

# Universal access to school based counselling - bridging the 'missing middle' gap

## What's missing in current universal access to mental health provision within Primary and Secondary Schools and Further Education Colleges



What's currently on offer in schools

### Getting help

#### Mild to moderate mental health needs

Mental Health Support Teams – estimated 42% coverage March 2025

Pastoral support

Mental Health First Aiders

School nurses

SEND support/Educational Psychologists

Local support services/youth services

Senior Mental health Leads (in 70% of schools) responsible for oversight of mental health support in schools and colleges



### CAMHS

#### Specialist NHS Services

In 2022-23, two-fifths (39%) of referrals were closed after zero or just one contact with CAMHS. This amounts to approx 730,000 children and young people who could have benefited from counselling if a national programme was in place.

In Wales, where school counselling services are statutorily funded -only 2.9% of those accessing counselling needed to be referred on to specialist CAMHS following counselling.

### Getting more help

#### Moderate to more complex mental health needs

Over 50% of schools and colleges in England have no access to counselling unlike the rest of the UK where there is Government funded counselling programmes for those aged 10 and above.

#### Current funding landscape

Some schools employ or contract school counsellors from existing budgets

Some areas have time-limited NHS commissioned counselling services (available via Single Point of Access routes)

Some areas have access to commissioned counselling services (third sector, local authority, etc)

Over half of all schools have no access to counselling resulting in a postcode lottery for children and young people

[School-based Counselling Provision guide](#)

## There is NO consistent mental health and wellbeing support currently available in schools and colleges

Proposed additional mental health professional in every school workforce capturing the 'missing middle' of those falling between MHSTs and CAMHS



BACP's proposal to extend MHST's to include counselling

### Getting help

#### Mild to moderate mental health needs

Mental Health Support Teams are extended. Educational Mental Health Practitioners currently provide low intensity cognitive behavioural (CBT) interventions to pupils, support school staff and help offer a whole school approach.

#### MHST+ Counselling Model

Building upon the recommendation made by Barnardo's in their report 'It's Hard to Talk', expand mental health teams to include a funded pathway to counselling thus extending the MHST offer to MHST+ counselling.

### Getting more help

#### Working with moderate to more complex mental health needs

Incorporate counselling into the 'mental health in every school' commitment employing specialist trained school counsellors registered with a professional membership body (i.e BACP, UKCP, NCPS) regulated by the PSA or HCPC (ie, art therapists) who can fill the workforce gap.

School counsellors work with active risk including suicidal ideation and self-harm, and work from a trauma-informed approach.

Common themes in counselling include family issues, relationships, anxiety, emotional difficulties, bullying, low-self-esteem, identity issues, exploring neurodiversity, bereavement and loss.

A report by Public First found that for every £1 spent on school counselling for 11-18 year olds there was an £8 return on investment, rising to a £10 return on investment for primary school counselling.

### More severe mental health needs

#### CAMHS Specialist NHS Services

A clear referral pathway to counselling interventions provided by a mental health professional in every school would reduce the ongoing burden on CAMHS with counsellors employed as part of this vital workforce and considerably reduce waiting lists, some children wait as long as two years for CAMHS interventions.

Reducing waiting lists and utilising counselling services' is achievable through triaging via Single Points of Access routes ensuring each child gets the right service for them and at the right time with no lengthy wait.

BACP 2024 workforce survey demonstrates that over half of the specialist trained children and young people registered and accredited counsellors can take on more paid hours equivalent of working with over 50,000 additional CYP per week.