



7 key safeguarding concerns for schools right now



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7 key safeguarding concerns for schools right now

Safeguarding issues are rarely standalone events. There are countless opportunities for perpetrators to come into contact with children and young people, so it's crucial that staff keep up to date with the latest issues. In this new guide we outline seven key concerns that staff should be aware of right now.

The importance of recognising abuse

Before we look at the key concerns, let's recap why it's so important that, as adults working or volunteering with children or young people, we're able to recognise abuse.

To protect the children we work with, we need to understand our specific caring responsibilities and how we should work in partnership with others. To fulfil our responsibility effectively we should make sure our approach is child centred and that we determine how best to build trusted relationships with children and young people. **This means that we should consider, at all times, what is in the best interests of the child.**

We should be aware that a child may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited or neglected, or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful. A child may feel embarrassed, humiliated or threatened. This should not prevent us from having professional curiosity and speaking to the designated safeguarding lead if we have concerns.

Children who have experienced abuse – and adults who have been abused in childhood – may suffer from problems relating to:

- Behaviour
- Attainment
- Mental health
- Relationships
- Substance misuse
- Physical brain development

Principles for safeguarding children and young people

As a person who works with children, you have both legal and moral responsibilities towards them. These underpinning principles will help you to safeguard them and to promote their wellbeing:

- Be aware that the welfare of the child is paramount
- Respect all individuals regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, developmental stage, sexual orientation, religion, belief or disability
- Ensure that your safeguarding training is current and that you understand your organisation's policies and procedures
- Be open, accessible, always prepared to listen and supportive of children's needs
- Consider the child as a whole, including their mental health
- Maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here'

1. Child sexual abuse material (CSAM)

Children and young people have been brought up with the internet and most use technology intuitively, often showing their parents how to use it.

Being online enables children and young people to socialise, learn and experience many things in a variety of different ways. Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, children have spent more time in the digital world than ever before.

But, as we all know, there are dangers associated with everyday internet use. Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is commonplace and can be found on mainstream social media and online gaming platforms.

In 2021 there were 85 million pictures and videos depicting child sexual abuse reported worldwide*. Many more will have gone unreported.

A recent report from the [Internet Watch Foundation](#) (IWF) found a 64% increase in reported webpages containing confirmed child sexual abuse images in 2021 compared to 2020.

Almost seven out of 10 instances involved children aged 11–13 years and 97% of the images removed were of girls.

There continues to be an increase of **self-generated child sexual abuse images** – this includes images or videos featuring children under the age of 18 that are subsequently shared online.

Some images will be produced to share with a sexual or romantic partner, but many are obtained through coercive measures or grooming.

Online child sex offenders can manipulate children to involve siblings and friends to provide more images. Types of self-generated CSAM include sexting and sextortion.

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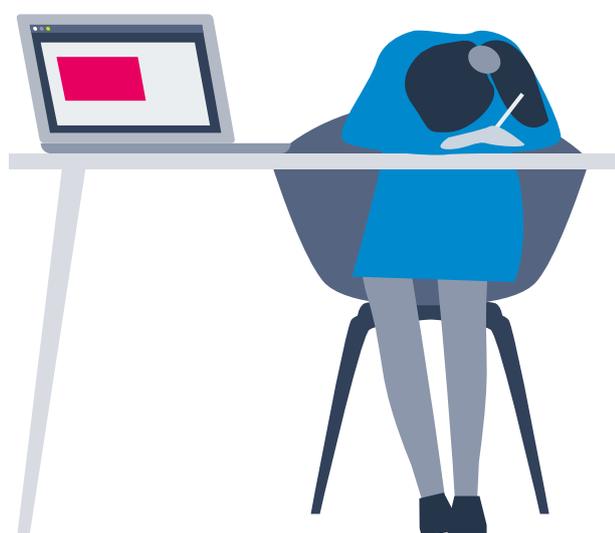
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* [Fighting child sexual abuse: Commission proposes new rules to protect children, European Commission, May 2022.](#)

It's vital that everyone working with children and young people:

- Is aware of risks online
- Has appropriate online safety training
- Works with and learns from children and young people about what they're doing online
- Make sure that any technology used within the organisation is used appropriately
- Ensures children have appropriate routes to support and reporting

Schools and registered childcare providers in England and Wales are required 'to ensure children are safe from terrorist and extremist material when accessing the internet in school, including by establishing appropriate levels of filtering'^{**}.

Schools in Scotland should have policies in place relating to the use of IT and use filtering as a means of restricting access to harmful content.

Useful resources and reporting tools for your school community

Reporting tools

SWGfL: Whisper Anonymous reporting

Anonymous reporting tool for pupils, parents and teachers.

Internet Watch Foundation

Anonymous reporting of child sexual abuse images or videos online.

International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children

Global hotline and help directory.

in hope

Global network of hotlines for reporting CSAM online.

Resources

SWGfL: So You Got Naked Online

Advice and strategies for children, young people and parents to support the issues resulting from sexting incidents.

Childnet: Step up, speak out

A toolkit for young people and professionals to address issues of online sexual harassment among young people.

Looking for more support?

This information has been taken from our [Online Safety course](#) written in partnership with Childnet International. This course looks at how technology is changing, the nature of children and young people's online world, and the risk and protective factors when going online. It provides a wide range of practical advice on what can be done by you and by your school.

The course is available to buy individually online or as part of Tes Safeguarding, our online safeguarding and duty of care training package, powered by EduCare.

Find out more: tes.com/safeguarding-training

^{**} [Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales, April 2021.](#)

2. Child-on-child sexual violence and harassment

Over recent years, there have been growing concerns about sexual violence and sexual harassment between children. Due to the diverse nature of child-on-child abuse, the number of children affected is difficult to estimate.

In 2021 Girlguiding released figures that stated of their members, two thirds of girls and young women experienced sexual harassment in school.

It's vitally important to understand that it can happen anywhere, and your organisation should maintain an attitude that it could already be taking place in your school or college.

All reports and concerns must be taken seriously, and your organisation should operate a zero-tolerance policy on this kind of behaviour, be it verbal or physical. Downplaying these incidents will foster an environment in which children won't feel safe or comfortable enough to report abuse.

Children may also experience **coercive control**. This is an act or a pattern of acts of **assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation, or other form of abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a victim**.

Unchallenged, sexual harassment can create a culture where inappropriate behaviours become normalised. Schools should recognise that many children and young people may have already experienced sexual harassment, both online and offline. Schools should therefore promote and support a whole school ethos to help prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence.

When dealing with cases of sexual violence and sexual harassment schools should feel confident in contacting their local police and the local authority social care department for advice and support.

2/3

of girls and young women
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Support organisations for children, parents and schools

NSPCC

Helpline for under 18s (childline)
call 0800 1111, and for professionals
call 0808 800 5000
or email help@nspcc.org.uk

Rape Crisis

Help and support call 0808 802 9999.

The Survivors Trust

Support for anyone who has
experienced sexual violence and abuse
call 0808 801 0818.

The UK Safer Internet Centre

Helpline for professionals
call 0344 381 4772
or email helpline@saferinternet.org.uk

Childline/IWF: Remove a nude shared online

Report Remove tool that allows children to report nude or otherwise sexual images and footage of themselves that may have been shared online to see if they can be removed.

Thinkuknow

Support for the children's workforce, parents, and carers on staying safe online.

South West Grid For Learning

Support service for professionals in tackling harmful sexual behaviours.

Looking for more support?

This information has been taken from our Raising Awareness of Child-on-Child Abuse and Harmful Sexual Behaviours courses.

Raising Awareness of Child-on-Child Abuse

This course looks at what child-on-child abuse is, the different types of child-on-child abuse, who it may affect and what external influences there are. It includes:

- How to recognise early signs
- What action to take
- How to implement preventative strategies

Harmful Sexual Behaviours

This course is written in partnership with leading wellbeing and sexual health charity Brook and looks at how to distinguish between healthy and harmful sexual behaviour. It explores:

- How to respond to demonstrations of harmful sexual behaviour
- How a whole school or college approach encourages healthy relationships and helps to prevent harmful sexual behaviour

These courses are available to buy individually online or as part of Tes Safeguarding, our online safeguarding and duty of care training package, powered by EduCare.

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3. Extremism and radicalisation

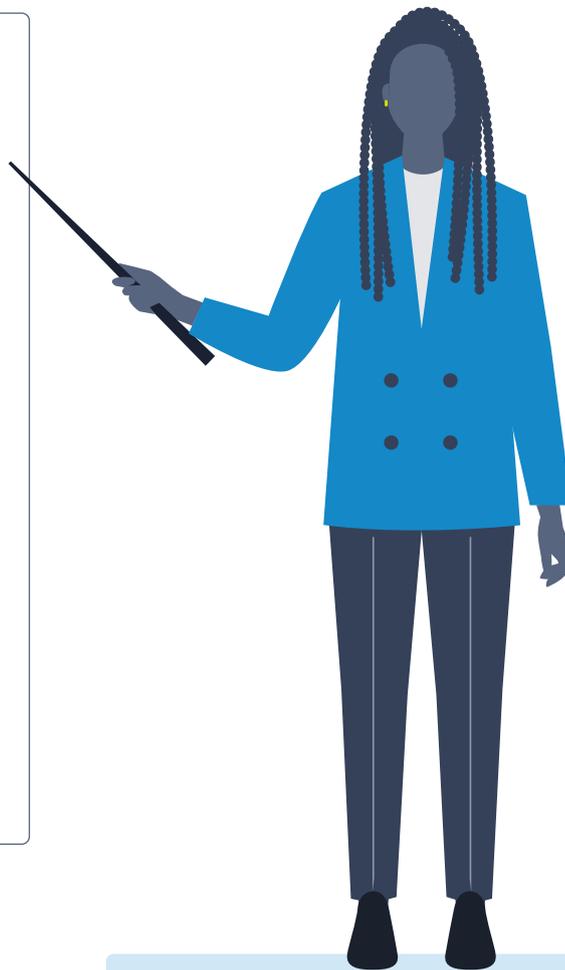
Most of us have some understanding of extremism, non-violent extremism, radicalisation, and terrorism, but these key definitions are important to establish.

Extremism The definition of extremism also includes calls for the death of members of the armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.*

Non-violent extremism is extremism but without violence. Non-violent extremism can create an atmosphere in a community which can popularise the view of terrorism which terrorists can then exploit.

Radicalisation 'is the process through which a person comes to support or be involved in extremist ideologies. It can result in a person becoming drawn into terrorism and is in itself a form of harm.'**

Terrorism is the use or threat of action, designed to influence any international government organisation or to intimidate the public. It must also be for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.



The radicalisation of children and young people

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation. Adolescence is a time of huge turmoil, during which people constantly re-evaluate their beliefs. It can also be a lonely time, and many young people, and especially those feeling oppressed or ignored, seek to find belonging and security, often naively.

According to [government statistics](#) the number of children arrested in relation to terrorism offences has reached its highest level since records began. The Home Office's quarterly release of statistics relating to the police's use of powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 revealed in the year ending June 2022 there were 203 arrests for terrorism-related activity. Of these arrests 16% were aged under 18 years.

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* [Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales, April 2021.](#)
** [Radicalisation, NSPPC Learning, October 2021.](#)

Risk factors for being radicalised are circumstances or personal qualities that may increase someone’s susceptibility to harmful worldviews, including:

- Social isolation
- Precarious emotional ties
- Radical or otherwise violent peers or significant others
- A lack of positive role models and critical thinking space
- Impulsivity
- Difficult or tragic life events
- Intolerance towards ambiguity
- The feeling of being culturally or politically alienated

This period of social and self-exploration means that for some young people, extreme groups and worldviews can be appealing. What may begin as genuine curiosity may lead to a process of radicalisation conducted by older, manipulative extremists.

To tackle radicalisation and extremism schools and colleges should:

- Assess the risk of children and young people being drawn into radicalisation, including support for extremist ideas that are part of terrorist ideology
- Ensure children are safe from extremist material when accessing the internet in school by having clear IT policies in place and a suitable filtering system
- Integrate internet safety into the curriculum
- Encourage and promote positive values and community cohesion. Open debate and critical thinking should be supported
- Work directly with children and young people to help build their resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values and challenging extremist views in lessons
- Help children recognise and manage risk, make safer choices, and recognise when pressure from others threatens their personal safety and wellbeing
- Provide information on the support available to staff, pupils and parents



What to do if you have a concern

All safeguarding policies should have clear procedures in place for protecting children at risk of radicalisation. If you have a concern about a particular child or young person, in the first instance, you should follow your normal safeguarding procedures and speak to your designated safeguarding lead.

Further advice and guidance

Department for Education:
Educate Against Hate
Guidance on reporting concerns.

Act Early
Advice and guidance on spotting the signs of radicalisation and reporting concerns.

Looking for more support?

This information has been taken from our courses covering The Prevent Duty, and Extremism and Radicalisation.

The Prevent Duty

This course is accredited by Secured by Design and meets national police-approved standards. It aims to build understanding of extremism and radicalisation and includes:

- How people may be drawn into terrorism
- What you should do if you have a concern

Extremism and Radicalisation

This course looks at how to approach extremism and radicalisation including:

- Key definitions and specific issues, including warning signs, risk factors, protective factors and grooming
- Distinguishing hate speech from acceptable speech in-school and online
- Good practice and other online safety and media literacy measures

These courses are available to buy individually online or as part of Tes Safeguarding, our online safeguarding and duty of care training package, powered by EduCare.

Find out more: [tes.com/safeguarding-training](https://www.tes.com/safeguarding-training)



4. Domestic abuse

Every day, children and young people experience domestic abuse at home and can suffer a wide range of severe and long-lasting effects.

In the year ending March 2020 an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16-74 experienced domestic abuse, of which 1.6 million were women and 757,000 were men*.

Witnessing domestic violence can have a profound direct and/or indirect impact on children and young people. The impact can vary depending on:

- The level of abuse to which children are exposed
- The age of the child
- The existence (or not) of protective factors

Recent research has shown that children and young people are not only impacted negatively by witnessing violence but are harmed by coercive and controlling behaviour even when physical violence is not present.

In some cases, a child may blame themselves for the abuse or may have had to leave the family home as a result. Operation Encompass is a charitable organisation operating in England. They ensure that a notification is sent by the police to the school's designated safeguarding lead prior to the start of the next school day, after police have attended a domestic abuse incident where there were children related to the adults involved.

Child-to-parent abuse

Child-to-parent abuse can involve children of all ages and can include abuse toward siblings, parents and grandparents, as well as other family members such as those acting as kinship carers. If the child is aged 16 years or over, the abuse falls under the statutory definition of domestic abuse in the 2021 Act. Parents may fear being blamed, disbelieved, or conversely having their child taken away from them or criminalised leaving them reluctant to seek help.

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* [Domestic abuse victim characteristics England and Wales, year ending March 2020, November 2020.](#)

Indicators of domestic abuse

All children living with abuse are under stress which may lead to:

- Being withdrawn
- Being angry
- Being anxious or depressed
- Fear of being abandoned
- Problems in school
- Truancy and low attendance in school
- Speech problems and/or difficulties with learning
- Nightmares or poor sleep patterns
- Bed-wetting
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Self-harm, for example, eating disorders, cutting
- General poor health

Good practice

- Always follow your organisation's child protection policy if you suspect children are witnessing and/or experiencing domestic abuse
- If you suspect a child is in danger, then contact the police
- Do not promise confidentiality
- Reassure the child or young person
- Speak to the non-abusive parent on their own
- Do not challenge or tackle the perpetrator as this will increase the risk to the victim
- Provide children and young people with resources and information on where they can go for support and talk to them about healthy relationships

Looking for more support?

This information has been taken from our [Domestic Abuse: Children and Young People course](#) written in partnership with SafeLives, a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse. It looks at what domestic abuse is and includes:

- The key risk factors and trigger events
- The prevalence and impact
- What you should do if you suspect a child or young person is witnessing and/or experiencing domestic abuse

The course is available to buy individually online or as part of Tes Safeguarding, our online safeguarding and duty of care training package, powered by EduCare.

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5. Adverse childhood experiences

During the Covid-19 pandemic, public health measures, such as lockdown and social distancing restrictions, were essential to contain the virus and protect the health of the population. However, for some people this increased their exposure to harm at home and online, while reducing their access to care and support from services. In particular, this placed children and young people at risk, with the potential for increased exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and violence to have long term consequences*.

What a child experiences, is fundamental to their mental health and emotional wellbeing in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is the term used to describe highly stressful and potentially traumatic events or situations that occur during childhood or adolescence.

The social and wellbeing impact of ACEs

Almost half of people in England and Wales have experienced one ACE as a child, and one in 10 have experienced four or more ACEs.

Several studies have shown if a person has experienced four or more ACEs compared to someone with no ACEs, they are more likely to experience poor health and wellbeing in adulthood**. The type and number of ACEs, and the length of time they were experienced, may have a negative impact on a child or young person that can last throughout their life

Not everyone who has been exposed to ACEs will have negative outcomes but understanding ACEs and the impact they may have on a child or adult will help support your work and relationships with children, young people and families.

Almost
1/2
of people in England and
Wales have experienced
1 ACE as a child

1/10
have experienced
4 or more ACEs



* [Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Violence and ACEs Experienced by Children and Young People in Wales, Interim Report, November 2020.](#)

** [Polishing the Diamonds' Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences in Scotland, May 2016.](#)

How can you help?

A child or young person that suffers a traumatic event may not be able or want to tell you what they're feeling. Their voice can often be lost in adults making all the decisions for them. They may feel and exhibit a range of emotions including, fear, sadness, anger, guilt, shame and have no control of what's happening.

Children may believe wrongly that they've caused bad things to happen. By identifying and addressing any concerns early and working in partnership with others, ACEs can be reduced in future generations.

To help support a child or young person who has experienced ACEs you can:

- Listen to them and keep them informed
- Provide a safe space for them to talk about their feelings
- Where appropriate, give them choices so they feel in control
- Encourage them to self-regulate; for example, encouraging helpful ways to reduce anxiety
- Offer support that is non-judgemental
- Set clear boundaries
- Answer their questions honestly
- Look for meaning behind behaviour changes
- Respond appropriately to a child's feelings of anger or guilt

By doing these things you will help them to cope better and to develop their resilience.

Looking for more support?

This information has been taken from our [Adverse Childhood Experiences course](#) that looks at what adverse childhood experiences are and how they may affect children growing up. It includes:

- Understanding trauma
- Understanding what those who experience trauma need to enable them to cope
- What you can do to help break the cycle of ACEs

The course is available to buy individually online or as part of Tes Safeguarding, our online safeguarding and duty of care training package, powered by EduCare.

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6. Trauma-informed practice

While it may be tempting to point to the Covid-19 pandemic as the source of our growing interest in trauma – and certainly, it has been traumatic for many – trauma has been on the tips of our tongues for years. In fact, [Vox magazine recently reported it as the word of the decade](#).

What is trauma?

Trauma can be defined as any single, multiple, ongoing, or cumulative experience which:

- Is a response to a perceived threat (even after the traumatic experience has passed)
- Overwhelms our capacity to cope
- Feels or is outside our control
- Evokes a physiological and psychological set of responses based on fear or avoidance

When trauma occurs early it can affect a child's development. **Childhood trauma** can occur when a child witnesses or experiences overwhelming negative events in childhood. **Developmental trauma** includes children who are neglected, abused, forced to live with family violence or experience high parental conflict in the context of separation or divorce. This type of trauma can also be experienced by a child removed at birth and who goes on to experience multiple adverse experiences, such as the death of a carer, or being bullied.

Trauma affects all aspects of a child's development including the brain, body, emotions, memory, relationships, learning and behaviour. When trauma occurs during crucial stages of the brain's development, the brain structures developing at the time can be interrupted, disrupting important connections and leading to changes in the sensory systems.

The most important job of the brain is to ensure survival. Exposure to high levels of stress through trauma can cause areas of the brain to change to help the child cope and survive in adverse environments.



What trauma looks like in school and the classroom

Trauma-affected students may have disrupted and maladapted development in the lower parts of the brain, and this will dramatically affect the regulatory capacities of the higher regions employed for the integration and memory retention of cognitive content. Yet, classroom learning depends upon an organized and regulated brain, where each level of the neuro-sequential hierarchy is well-regulated.

A traumatised student may feel like every adult is a threat and therefore overreact to situations, or they may be unsure how to read social cues.

Students in a state of hyper-arousal may display:

- Anxiety, worry and fear about their own safety and others
- A tendency to be easily startled
- An irritable, moody temperament
- An increased activity level suggesting lack of focus and concentration
- Angry outbursts and aggression
- An inability to respond and interpret social cues
- Difficulty being in a state of calm or being regulated
- Difficulty with authority and criticism



Preventative strategies

Schools are unique environments with wonderful opportunities to offer trauma responsive provisions to children. Preventative strategies include:

- Building a safe and predictable environment which is calm, welcoming and empathic
- Implementing a relationship policy to ensure staff interact with children with kindness and compassion. This should include no shouting, criticism or shaming
- Preparing children for transition
- Talking to students about their hobbies, interests, hopes and fears
- Teaching students to share how they are feeling
- Making staff aware of any support or interventions and the key named person for a child
- Teaching students how to respond to different situations, encouraging them to take a moment to breath and reflect
- Providing support mechanisms such as a mentoring scheme and counselling support



Looking for more support?

This information has been taken from our [Trauma-Informed Practice in Schools course](#) written in partnership with Gita Shah, a trauma-informed and therapeutic social work practitioner. It focuses on understanding trauma and how to manage it in school.

The course is available to buy individually online or as part of Tes Safeguarding, our online safeguarding and duty of care training package, powered by EduCare.

Find out more: tes.com/safeguarding-training

7. Mental health

The [government recommends that all schools and colleges should have a designated senior mental health lead \(SMHL\) by 2023](#).

What is mental health?

To begin to explore mental health, we must first understand what we mean by the term 'mental health'. The World Health Organization defines it as:

“A state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

We all have mental health needs, and from time to time these may become problematic, even inhibiting us from doing the things we normally do. Having positive mental health is a fundamental component of good health. Being physically active or participating regularly in sport has significant benefits, not only physically, but also emotionally and psychologically.

The wellbeing of young people is a key concern for anyone entering education, and the need for children to have a happy and well-rounded experience should be at the heart of every schools' ethos. Enjoying good relationships and being able to deal with setbacks also helps to preserve mental wellbeing and builds resilience.

A whole school approach to wellbeing is key and all staff should be given training on the most common issues, including:

- Anxiety
- Low mood and depression

Signs and symptoms

There are myriad signs and symptoms to look out for that may indicate a young person is struggling with their mental health. However, every young person is different, so it's important to think about each as an individual.

If we ask ourselves: what are the signs that would worry me or make me want to find out more?, we'll come up with a list that often comes down to a change in behaviour from what is 'normal' for that particular young person.

For example, a child who is usually very well behaved and quiet becoming loud and aggressive, or a child who is usually very sociable and contributes a lot, becoming withdrawn and isolated.

The most important thing when trying to spot if a child or young person is experiencing a problem is to have someone in school who knows that child well. It's all about noticing those changes in students, no matter how small. In a busy school and classroom environment, this can be tricky, but it's about exploring anything that's concerning.

15 mental health warning signs

1. Change in behaviour from what is normal for that particular young person
2. Not taking care of their appearance and/or hygiene
3. Absence from school or sickness – often in adolescence, young people will experience physical symptoms of anxiety or stress before they can necessarily articulate the issue
4. Becoming socially isolated and/or withdrawing
5. Erratic behaviour or mood swings
6. Risk-taking behaviour
7. Anger and aggression
8. Not being able to concentrate and seeming distracted
9. Avoiding friends and activities they used to find fun
10. Missing regular appointments
11. Seeming jumpy or nervous for no obvious reasons
12. Experiencing panic attacks
13. Being tired in school
14. Changes in appetite
15. Lack of aspiration or not being able to predict positive things happening in the future



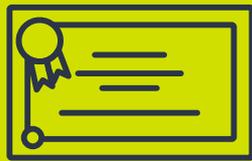


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