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### **Green paper. Improving the mental health of the population. Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union**

The European commission has invited all interested citizens, parties and organisations to contribute to the preparation of a possible EU strategy and an Action Plan on Mental Health by commenting on The Green Paper. The Finnish Society of Child Psychiatry wish to present the following comments and suggestions:

The aim of the Green Paper in proposing actions to improve the mental health of people in the EU is to be supported. In general, the practical efforts presented in the Green Paper can be agreed on. The mental health of individuals affects society on all levels. According to the research mental health problems affect one in four to five individuals in every western society, and this finding applies also to children. The first years of life are considered to be important to the foundation of good mental health. Various research results have shown the continuity of mental problems from childhood to adulthood and it is also known that many serious mental problems show their first signs already in childhood or adolescence. It is also pointed out that the resilience against stress later in life will be increased by good care during the early years. For all these reasons childhood is a unique period for promoting mental health and this should be clearly stressed when planning preventive actions. Measures to educate and support day care and primary health care staff in their work to promoting healthy development and in identifying psychiatric problems as early as possible are important in improving the mental health of the population. Also actions to increase knowledge concerning issues known to promote the development of mentally healthy children should be directed to the citizens of the member states and the legislators in each EU country. These include issues such as initiating and promoting discussions about values and actions affecting the care and mental health of children in the EU. These include topics like for example possibilities of parents to take care of their children during the first years of life without losing their jobs and careers. Also discussion of the impact of mass media on children and the need to regulate this aspect in the EU for protection of minors is needed. For the realization of such aims discussion and active promoting of various issues is needed.



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Many decisions made by policymakers (legislation as well as economical decisions, town planning etc) also have an impact on children's mental health and this aspect should always be evaluated, and practical tools to do this should be developed. After evaluating the impacts, actions promoting the positive growth of children should have priority. Also co-operation between the EU countries in developing actions to support the healthy development of children should be supported. Systems supporting the connecting of various bodies as well as professionals active in the field should be developed since learning through these kinds of contacts and co-operation would be a great asset in the development of practical actions. Currently, most countries fail to provide enough mental health services for children, and work to solve this shared problem should be supported. Although, preventive actions should be prioritized the development of good quality, easily and equally available mental health services should also be the aim of EU countries.

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