

Rothbury First School

Safeguarding Newsletter

May 2024



WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT A CHILD

If you are worried about a child's safety please do not hesitate to contact the Designated Safeguarding Leads straight away.

The following members of staff are Designated Safeguarding Leads at Rothbury First School
Mrs C Auld
Mrs H Duffield

Our safeguarding governor is Diane Pringle

They can be contacted on 01669 620283 or via email

For further information on safeguarding at our school, please look on the safeguarding page on the school website.

[RFS Safeguarding](#)

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Last week was Mental Health Awareness week. In school the focus was upon movement and how activity can help our mental health.

Our mental health and wellbeing can change all the time. Because of this, it can help to check in regularly and make time for young people to talk about how they're feeling. You don't have to wait until they're struggling.

Signs that a young person may be experiencing poor mental health

It can be hard to know if a young person is struggling with their mental health or wellbeing. We all act in different ways when we're going through a tough time. You might notice some of the following signs, you might see something different, or you might not notice anything at all. These signs could also be linked to a young person's physical health, or something else entirely.

Some of the ways they might act differently include:

- Seeming distant, or not themselves
- Not meeting up with friends
- Spending more time alone than usual
- Not chatting, smiling or laughing as much
- Seeming less confident
- Talking about feelings that worry you
- Losing interest in or not doing activities they normally love
- Crying, shouting or feeling angry
- Being restless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs when they didn't before
- Using social media in a different way, or more or less than before

Some of the physical changes you might notice include:

- Not dressing with as much care as they used to
- Eating too much or too little
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Looking tired
- Not washing or taking care of themselves like they used to
- Hurting themselves on purpose
- Repetitive behaviour, like tapping or checking things a lot



Information taken
from **mind.org.uk**

How to start a conversation about their mental health

It's okay to feel uncertain about talking about mental health – you're not alone. If you're worried about speaking to a young person about their mental health and wellbeing, it can help to feel prepared. You don't need to have a long conversation every time, you might just want to check in to see how they're feeling.

- Try to find a time and place that suits you both. The time may never feel perfect, but it can help if you both feel calm and comfortable. This could mean talking in a quiet place, or it could mean doing an activity together.
- It can help to practise what you want to say. You could write things down too, or talk to someone on a helpline, like the YoungMinds Parents and Carers Helpline.
- There's no perfect way to begin a conversation. However you choose to do it, try your best to start in a calm and open-minded way. You might not understand exactly what they're going through, and that's okay.
- Try not to feel disheartened at your first attempt. They might not respond well the first time, or might not want to engage at all. You can try again at a different time when they're ready.
- Give them the space they need. Pressuring them to talk can push them away. Let them know you're there for them and let them come to you. It's important to respect their boundaries – there are some things they might not want to share or talk about with you.

Here are some useful contact details

Action for Children

parents.actionforchildren.org.uk

Emotional and practical care for children, young people and families in England. Includes a parenting hub, information for foster and adoptive parents, and local services for families.

Barnardos

barnardos.org.uk

Practical information and emotional support for children, young people and families. Includes specific information on mental health problems.

MindEd for Families

mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people

Information and advice on supporting young people's mental health, created by experts and parents. Covers topics like parenting and mental health services.

WHAT ABOUT PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH?

Managing stresses and illness alongside being a parent or carer is a complicated part of life for many.

If you're managing mental health issues you might find you have mood swings or struggle with keeping routines such as mealtimes, bedtimes and taking your children to school.

If you, or someone you know, is struggling, there are steps you can take.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

If you have coping strategies that work well for you already, keep doing them. That might be using mindfulness techniques, taking five minutes for yourself, or talking to a friend. Choosing one or a couple of things from the list below to focus on could give your mental health a boost.

- Maintaining good sleep might feel impossible, but [the NHS has tips and advice to help](#).
- Keep in touch with family and friends on the phone or try a video call. If you're struggling to find someone to talk to about what you're going through, [Mind has helplines](#) and you can speak to your GP to see what counselling provision might be available in your area. You can also [call or email the NSPCC Helpline](#) with any parenting concerns or worries.
- Write down your feelings in a notepad. This can help you reflect, understand, and let go of emotions.
- Join a support group or network online. Talking to others in a similar situation can help.
- Try to have some time for yourself, whether that's at home or by going for a walk.
- Physical activity is really helpful for some people. You could try walking, going for a jog, swimming or doing an online class. If these don't suit you, you could try a gentler activity like gardening, sitting next to an open window to get some fresh air, or doing a crossword.
- We know eating well isn't easy or accessible to everyone. If you need help with getting essentials, you can [contact your local food bank](#).
- Planning things to do by yourself or with your child can help create structure and a routine for the day. Try starting your day with a short list of 4 small, achievable things you'd like to do.
- If there's another adult in your house or older children, ask them to play an active part too.
- If finances are causing additional stress, [Money Saving Expert](#) has lots of information and [Citizens Advice](#) can offer help and support.

HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BETTER UNDERSTAND PARENT'S MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

If you're struggling, it's OK to reach out for support from friends, families and organisations that are available to help.

Changes in a parent's mental health can sometimes affect children. They may pick up on your anxiety, low mood or stress. This doesn't mean you should hide or minimise your feelings. You can try to explain what you're experiencing using phrases like, "It's OK to get big feelings, everyone gets big feelings but it's still the grown-up's job to look after the children" or "If grown-ups get big feelings, it's not your fault – we can ask other grown-ups for help with our feelings."

It's important to give children reassurance and support. Looking after your own mental health is vital to their well-being so don't be afraid to try new things together.

Reach out if you need help. The NSPCC [Helpline team](#) are available, whatever your worry. You can call them on 0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

WHERE TO FIND HELP

Other organisations providing support to children and families include:

[Mind](#)

Information and support as well as helplines for people experiencing mental health problems and their friends and families.

[Rethink Mental Illness](#)

Advice as well as services and support for people affected by mental illness and their friends and families.

[Samaritans](#)

Round-the-clock confidential support to people going through a tough time.

[SANE](#)

Emotional support to people affected by mental health problems and their families and friends.



What Parents & Carers Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

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WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Occurring through messaging apps, on social media and in online games, group chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. Involving, by definition, three or more individuals, these groups allow users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While they are useful for helping friends, people with shared interests or members of a club to communicate and coordinate activities, they can also leave young people feeling excluded and bullied – as well as providing opportunities for inappropriate content to be shared and viewed.

BULLYING

Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat – allowing and often encouraging others to join in the bullying behaviour. If this content is shared in a group of their peers (especially a larger group), it serves to amplify the hurt, embarrassment, anxiety and isolation that the victim feels.

SHARING GROUP CONTENT

It's important to remember that – while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something your child intended as private becoming public (and potentially going viral) is higher if there are people they don't know well in the group.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: starting a new group, for instance, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one child doesn't have access to, meaning they can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly toward your child. It's wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by your child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function, so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO

A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications. Every time someone in the group messages, your child's device will be 'pinged' with an alert; potentially, this could mean hundreds of notifications a day. Not only is this highly distracting, but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.

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Advice for Parents & Carers

CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats are often an arena for young people to gain social status. This could cause them to do or say things on impulse, which could upset others in the group. Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel if they engaged in this behaviour. If your child does upset a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Remind your child that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in a group chat, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help to put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. On a related note, you could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

AVOID INVITING STRANGERS

Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and, especially, to never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be a massive irritation and distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to your child that they can still be part of the group chat, but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with the conversation at a time which better suits them.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



Source: <https://www.ft.com/content/2019/02/28/online-safety-social-media-chat-apps>