

Mental Health Awareness – surviving and thriving

-  Introduction
-  Surviving
-  Thriving

Introduction

Mental Health Awareness Week falls in May, and the theme for 2017 is ‘Surviving and Thriving’ – which focusses on the fact that an increasing number of people have mental health struggles and may be unaware of how to self-help or seek professional support.

Prince Harry has spoken openly about his journey with grief, having lost his mother at a young age, and the subsequent struggle with his emotions – impacting on both his behaviour and relationships. The Prince disclosed that he had accessed counselling support as an adult, which had helped him articulate his thoughts and process his loss. The counselling couldn’t change the circumstances, but it did provide a space for him to begin to come to terms with his loss. Despite his heritage, and space in the public eye, Prince Harry’s story is one that epitomizes the reality of mentally and emotionally surviving, rather than thriving – but we shouldn’t wait for a significant loss, or life event, to occur to believe we are worthy of help and support.

This guidance document outlines how to spot the signs of surviving, and how to promote thriving amongst staff and pupils, ensuring your school is doing everything it can to support those with mental health issues.

Surviving

Surviving and living with a mental health problem will affect everyone differently – the key is to identify the changes in behaviour and outlook.

In children, you may notice:

- A reduction of interest in the activities they usually enjoy.
- Them isolating themselves from friends.
- A loss of appetite.
- Unexplained physical health complaints.
- A suppressed mood that is evident on more days than not.
- Persistent fatigue.

In adults, you may also notice:

- Obvious changes in personality.
- Disturbed sleep.

- Tearfulness.
- Missed deadlines.

Not everyone will present signs in the same way, and some people may be very good at covering up how they feel. It is important to create a culture in which asking for emotional support feels no more daunting than talking about a sprained ankle.

Thriving

There are many different things that a school can adopt to encourage mental and emotional wellbeing, which can be applied to both staff and pupils. Here are the main points schools can consider:

- **Stop** – allow staff and pupils to be permitted to stop and have rest. This can be incredibly hard when there is so much to be done, but productivity will be improved when we take the time to stop and permit time off, be it at weekends or during the school holidays. Consider where pupil homework can be reduced – how much more beneficial might it be to the wellbeing of staff and pupils if no homework was issued during the half-term breaks?
- **Talk** – name the importance of wellbeing at school, and take deliberate steps to communicate to the staff and pupils that it's something that the school takes seriously and wants to improve on. Be intentional – if you plan a day of creative activities for the pupils, then be explicit that this is part of the overall drive to improve wellbeing.
- **Display** – have posters, provide leaflets, fill pupil areas with reminders that there are people available to help and support them if they have any worries. Promoting these services at the start of the academic year is great, but will the information have been lost again by half-term? Be transparent in what you can offer, by who, and how – knowing the pathway of pastoral care will make asking for support much less daunting.

The final term of the academic year is busy with exams and transitional work; however, this period must be used as an opportunity to look ahead to the next academic year and see what steps can be taken to ensure both staff and pupils are thrivers rather than survivors.

Our [Counselling in Schools – 3 Minute Read](#) outlines the main aspects schools should consider surrounding the implementation of an in-school counselling service and highlights the importance of providing such a service.