

The DfE (Department for Education) provides guidance for schools to promote student mental health through a whole-school approach, focusing on creating a safe, supportive environment and embedding mental health education into the curriculum. While staff should not diagnose or intervene in mental health conditions, they are expected to create pathways for identifying and escalating concerns and work with parents and external services to support pupils with mental health needs.

Key Principles

- **Whole-School Approach:** Promote mental health and wellbeing as part of the school's ethos and policies.
- **Not for Diagnosis:** Staff are not expected to diagnose mental health conditions or perform interventions.
- **Identify and Escalate:** Establish clear systems for identifying possible mental health problems and appropriate routes for escalation and referral.
- **Early Intervention:** Intervene early to create a safe and calm environment and strengthen pupil resilience.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Teach age-appropriate RSE (Relationships, Sex Education, and Health Education) that includes emotional wellbeing and mental health, alongside fostering social and emotional development.
- **Parent/Carer Engagement:** Develop trusting relationships with parents and carers, involving them in discussions about mental health support.

What Schools Can Do

- **Create a Supportive Environment:** Ensure the school is a calm, safe, and supportive place where pupils feel ready to learn.
- **Develop Staff Skills:** Provide training and support for staff on mental health issues and their role in supporting pupils.
- **Liaise with External Services:** Work with external specialists and Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) to get the right support for pupils and to build the school's capacity.
- **Utilise Resources:** Consider using SEN (Special Educational Needs) and pupil premium resources to support children with mental health difficulties.

- **Address Underlying Needs:** Use a graduated approach (Assess-Plan-Do-Review) to understand and support pupils whose behaviour may be a manifestation of social, emotional, or mental health needs.

Legal and Statutory Context

- **Equality Act 2010:** Schools must be aware that some mental health issues may meet the definition of disability.
- **Statutory SEND Code of Practice:** Schools should be alert to how mental health problems can underpin behaviour issues and work with external support when needed.
- **Attendance Duty:** A crucial role of schools is to ensure regular attendance, and they must consider how mental health can impact this.