# 21st Century Children
# **Emotional Well-Being**

Trends, factors and what education can do

## **Well-being in childhood.**

Early detection and prevention is key:

Childhood and adolescence are crucial developmental periods[1] which have implications for cognitive functioning, emotional regulation and more.

Worldwide, 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental health disorders.[2]
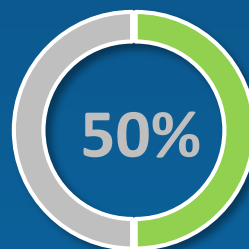


**50%**
...of adult mental health problems begin by age 14,[2] and

**75%**
...by the mid 20s.[2]

OECD
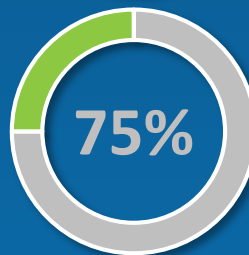
# Trends in emotional well-being.

## Bullying

Rates of bullying have remained consistent in recent years.

Bullying has lasting adverse consequences and **affects many children** around the world.[3,4]

According to PISA 2015 data, about **19% of students reported being bullied** (all types) at least a few times a month on average across OECD countries.[5]

## Depression, anxiety

Internalising behaviours such as **depression and anxiety** have **increased** significantly since the early 2000s.[6,7]

**Girls consistently report higher levels of anxiety** than boys.[5]

Better mental health screening and increased awareness may have contributed to the increase in prevalence.

## Teenage suicides

**Between 1990 and 2015** the average number of **suicides among youth aged 15-19** in OECD countries **dropped** from 8.5 to 7.4 per 100.000.[8]

However 13 OECD countries have seen an increase in teen suicide. There are **wide differences** across OECD countries. Rates of teen suicide range from 1.7 per 100 000 to 24.1.

## Changing contexts

Many factors affect children's emotional well-being. For example, urbanisation can lead to a lower sense of connection and belonging in communities, heightening exclusion. Families are also changing, with older parents and more single-parent or divorced households. The rise in digital technologies might also affect well-being; over half of respondents to the PISA 2015 survey reported "feeling bad" when not connected to the Internet.[5] However digital tools can also promote well-being by allowing kids to socialise and strengthen friendships online.

# Key protective and risk factors.

Sleep is essential to well-being and physical and mental health. Sleep deprivation negatively affects children's cognitive skills and attention, and is associated with an increase in suicidal thinking and problems with peers.
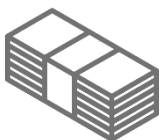
15-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds reported significantly lower life satisfaction than their more affluent peers across all OECD countries.[5] Key protective factors to boost resilience include strong social relationships and social and emotional skills.

Forming close and secure attachments with parents during early childhood helps build self-regulation, autonomy and cooperativeness, self efficacy and self-worth. Stable emotional support and relationships with parents can act as a protective or compensatory factor during difficult moments or situations, such as chronic stress, exposure to bullying and depression.[9,10,11]

# Effective interventions.

Event

↓

Perception and interpretation

↓

Emotions and behaviours
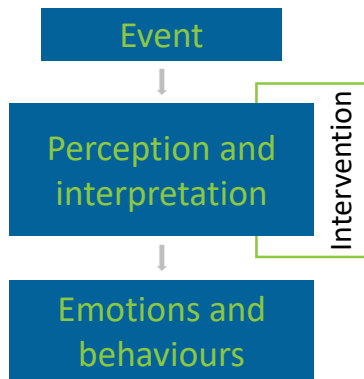
Intervention

Effective prevention and intervention programmes can improve mental health outcomes and increase awareness of these issues. These programmes tend to focus on problem-solving, effective communication and insight building. Social and emotional skills are an important tool to help overcome adverse mental health effects and outcomes.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is a common intervention. It aims to teach children cognitive skills to help detect and overcome negative thoughts and emotions and improve their problem solving skills.[12,13]

## Education as an avenue

School-based intervention programmes can help increase awareness and reduce or prevent the onset of mental illness. In order for these to work, important considerations include: cost, burden on teachers and necessary training and support for teachers.

In the classroom, teachers can help raise student self-esteem and motivation by being a role model, mentor and educator. Students' perception of unfair treatment by teachers or school disciplinary climate is related to bullying and victimisation. Students who are happier also tend to report good relationships with their teachers, and those who perceive high level of support from their teacher(s) tend to handle stress better at school.[11,14] Social support more generally is implicated in higher academic performance for students from disadvantaged backgrounds[15].

# Research gaps.

There is a need for longitudinal research on representative samples of children and adolescents in order to understand cause and effect. Further research is needed to examine:

- Outcomes in younger children
- The role of parents in collaboration with teachers/ schools to foster positive outcomes for children
- Teacher delivery of mental health programmes
- Practicality of school-based programme implementation
- The relationship between well-being and use of digital technologies

# Stay on top of the most recent research and insights.

Source:
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