inspiring ideas can promote gender-sensitive approaches.

CAMHeleon exists to champion a holistic model of CAMHS inpatient care, and it offers a collection of achievable positive experiences young people can have while in hospital. Its contents are informed by research into aspects of young people's well-being and how CAMHS wards can best provide and support these collaboratively. CAMHeleon is structured around themes, each of which reflects both an aspect of happy ward life and an important part of young people's everyday well-being.



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Gender-related practice issues, examples and concepts are mentioned across the CAMHeleon site. It acknowledges how gender fits into identity formation, and the potential fluidity of gender; that gender can influence how young people experience and express their internal worlds; and differences in how boys and girls may seek to belong to peer groups and use social media. CAMHeleon mentions gender as relevant to role models and peer support for young people, and lists gender-specific groups among ward leisure and therapeutic activities. It explores ideas around sanctuary and the importance of privacy and space while in inpatient care, recommending that gender-segregated areas are part of creating comfortable, welcoming and therapeutic environments for young people.

CAMHeleon is a project of Star Wards, which provides practical ideas and inspiring examples from and for mental health ward staff, and which has a membership of about 650 wards. Star Wards is itself a project of the social justice charity Bright. CAMHeleon was conceived and developed by Nic Higham, Star Wards' Inpatient Care Project Manager.

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Solace Women's Aid's Hear2Change Project

Solace's Hear2Change project is an education and prevention programme supporting vulnerable young women and girls through targeted early intervention, group-work and one-to-one support. It is run by Solace Women's Aid, a London-wide charity that works with women and children survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The project operates in the London boroughs of Islington and Haringey and began in 2016, supported by five years of Big Lottery funding.

Reports of domestic and sexual abuse are increasing, and more than 5,000 domestic offences and 1,200 sexual offences were recorded in Islington and Haringey in the year to June 2017 (MOPAC, 2017). Young women are the most likely group to be victims of these crimes (ONS, 2017), with many unreported cases not reflected in statistics. As the evidence review accompanying this document explains (see pages 16 and 34), gender-based violence is a key risk factor for poor mental health and well-being, with wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts on girls and young women.

Solace's Hear2Change project seeks to change a culture of acceptance and normalisation of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). It tackles various forms of violence including domestic violence, sexual abuse, harmful practices and honour based violence through understanding the objectification of girls and the specific discrimination that young women experience, including that which takes place online.

Conscious that the most vulnerable groups of women and girls experience the most abuse and have the least resources available to them, Solace are targeting the project towards young women and girls aged 11–19 from communities with the poorest access to provision that meets their needs: for example, young women from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee groups including Travellers, Somali communities, Muslim communities, those in care and care leavers.

In the first year of the programme, direct work with young people has focused exclusively on young women and girls. A large number have self-referred to take part, keen to make a difference in their lives and for other young women. The project is led by a youth steering group who:

- Steer the content of the project
- Co-deliver workshops on VAWG to their peers on VAWG
- Design publicity materials and social media content
- Gain AQA Levels 1 and 2 accreditations and work experience.

Activities are designed to develop participants' confidence, self-esteem and skills; increase their awareness around identity and understanding of safety and risks; build their resilience; and improve their mental health and well-being. For example, young women are given photos of inspirational



'Having young women at the heart of the project, steering its direction, is crucial, not only to ensure the project's relevance but also for the young women to realise their potential as a powerful force for change.'

Amy Quinn-Graham, Senior Project Worker, Solace Women's Aid

women from around the world and encouraged to identify what they find inspiring about each person; discuss how women and girls are perceived – and objectified – within society; and realise how often women defy society's odds. Presenting participants with an array of amazing women counters the usual media representation of women with which they are bombarded, and shows them that they are capable of defying society's odds too.

'This is such an important project because it brings light to a subject that no one really talks about on an everyday basis because it's... uncomfortable and... personal.'

Young service user, Hear2Change Project

Safe spaces are also provided for young people to disclose their experiences and get one-to-one support so they can move on to futures free from abuse.

Solace Women's Aid delivers the project in partnership with Islington and Haringey local authorities, schools, colleges and community youth hubs.

Creating safe gender-specific spaces whilst including all young people

Some young women expressed anxiety about participating in gender-specific group work, thinking that young women may not be friendly or supportive to one another. Solace Women's Aid takes care to identify and address the support needs of each young woman and looks into themes that arise, with both individuals and groups. Young women's confidence in the group is built through fun team building activities that explore the strength of friendship and community.

Feedback from young women indicates that many appreciate having a gender-specific space in which to share experiences and develop solutions to improve their lives. This has benefited their well-being as they feel their issues and ideas are finally being listened to and heard.

Some young men wanted to participate in the project and help to end VAWG too. Solace Women's Aid, recognising that young men have a key role to play, have put them on a waiting list to get involved in the second year of the project.

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Working With Men's Life Development Programme

Working with Men's Life Development Programme aims to engage and assist the development of social and emotional skills amongst boys and young men aged 13–25. It focuses on individuals who are most at risk, or showing signs, of mental health problems. The programme is delivered in Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and Hammersmith and Fulham, supported by funding from the City Bridge Trust.

By means of short- to medium-term solution focussed therapeutic interventions and support, Working With Men's Life Development Worker helps individuals:

- Understand their diagnosis better, if they have one
- Deal with issues preventing them achieving their ambitions
- Deal with feelings of depression, anxiety, stress or sadness
- Learn new coping mechanisms and strategies.



Social services, Early Help teams, school and youth offending teams are among the agencies referring young men to the Life Development Programme. Self-referral is possible although, in practice, young men tend not to access the programme of their own accord. Boys and young men vary in how prepared they are for the interventions involved in the Life Development Programme. This may relate to how well-briefed they are by referring agencies, their memory of information given, or how comfortable they are with acknowledging a need for support.

One-to-one work generally takes place in service settings, although home visits are also carried out with young men whose behaviours are deeply entrenched, or where working with the wider family would bring particular benefits. The Life Development Worker also does some school-based group work.

Many of the boys and young men accessing the programme have previously used, and disengaged from, children and young people's mental health services. Disengagement from more traditional services is especially common among young black men, reflecting research findings explored in the evidence review accompanying this document (see pages 35–36).

The Life Development Worker works hard to create conditions for a strong therapeutic relationship, despite some challenges presented by the service and home environments in which the programme is delivered. Boys and young men have valued an informal, laid-back approach, within a professional relationship that feels different from others they may have experienced. Avoiding an impression that the work is about problem-solving or doing something 'to' young men is important.

Through this programme, Working With Men are also working with mainstream services in the three London boroughs to help make these more accessible for boys and young men.

Reducing the stigma of seeking or accepting help

As the evidence review accompanying this document explains, stigma relating to mental health disproportionately deters young males from seeking help (see pages 21–23).

Working With Men decided not to include the term 'mental health' in the name of this programme, since it can be off-putting to young men and also difficult for their families. Encouraging engagement whilst being transparent and tackling stigma is a delicate balance, which staff consider on an ongoing basis.

Communication takes into account which language and concepts are acceptable and relevant to individuals: for example, talk of 'emotional regulation' has been well-received. When supporting one young man, the Life Development Worker found that the long-term nature of this individual's difficulties had enabled him to develop good mental health literacy; he could be highly articulate and open, but also adept at avoiding unwelcome conversations. With any individual, conversations about mental health develop gradually, as the working relationship with the Life Development Worker becomes established.

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Trans* Health Education (THE) Action Youth

The Trans* Health Education (THE) Action Youth Project supports young people whose gender identity is different to how others see it, or those who are questioning their gender identity. It is run by Young Persons Advisory Service (YPAS), a charity that provides mental health services for children, young people and their families in Liverpool. THE Action Youth is funded by Liverpool CCG and works within the Liverpool CAMHS partnership which includes Alder Hey CAMHS, Barnardos and ADHD Foundation amongst other organisations.

THE Action Youth group enables young people aged 12-18 to meet others, be themselves, explore their identities, learn about health and well-being, and be supported through their gender transition. The service runs sessions exploring a range of topics, which are drawn from the identified needs of the young people: for example, gender, issues in school, coming out, sexual health and peer relationships. Sessions aim to break down social isolation, build peer relationships and support networks in a safe and welcoming space. Due to trans* identities not being fully known about and accepted in wider society, the group also aims to reduce the stigma of being trans* and to improve the mental and emotional well-being of young people accessing the service.

All aspects of the work undertaken by THE Action Youth is underpinned by a gender-sensitive approach: for example, toilets are non-gendered so that all young people feel comfortable using the facilities.

THE Action Youth sits within the wider LGBT+ provision offered by YPAS. Young people and their families aged 10-25 can access a 1-2-1 Information, Advice and Guidance service as needed. By working with other professionals and families, THE Action Youth staff ensure that holistic support for young people is routine.

Feedback from young people who attend THE Action Youth has focused on improvement of their self-esteem and confidence, reduced isolation, greater understanding of themselves and being able to explore who they are in a non-stigmatised environment.

Facilitating and addressing feedback from young people

Suggestions and/or issues raised by young people accessing THE Action Youth services are filtered through to the wider YPAS staff team delivering support and counselling services.

One of the main challenges has been in relation to the use of gendered language, and ensuring that children and young people are not mis-gendered. To overcome this, staff were provided with training to further understanding around language and terminology, and to challenge perceptions of a binary gender approach to 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Staff are encouraged to ask questions about gender identity and pronouns, and to ensure that young people's identities are reflected across YPAS paperwork and monitoring forms.

Feedback from young people has been positive. Young people understand that staff may not get it right every time, but that they are listening to the young people and striving to develop gender-sensitive practice.

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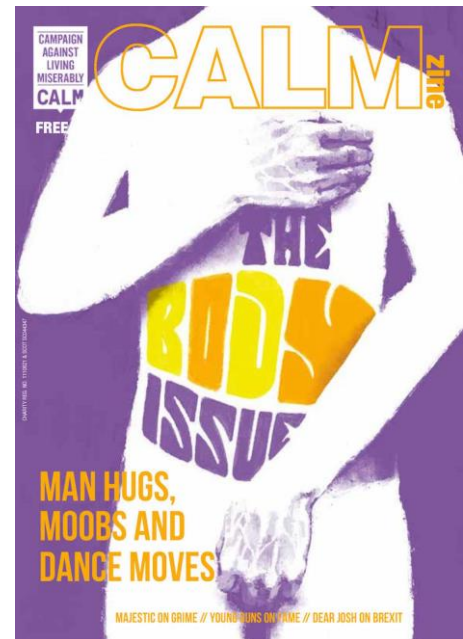
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CALMzine, The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

CALMzine is an award-winning quarterly online and in-print publication produced by the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM), a charity established to address male suicide in the UK. The publication is funded by menswear retailer Topman and distributed in Topman stores throughout the UK. The magazine recently won Best Publication at the 2016 Mind Media Awards.

Men are three times more likely than women to die by suicide (ONS, 2016), so CALMzine is specifically designed to reach men aged 15–34 on their own terms and on their own turf. It aims to address issues and ask questions about what's expected of young men in the 21st century, taking a non-clinical, non-aspirational approach that empowers young men to help themselves and each other. CALMzine allows men to express what they feel, and challenge unhelpful stereotypes about masculinity.

The publication is by and for men, and focuses on interest areas that they connect with. It features a mix of interviews and articles on a range of topics including music, mental and physical health, art, sport, technology, film and fashion. CALMzine features interviews with high profile individuals that have in the past included well-respected musicians like Frank Turner and Young Fathers. It aims to create a space to challenge stereotypes and preconceptions, and get men reading and writing about the issues that matter to them.



'Addresses a serious message without taking itself too seriously'

'I LOVE IT. Since dealing with anxiety and depression, I picked one up from my university's counselling service and I honestly love reading it'

Feedback from CALMzine readers

CALM describe their publication as an antithesis to the typical glossy men's mag, and CALM's 'stealth weapon' in preventing male suicide: a relatable, supportive and creative space for guys disguised as a quarterly lifestyle magazine. CALMzine writers and artists create pieces about depression, anxiety, OCD, being suicidal and having panic attacks – but they do so in a way which is surprisingly readable, funny and inspiring. Readers can discover and find solace in CALM through the magazine.

Whilst CALM are sometimes challenged to explain why their campaign and publication focus solely on men, the overall response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Achieving reach through a 'soft-touch' approach

CALM report that the interviews, artwork and irreverent 'soft-touch' approach of the publication allow them to reach thousands of men, well outside the arena of mental health.

Every CALMzine signposts their support services (helpline, webchat and website), so readership is crucial to its impact. To date, CALMzine has reached an online audience of 640,000; has had 36,000 digital reads online; and has reached nearly 100,000 print copies annually.

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OutBurst

OutBurst is a weekly support group for young people aged 11-19 who self-identify within the LGBTQ+ spectrum or are questioning their sexuality or gender identity. OutBurst is run at NGY myplace, a young people's centre in Nottingham, through a contract with the centre's lead partner, Base 51. It is funded by Nottingham Women's Centre.

OutBurst offers a range of activities for young people in the Nottingham area, including arts and crafts, board games and sports. They also offer one-to-one support, drop-in counselling, and sessions on topics such as hate crime and trans* awareness. OutBurst aims to create a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQ+ young people, building their self-esteem and supporting them to comfortably express their identity. They encourage young people to self-identify, dress as they choose in sessions so they feel comfortable, and welcome participation and use of the centre's facilities according to their identified gender. For example, although they have gender-specific toilets within the building, they promote the toilets as all access facilities. In addition to this, they reinforce their code of conduct within the building and with staff to ensure that there is minimal harassment and discrimination.

OutBurst also works closely with other organisations such as NHS partners who come in every few months to deliver workshops and offer OutBurst-only sexual health clinics. However, there can be challenges in delivering gender-specific sessions. For example, sexual health sessions have traditionally been tailored for delivery to cisgender male or cisgender female groups, but staff are aware of the need to ensure that trans* young people feel included and do not miss out on vital information and education on important topics.

OutBurst also works with organisations to deliver practical workshops that empower trans* and non-binary young people to confidently express their gender identity. For example, recently they worked with make-up artist Trish Daswaney of Kohlkreatives to deliver a series of skincare and make-up sessions (see box).

Delivering practical gender-sensitive workshops that empower young people

Trish Daswaney of Kohlkreatives offered free one-to-one sessions to OutBurst young people in which they learned how to use make-up techniques to masculinise or feminise their faces. For many of those who attended, it was the first time they had been able to explore make-up techniques, and they left sessions feeling empowered. The young people gave positive feedback and asked for further sessions to better their techniques and learn new skills.

OutBurst Support Worker Jess Ternent reports that such sessions are, 'for many of our young people, the only time they are able to feel 100% comfortable with who they are'.

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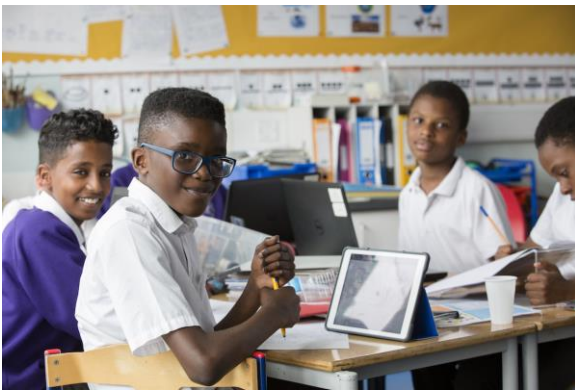
Julie Berentsen, Mindfulness educator

Julie Berentsen is a self-employed Mindfulness educator. She leads weekly half-hour mindfulness sessions during term-time with young people in educational settings.

Mindfulness involves learning to direct our attention to our experience as it is unfolding, moment by moment, with open-minded curiosity and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1996). Rooted in Buddhist traditions and later introduced in the west, mindfulness techniques have gained considerable popularity in recent years, in both clinical psychology and as practice for daily life. There is a growing body of research into the potential of mindfulness programmes in school settings (Weare, 2015; Mindfulness in Schools Project, 2016).

This project has been running for almost two years and is ongoing. Julie works with children aged between 5-10 years old at one inner city London school among others. The school has a diverse multicultural population.

Julie's mindfulness sessions aim to address social and emotional concerns including anger, self-regulation, anxiety, and general well-being. Her approach is based in developing a trusting relationship with the participants. This begins by meeting them openly, whatever their current experience. Julie listens to them, accepts whatever they wish to share without judgement, acknowledges when things don't work and encourages the things that do. This has required a gender-sensitive approach. For example, the boys appeared to find talking in a group more difficult than the girls, so Julie started working with them individually and then in pairs when they felt ready. This led to honest conversations around what issues were confronting them at a given time, and the impact on their lives: for example, differences between each of their relationships with their mothers and fathers.



'I have learnt that I have lots of different emotions, how to look after them and be a better friend to myself'

Child participating in Julie Berentsen's sessions

In using a gender-sensitive approach, Julie is challenged to continuously monitor and check in with her own inherited views about gender. She also reflects on how she interacts with participants, taking time to consider a gender-sensitive approach. This approach has had a big impact on transforming Julie's relationships with the young people.

Creating a gender-sensitive safe space to communicate

Julie reports that her approaches towards creating a gender-sensitive, trusting environment for participants has helped reassure children that it is OK and safe to talk about their emotions. This enables more open communication, as well as helping the child to recognise the choices available to them and their own responsibility for how they respond to situations.

Julie's personalised, gender-sensitive approach has had a big impact on children's response to the mindfulness sessions, and improved their overall well-being. Feedback includes: "I get on better with my family now" and "I have learnt that I have lots of different emotions, how to look after them and be a better friend to myself".

Further information

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Reflections

The examples in this document present some key learning points:

- Considerations of gender can be incorporated into general information on children and young people's mental health and related services. This reflects gender-sensitivity as opposed to gender blindness.
- Specialist services and peer support are important for trans* and gender variant children and young people, as is improving inclusion of these young people in non-specialist services. Improvements can be promoted by creating a positive dialogue between young people and staff; training and supporting staff; and sharing the expertise of specialist workers.
- Gender-informed communication can help young people to engage with mental health topics. In particular, a soft-touch approach appeals to young men, with mental health content being produced by their peers and presented in the context of their interests and lifestyles.
- Gender-sensitive approaches involve meeting children and young people where they are, creating safe spaces, and being open to making adaptations for individuals or groups as needed. It also requires practitioners to reflect on their own views about gender, and their interactions with children and young people. It should be acknowledged that practitioners need time, flexibility and support to work in this way.

Together, the outputs from this project reveal a need for active consideration of gender in work that impacts on children and young people's mental health and emotional well-being. This includes policy-making, commissioning, service design and delivery, workforce development and research. Recommendations relating to these areas are detailed in the other outputs.

Find out more

All publications from this project are available at <https://www.ncb.org.uk/genderandmentalhealth>. A wide range of other resources from NCB on children and young people's health and well-being can also be found on our website.

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