

Working with parents

Where it is deemed appropriate to inform parents, sensitivity is important. Before disclosing to parents, the following questions (on a case by case basis) should be considered:

- Can the meeting happen face to face? This is preferable.
- Where should the meeting happen? At school, at their home or somewhere neutral?
- Who should be present? Consider parents, the young person, other members of staff.
- What are the aims of the meeting?

It can be shocking and upsetting for parents to learn of their young person's difficulties and many may respond with anger, fear, upset or denial during the first conversation. An acceptance of this is important, as is giving them time to reflect.

Communicating with parents around mental health issues

When contacting a parent to discuss with them their child's mental health, it can be helpful to have a checklist of things you want to remember to say. This list may be a useful starting point that you can adapt according to the situation:

- Who you are – your role and why it's you making the call
- Why you are concerned about the child or young person
- Any relevant information about the mental health need in question
- Reassurance that with support the child or young person will be okay
- How you / the school intend to support in the short term
- Advice about keeping their child safe in the short term (if relevant)
- Arrange a time and place to meet face to face if you haven't already done so
- What help is available via school
- How the parent can help the child or young person access support if appropriate

- Sources of further information, such as websites and helplines

The following are recommendations of resilient interventions that could be made in support of parents:

- Parent support groups for children and young people struggling with psychological and emotional difficulties, run by parents (perhaps with any training or support they identify as useful).
- Access to information, online information and support.
- Parent workshops focusing on various issues highlighted throughout this guide.
- A named person that parents can contact if they are concerned.
- Details of local services and voluntary organisations, should they feel they require further support.
- Sources of information and support about common mental health issues clearly signposted on the school website.
- Ensure that all parents are aware of who to talk to, and how to go about this, if they have concerns about their own child or another child.
- Make your mental health policy easily accessible to parents.
- Keep parents informed about the mental health topics their young people are learning about in PSHE and share ideas for extending and exploring this learning at home.

Resources for parents

Kim Aumann & Angie Hart. (2009) *Helping children with complex needs bounce back: Resilient Therapy for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Experience in Mind, Sam Taylor & Angie Hart (2011) *Mental health and the Resilient Therapy toolkit: A guide for parents about mental health written by young people*. Brighton: Mind Brighton & Hove: <http://www.boingboing.org.uk/mental-health-resilient-therapytoolkit/>

Angie Hart and Lisa Williams (2013) *What about parents?* www.boingboing.org.uk/parents-academic-resilience/