

Supporting your child during school years

Dorset Mental
Health Support
Teams in Schools



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Schools



Dorset HealthCare
University
NHS Foundation Trust

What is the MHST?

Schools play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of children and young people at a time when they are experiencing lots of physical, emotional and social changes. The introduction of Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) working within schools is a new approach to provide an additional source of support to families.

We are a schools based service currently working across a number of school in Dorset. The team are part of a national programme that aims to build a better understanding of emotional wellbeing in schools by teaching techniques and strategies to help children and young people cope a little better with life's ups and downs.

Within Dorset there are three teams: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; North and East Dorset; and Weymouth, Portland and West Dorset.

This booklet is designed to help you support your child whilst they are at school and includes some of the techniques and tools they may find useful to cope with this experience.

If you would like more information about the MHST, please speak to a member of your child's school.

Coping with Change

Change happens throughout our lives. Sometimes we choose to make changes, sometimes changes happen that we cannot control. This is a normal part of life, but that doesn't mean it is always easy.

Young people can sometimes find it difficult to accept change, particularly teenagers who are in the process of becoming more and more independent and therefore want more and more autonomy over their own decisions. In schools, there are many situations that a young person cannot control, or change, and instead they have to accept that some elements of their life are out of their control.

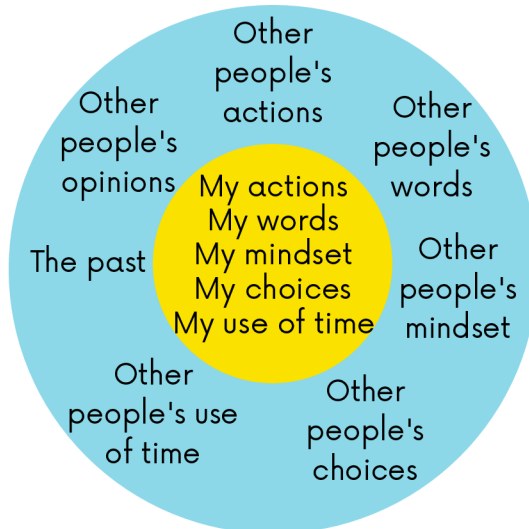
For example, a student at a school does not get to make a decision about the school uniform or how much homework they get. These are decisions made by the schools and by the UK Government.

Circles of Control

Understanding that we cannot control everything around us is a helpful step in accepting change.

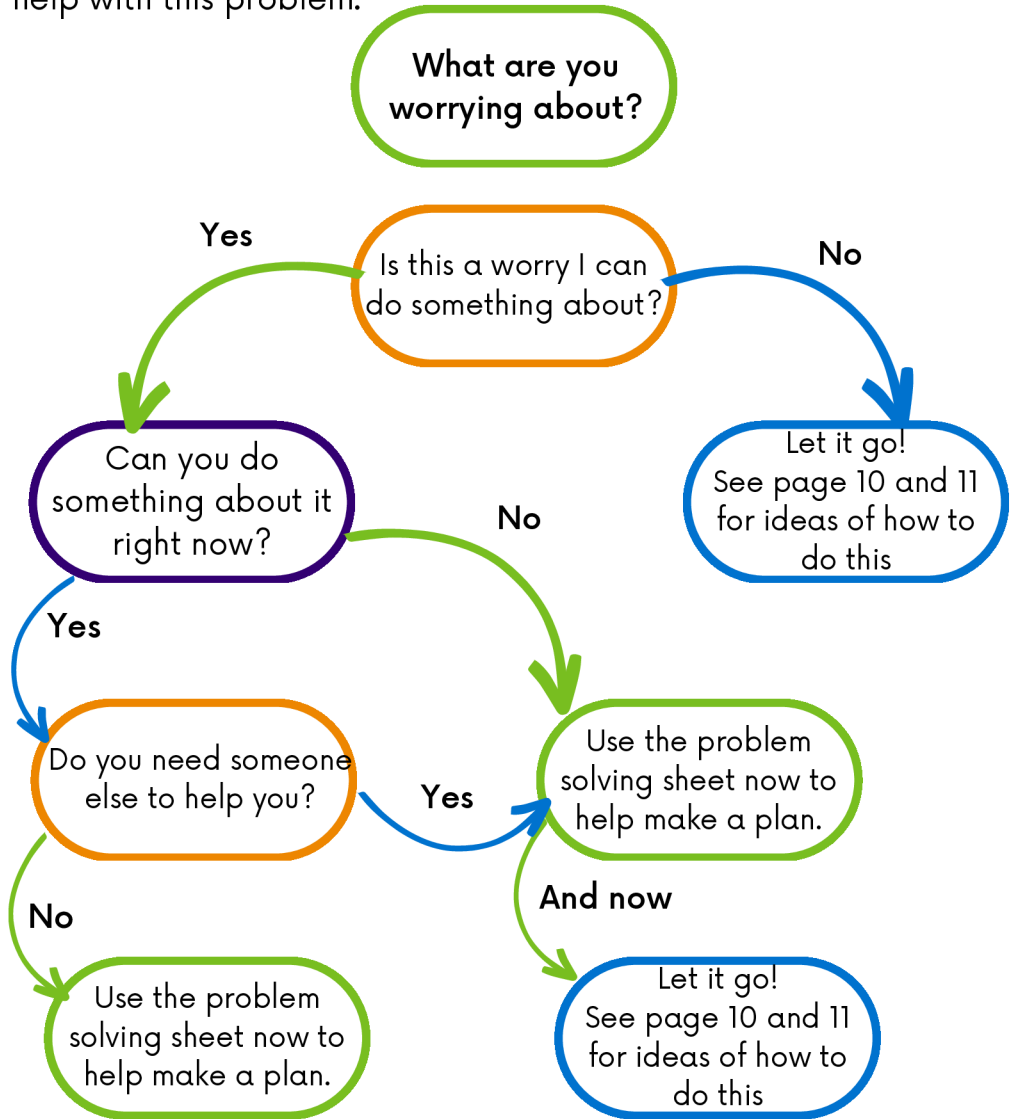
Circles of Control can be a helpful tool for lots of people to understand how they can **only** control **their** actions, their words, their mindset, their choices and their use of time. Everything else is out of their control.

By accepting that other people will say, do and act in ways that we cannot control can help us manage unexpected changes or disruptions to our days differently, as it can help us to let go of worries about things that are out of our control - we can't change anything about them anyway!



Worry Tree

Sometimes we all need a bit of help to work out how to manage our worries. The Worry Tree is a great tool to use to help with this problem.



Problem solving

Worries that are within our control can be solved. This is great! A solution is what we all want - but, how do we work out what the solution to our worry is?

A tried and tested method of dealing with these types of worry is Problem Solving. The following steps can be used for your worries or for your child's worries:

Step 1: Identify the Problem - Ask "What is the problem?". Define it, describe it in detail, get out all the parts and be as specific as you can.

Step 2: List **ALL** the Possible Solutions - Come up with all the possible solutions, no matter how wild and wonderful or serious and realistic - this isn't a place to decide if something will work, just make a big list of everything that could possibly help.

Step 3: Consider the Consequences - For each of the possible solutions, look at the pros and cons. What is the benefit of doing one solution over another? Does it hurt anyone else? Is it safe? Is it do-able?

Step 4: Pick the Best Solution and Try it Out - Make a plan of how you are going to try out the solution you think will work best. Break it down into smaller, more realistic chunks if needed. Do it.

Step 5: Review your choice - Ask "Is this working?" "Is there another way?" If needed, go back to Step 2 and choose an alternative solution, add more ideas if needed and start again.

Problem Solving - Have a Go

You can use this space to practice the Problem Solving Technique with your child or on your own.

What is the problem? (e.g. I forgot my homework)

Possible solutions

Consequences of doing this

Problem Solving - Have a Go

Solution to try:

How am I going to try it
(what steps do I need to
do? Who do I need to
help me?):

How did it go?

Practical tips to support your child

1. Take a deep breath!

Take a deep breath! Moving schools can be a time that brings up lots of different emotions. It is ok to feel these emotions, remember to take deep breaths.

2. Get to know the new social network

Build your new social network. Lots of parents are in the same position and sometimes it can help to network and communicate with others going through the same thing.

3. Get involved!

Play your part in life at your new school. It can help to feel part of the school community as well. Being visible in school shows your child that you see education as important.

4. Connect with your child's new school

Build a bond with your child's new school. Keep in touch online and share feedback. Show your support at parent-teacher parents' evenings, go and watch your child in the school play or sports day. They probably won't tell you, but your kids really appreciate this.

5. Organisation

Get organised by putting time aside to fill out forms, arrange payments, register for school communications, and sort out school uniform and other kit well in advance. Do seek out the school second-hand uniform shop for a few bargains, too.

Practical tips to support your child

6. Practicalities

Label your child's belongings regularly and stock up on (the easily lost) house / locker keys, school ties, watches, protractors and water bottles. Another top tip is to encourage your child to pack their bag (themselves) every evening from day one, to help avoid breakfast-time panic and create a healthy routine.

7. Empower Their Voice

Help your child find out who they need to speak to in school if they need extra support/ have questions. You will not be with them during the school day and they need to be able to find support if needed at any time in school.

8. Encourage appropriate independence

Your child will need to become more independent throughout school, which may include taking responsibility for their homework and remembering their PE kit. Build your child's independence and confidence by encouraging them to take on small responsibilities at home and giving them opportunities to test out new experiences.

9. Reach out for support

Young Minds provide support for parents and caregivers. You can contact them via a telephone line between 9:30am – 4pm Monday - Friday: 0808 802 5544 or they have an online webchat where you can speak to a member of their team.

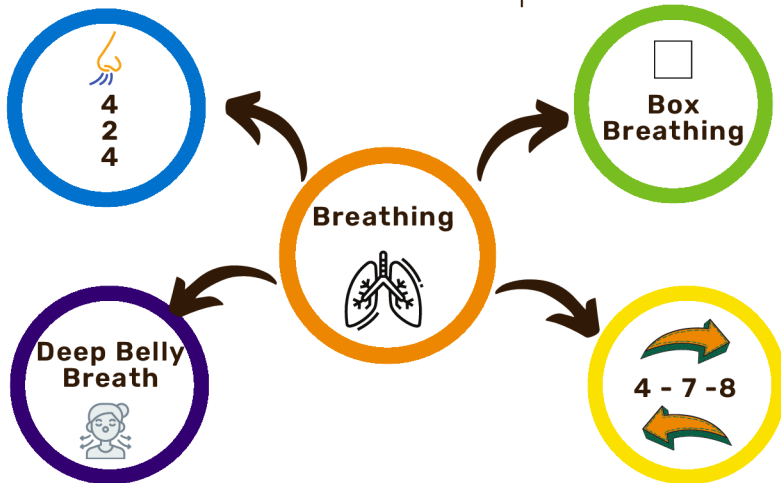
10. Look after yourself

Parent Forums are often the best place to get support by connecting with other parents and caregivers who are experiencing the same thing. You can often find parent forums advertised via your child's schools website, Facebook groups or local community groups.

Breathing Techniques

These can help to reduce the physical sensation of anxiety or worry and help refocus your mind and body on the present moment.

- Sit down on a chair with both feet on the ground
 - Take a breath in through your nose slowly for 4 seconds
 - Hold this breath in your lungs for 2 seconds
 - Breathe out through your nose for 4 seconds
 - Repeat this for 4 or 5 rounds
- Sit down on a chair with both feet on the ground
 - Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds
 - Hold this breath in your lungs for 4 seconds
 - Breathe out through your mouth for 4 seconds
 - Hold this breath for 4 seconds
 - Repeat this for 4 or 5 rounds



- Sit down on a chair with both feet on the ground
 - Breathe in through your nose and keep going until you get the breath all the way down to your belly
 - Hold this here for 4 seconds
 - Release the air through your mouth in a big sigh
 - Repeat for 3 or 4 rounds
- Sit down on a chair with both feet on the ground
 - Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds
 - Hold this breath in your lungs for 7 seconds
 - Breathe out through your mouth slowly for 8 seconds
 - Repeat for 3 or 4 rounds

Grounding Techniques

These can help to come back to the present moment when you feel as if your thoughts or physical feelings are taking control of how you act.

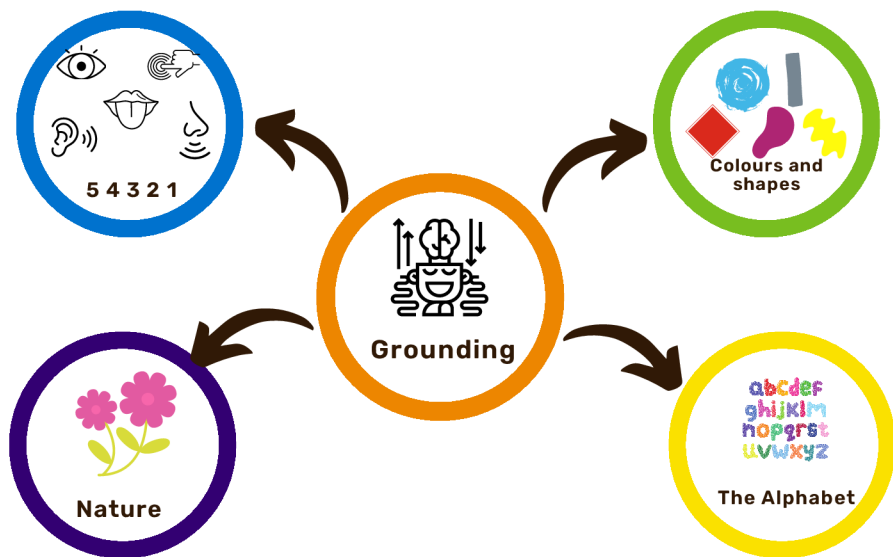
Can you name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you want to taste

How many different colours can you see in this room?

How many different shapes are there?

Can you find one object for each colour of the rainbow?



What can you see around you?

How many different plants, trees, flowers, colours, shapes are there?

How many different textures are there?

Is there something here that would feel soft? Something here that would feel rough or more textured?

Can you name:

One object in this room for each letter of the alphabet?

Or,

Can you name:

A country beginning with each letter of the alphabet?

A famous person beginning with each letter of the alphabet?

Sleep

Sleep is important for everyone, but is particularly important for young people who are learning a lot everyday. On the next three pages we have included some helpful information to support you to help your child to improve their sleep.

How much sleep should my child be getting?

Child's age and recommended sleep time in 24 hours (Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, NHS).

Infant 4 to 12 months - 12 to 16 hours including naps

Children 1 to 2 years - 11 to 14 hours including naps

Children 3 to 5 years - 10 to 13 hours including naps

Children 6 to 12 years - 9 to 12 hours

Teenagers 13 to 18 years - 8 to 10 hours

Restful Environment

We all need the right environment to sleep in, a bit like Goldilocks. If it's too dark, too light, too hot, too cold or just not comfortable enough, it will be difficult to sleep. Check these things with your child regularly to see how they are finding the set-up in their room.

Sleep

Routine

A good bedtime routine helps create sleep associations, which means our bodies and our minds know it is going to be sleep time soon. Good bedtime routines include:

- No screens 1 hour before bedtime
- Having a warm bath or shower 1 hour before bed
- No heavy meals 3 hours before bed
- No exercise 3 hours before bed (a gentle walk is okay)
- Listening to the same sounds whilst getting ready for bed (e.g. rain sounds/white noise)
- Associating a certain smell with bedtime (e.g. a lavender spray on their pillow)

Relaxation

Sometimes it can be really hard for young people to wind down after a difficult day so it's important to encourage them to practice relaxation techniques everyday. This is because on the days when they really do need it, it is already part of their everyday routine so will come to them more naturally.

Relaxation techniques could include yoga, mindfulness, breathing and grounding exercises (see pages 10 and 11 for more ideas).

Sleep

Further Support

Sleep is something everyone can struggle with from time to time, but behavioural changes have been found to be the most effective way of getting you back on track to a good nights' sleep.

If you, or your child, would like further information about Teenage Sleep, please visit: <https://teensleephub.org.uk/>

Diet

As your child becomes more independent, they will want to make more and more choices for themselves. This is a healthy sign of development, and something which should be encouraged.

Young people are growing at a rapid rate, and often exert a lot of energy at school, either through sporting activities or by walking around the bigger buildings and moving from class to class.

Eating regularly and choosing foods that release energy slowly will help to keep sugar level steady and prevent tiredness and irritability.

It is important to help your child to make the right choices and offer options for foods which meet their nutritional needs.

What makes a healthy diet?

Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.

Protein contains the building blocks brains needs to regulate thoughts and feelings. Our brain also needs fatty acids found in fats to keep it working well.

For more information on healthy eating, visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>.

Routine

Humans love routines, it is important for all of us to know what is coming next. Letting your child know about their routine and what to expect each day can help build their independence and improve their own skill sets in getting themselves ready for upcoming activities.

It can be helpful to have the same routine at the end of each school day. Some families benefit from having this written down in a shared space, such as the kitchen or living room. Young people benefit from knowing what they are expected to do when they get home and what time food will be available.

A routine for your family of a 11 year old child could look something like this:

4pm: Arrive home and get a snack
4.30pm: Start homework
5.15pm: Finish homework and do something fun!
6.15pm: Eat dinner with family
7.00pm: Watch TV
8.00pm: Have a hot shower and start to wind down from the day
8:30pm: Get in to bed and read
9pm: Lights out and go to sleep

As your child gets older, it can be helpful to include them in creating the routine that fits their needs and the patterns of your family life. By allowing your child this responsibility, they are more likely to stick to the routine.

Internet Safety Tips

Your child may be an independent, confident internet user, or they may be just beginning to explore. Whatever stage your child is at, it is never too late to have conversations with them about their internet safety.

To help keep your child safe on the internet, it can help to:

- Create a family media plan. It's best to create this agreement with your child. Your plan could include elements such where there are screen-free areas in your house and what good online behaviour looks like.
- Ask your child if they have ever come across upsetting and inappropriate content online. What you would like them to do if they come across this on the internet? Make sure your child knows who they can reach out to help in these situations.
- Get an app or timer to log how much time your child is spending online. Even as adults, it can be easy to lose a large chunk of your day scrolling on social media without realising so this can be something that all members of the family start to do.
- Ask your child to 'friend' you on social media. Not all young people will be happy to do this, but exploring why not is a good idea as it may be that they are sharing or viewing content they know that you would not want them to be doing.
- Encourage and remind your child to explore and use the internet safely. For example, it's OK to remind your child to check privacy settings.

Internet Safety Tips

Identifying and managing internet safety risks with children

It's important to help your teenage child manage internet safety risks. This lets your child build digital resilience, which is the ability to respond positively and deal with risks they come across online.

You can do this by:

- being a role model for healthy internet use
- talking with your child about online content and behaviour
- reminding your child about privacy and personal information
- teaching your child about online purchases.

Talking about online content

Talking openly about your own digital media and internet use and encouraging your child to do the same will help your child feel they can talk to you if they have a bad experience online.

It's good to encourage your child to develop a sense of what they like and don't like online and to defend their choices with friends.

Taking care with privacy, personal information and personal safety

You can help your child look at and choose appropriate privacy, location and safety settings on devices, programs and social media, and talk about why this is important.

Support In School

At your child's school, there are a lot of people to ask for help if you or your child are finding things difficult. It is very normal to find periods of time at school challenging, and it is important to model to your child that asking for help is an important step in fixing any problems that may come up.

Each school has a different organisational structure, so it is important to find out the names and contact details of people you think you may be helpful.

Members of staff you may wish to find out the contact details of include:

Your child's Form Tutor
Your child's Head of Year
Your child's SENCO

This information is often included in school welcome packs.

If you do not have this information or you are not sure who to contact, you can call or email the school office and a member of reception team will be able to point you in the right direction.

Support Out of School

Sometimes problems come up outside of school or it can feel as if the difficulty your child is facing is not related to school. It is always important to tell school if there is something happening in your child's life that may require extra support, even if your child's school are not the correct place for this support.

If you are worried about your child's mental or physical health, you can always contact your GP.

If your child, is struggling with their mental health and needs urgent support, call NHS 111 and ask for Mental Health. You can also take your child, to A&E or call 999 in an emergency. This support is also available to you if you are struggling with your own mental health.

Action for Children offers parenting advice and information:
<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/>

Stem4 is another useful place to find out information to support your child outside of school: <https://stem4.org.uk/>

The Open University offer a free online course around young people's wellbeing: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/young-peoples-health/young-peoples-wellbeing/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

There is a list of further support for both you and your child at the end of this booklet.

Further Support

Further support for children and young people:

If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small.



<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Helpline: 0800 1111

Online chat: <https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/>



Available: free, 24 hours a day

More info: <https://www.giveusashout.org>

Text CONNECT to 85258 to contact Shout



Free, 24/7 text support for young people across the UK experiencing a mental health crisis.

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

Text: YM to 85258



NHS 111 is for everyone aged 5 and over. If you are worried about yourself or someone else call 111 and ask for Mental Health.

If you are worried about the safety of yourself or someone and need urgent advice, call **999** or **go to A&E**

Further Support

Further support for Parents/Carers:



Website: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/> Parent helpline: 08088025544 (9.30am-4pm, Monday-Friday)



Available: 9am-4pm, Monday to Friday (excluding weekends bank holidays and school holidays).

More info: <https://www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/school-nursing/parentline>

Text 07312 263131 for confidential advice and support from a member of the school nursing team.



Dorset Family Information Service is a free, impartial information service for parents and carers of children and young people

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/children-families/get-help-for-your-family/family-information-service>



Steps2Wellbeing supports adults experiencing common mental health problems, helping you to feel better.

<https://www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk/>



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Contact us

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