

Recommendations on promoting child and adolescent mental health

General principles

Take a positive and holistic approach in which mental health promotion is as about the promotion of the positive mental wellbeing of all, which includes a concern for those with mental health problems and illnesses. This approach sees mental health as being on continuum or spectrum, and recognises and builds on the strengths and capacities that young people and their families have within themselves.

Within this overall holistic approach targets should include children and families, at particular risk. These might include children whose parents suffer from mental illness and or enduring physical illness, from high levels of social deprivation and poverty, who have experienced particularly stressful life events, or are suffering from post traumatic stress or the effects of war or migration.

Address the social risk factors known to underlie mental health problems. These include inequality, stigma, marginalisation, social exclusion and poverty, and the traumas created by war and violence.

Also recognise the ways in which rapid social change, pressure to succeed and commercial and media influences are shaping the mental health children and young people and their families in more affluent societies, sometimes resulting in the breakdown of protective adult- child relationships, and risky behaviour such as binge drinking, drug abuse, early sexual experience, harmful eating patterns, and self harm.

Put children and young people and their families at the heart of the process. Recognise, respect and work with their strengths and capacities. Enable them to participate fully in decisions made about themselves, and shape the plans, initiatives and policies that affect them. Address their problems in partnership with them, working wherever possible within the everyday settings in which they live, learn and work, and in ways that are accessible, relevant, empowering and involving and give them genuine power and respect. Be sensitive to the differing needs of different cultures, and population groups.

Have a particular focus on tackling the problem of stigma and discrimination that surround mental health problems.

See mental health promotion as involving everyone, and as a team effort, including but not lead by the medical/ psychiatric services, in which a wide range of agencies, professions and lay people each have an appropriate role to play, including end users and the young people themselves. Encourage interdisciplinary and multi-agency working, in a coherent and coordinated way.

Focus on the whole social context in which people find themselves as both the seat of understanding the causes of problems and as site for solutions, in

a co-ordinated and planned way. This needs to include the whole community with its health, leisure and educational resources, the full range of services available to help young people. Encourage the creation of the kind of contexts which are known to shape mental health, in home, school and community settings, which are those in which people are able to make sense of what is happening to them, feel safe, feel respected, valued and understood, and have a sense of ownership and participation.

Recognise that taking community based approaches should not be used as an opportunity to save money. Specialist and technical services still need to be properly resourced, and have their service and academic base supported and indeed increased in some countries, if they are to play their proper part in the team, while community based approaches themselves need to be properly resourced. There are no quick solutions, and a long term focus is needed.

Evidence base

Use and build on the evidence base in order to develop appropriate strategies, approaches and programmes. Consolidate, develop and disseminate the existing evidence base for work in this area, including the creation of a European database of successful projects and relevant research.

Give greater priority to evaluation of new and existing projects, with a great deal more resource devoted to it, and the creation of more effective partnerships between practitioners and the research centres which have the expertise in this area.

Develop indicators on mental health which allow for the collection of long term data, and for comparison between regions.

Encourage links between research and practice, and more training in the use and dissemination of research.

Build on emerging new evidence, for example on social risk factors, neurobiology, brain imaging, attachment theory, molecular genetics which may offer new insights and possible ways forward, more focussed interventions

Governments

Give the mental health of children and young people greater priority and greater resource.

Develop mental health policies that focus specifically on children, adolescents and young people and to address their needs.

Create strong and supportive mental well being infrastructures. Raise awareness of the importance of mental health issues at all levels.

Avoid investing in solutions for short term political gain which marginalise people, create anxiety in populations, create intolerance etc

Give more support for countries in transition to help them with their particular situations, such as high levels of deprivation and effects of war, the need for quality criteria, and help them move rapidly to take up modern approaches.

Require clear action plans on mental health promotion and youth from all member states, which are realistic and graduated to the needs of particular states.

Integrate mental health into policy and practice at all levels. This includes public health, fiscal policies, education, labour, health care.

Be aware of the vested interests and pressures such as from the pharmaceutical industry that can shape government action in this area.

Education

Address inequalities of access to good quality education

Provide preschool education for all– especially for low income families and migrant families, including addressing the learning of language and emotional and social competences.

Develop school based programmes for promoting mental health, including teaching skills, building on existing whole school approaches.

Parents and families

Support good parenthood and facilitate strong parent/child relationship development. Address the quality of parenting that the children receive and also the quality of their family relationships.

Provide parenting support and education, including during pregnancy for both partners, and prenatal - home visiting, education to help parents attach to their children and support for the reduction of substance abuse.

Health Professionals

Need ongoing, lifelong professional training including in working in the field of mental health, working with children and young people, the ability to change, work in teams, stress management, promote their own mental health competences, assessing the evidence base.