



The Potential of Schools to Support Teenagers' Emotional Health

Judi Kidger



🌿 Current Interventions (1)

Classroom-Based

- CBT skills for prevention / reduction of emotional disorder e.g. FRIENDS
- Education about mental disorder / suicide aiming to reduce self-harm / suicide, reduce stigma, increase help-seeking e.g. Thornicroft et al, work in the USA

BUT more evidence needed



🌿 Current Interventions (2)

Whole-School Approaches

- Policies, organisational structure, ethos, partnership with agencies and parents, on-site services, lessons
 - Focus on emotional *health*
e.g. MindMatters in Australia
- BUT** more evidence needed.



The Picture in England/Wales

- National Healthy Schools Programme 2001 / Welsh Network Healthy Schools Schemes (WNHSS)
 - Emotional Health and Wellbeing as key theme
- Social Emotional Aspects of Learning 2005
- Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TAMHS) 2009
- Supportive of whole-school approaches



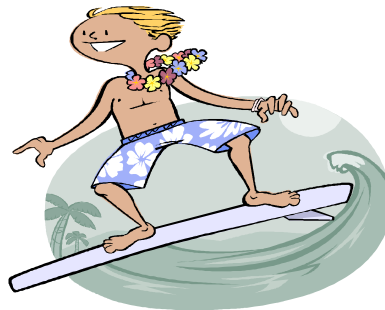


The DEAL Study

Dealing with Emotions in Adolescent Life



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DEAL Research Questions

- What ‘emotional health and wellbeing’ activities are currently delivered in English secondary schools?
- What emotional health needs do students and school staff identify, and how could schools meet those needs?



Methods

8 schools visited:

- 12 interviews with 15 staff members
- 27 student focus group discussions

Single sex, friendship pairs, 154 students

Year 8 Girls (12/13 yrs)	Year 8 Boys (12/13yrs)
Year 9 Girls (13/14 yrs)	Year 9 Boys (13/14 yrs)



Staff interviewees

Staff Position	Number
Assistant Principal	1
Head of Key Stage 3	2
Head of Year 8	2
Learning Support Manager	2
Learning Mentors	2
SEN Coordinator	1
Teaching Assistant	3
Educational Psychologist	1
PSHE Coordinator	1



Results



University of
BRISTOL



🌿 Perceptions of Teenage Emotions

- Negative emotions commonly experienced:
anger, injustice, sad / down / depressed
- Depression
 - Hard to distinguish from 'normal' teenage emotions
It's hard to detect because we're all like at that age where it's hormone levels are just like, one day we could all be happy and hyper and the next day we could just be sad and depressed and everything and there would be no reason for it

Year 9 girls



Depression (contd)

- Depression as not real
some people act depressed when it's not a big deal to get attention

Year 8 boys

- Depression as mind over matter
I mean depression, I just think it's about your character. If you've got a strong character you can handle things, if you haven't you can't

Year 9 boys

Implications?

- Coping by doing nothing
- Stigma
- Not taking own or others' symptoms seriously
- Not knowing when to seek help

→ Educational interventions re. depression, coping, help-seeking and supporting friends



Coping Strategies

- Someone to talk to
- Advice and information, but also to listen

I just want someone to listen to me. I don't want them to tell me how to solve my problems 'cause I've got to do that for myself I just want them to listen to me and I want to know that they know what I'm feeling isn't just stupid

Year 9 girls

Who to talk to?

- Friends
- Teachers and family members
- Other school-based
 - on-site counsellors, learning mentors, chaplains, peer supporters, school nurses
- Other outside school
 - GPs, youth workers, agony aunts / uncles



🌿 Characteristics of help sources

- Confidential - stigma
- Available
- Accessible
- provide information AND just listen
- Understanding / respectful
- Stranger?
- Same gender?



Not Talking About it

- Too risky – stigma
- Sign of weakness (unmanly)
- Just how I am
- Not necessary



Not talking about it

You don't want to be treated differently, you want to talk about it but you want to be treated the same anyway. You want to be normal basically *Year 9 girls*

Boys can sort of handle things more, but girls just cry, they tell all their mates, boys may tell a mate but they keep it in as well, like we can hide our emotions better *Year 9 boys*

I just like to keep it bottled up and like don't speak about it *Year 8 boys*



Other Coping Strategies

- Writing about it
it helps if you get it all out, rather than keep it in. Sometimes you can read it back and think no that was wrong and like rip it up and that *year 8 girls*
- Sport
say you've got a rugby match after school you can let all your anger out then *year 8 boys*
- Chill out spaces
- Provision of information
- Distraction



Undesirable Coping Strategies

- Missing school
- Aggression
- Substance misuse
- Self-harm
- Suicide



Sources of emotional distress

- Family problems
- Schoolwork stress
- Bullying
- Difficult interactions with teachers



P1: the teacher says like I'll pick you up by
your sidies [sideburns] and throw you
out of the window

I: how did that make you feel?

P2: like an idiot

P1: yeah

P3: ashamed

P1: yeah

Year 8 boys



🌿 Teachers' Needs (1)

- More training
 - How to support students
 - Why it's part of the role of teachers

I think unless you do deal with emotional health and confront it there's the danger of becoming robots or whatever, you know we have to acknowledge it, it's part of growing up, part of education isn't it, learning about yourself and discovering yourself

Head of Year 8



Teachers' Needs (2)

- More support

For a teacher to be able to support the children in emotional health they themselves have to be supported first so that they're able because the stresses of paperwork, stresses of delivering a lesson as well that's why they don't want to get involved because it's too much

Teaching Assistant

The School Environment

- Relationship policies
- Increasing rewards for good behaviour
- lessons more fun
- more extra-curricular activities
- better physical environment
- less strict



School Culture

I feel one of our selling points is that we offer very much a caring environment, we might not have the 49 sports halls, but we know every student that walks through the door

Head of year

So I much prefer emotional health to be a whole school thing. I think its all about caring for people and a nurturing environment

PSHE coordinator

Some of the young people here go home and they don't have any support systems do you know what I mean, sometimes school is the best place for them, best part of the day for them

Learning Mentor

Barriers to EHWB work

- Lack of training and support for teachers
- Lack of time and resources
- Resistance from senior management
- Poor communication with external agencies



The Potential of Schools

- Explore emotional and mental health issues in the curriculum
- Provide the 'right' sort of help sources
- Provide opportunities to develop / use other coping strategies
- Create an environment that bolsters emotional health
- Provide training and support for teachers

