

MY HEALTH, OUR FUTURE (PHASE SIX)

Young people's mental health
and emotional wellbeing in
Suffolk - part three

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Suffolk



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For more information about 'My Health, Our Future' (MHoF), or to download previous reports and insights, please visit: www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/mhof

INTRODUCTION – PART THREE

My Health, Our Future (MHoF) is a unique research programme exploring the wellbeing of children and young people in Suffolk.

Since 2017, more than 43,000 responses have been received to MHoF surveys about important topics like wellbeing, self-harm, resilience, bullying and many other topic areas.

MHoF uses a consistent survey methodology (co-produced with young people, schools, colleges, and local partners) in schools and colleges.

This report presents the findings from 'phase six' of the MHoF survey for young people in secondary schools and colleges. Young people completed the survey between April and July 2022.

This report is part of a series – Access part one and part three from:
www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/mhof/phasesix

Learn more about MHoF on the Healthwatch Suffolk website:
www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/mhof

DOWNLOAD PART ONE

Click title to explore data on **who took part, wellbeing, resilience** and **anxiety**.

DOWNLOAD PART TWO

Click title to explore data on **self-rated mental health, self-harm** and **bullying**.

HOW WE MEASURE WELLBEING

In this report, you will see references to wellbeing categories (e.g., young people with 'low wellbeing') and average scores. These are determined using the 'Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale'.

- ▶ Students responded to seven statements about their wellbeing, and received a score ranging between 7 and 35. A higher score indicates better wellbeing.
- ▶ **4,889** students responded to the WEMWBS questions this year.
- ▶ The average score for 2022 **remains the same as 2021**, and lowest of all MHoF years.
- ▶ Read our 'part one' report for more insight into young people's wellbeing in Suffolk.



Suffolk

● 19.9 (2022)

● 19.9 (2021) ● 20.0 (2018)

● 20.7 (2019) ● 20.7 (2017)

National

● 24.6 (2020)

Young people in Suffolk have reported lower wellbeing scores than the national average for multiple years of MHoF.

HOW WE MEASURE RESILIENCE

In this report, you will find references to students who have 'high', 'normal', or 'low' resilience.

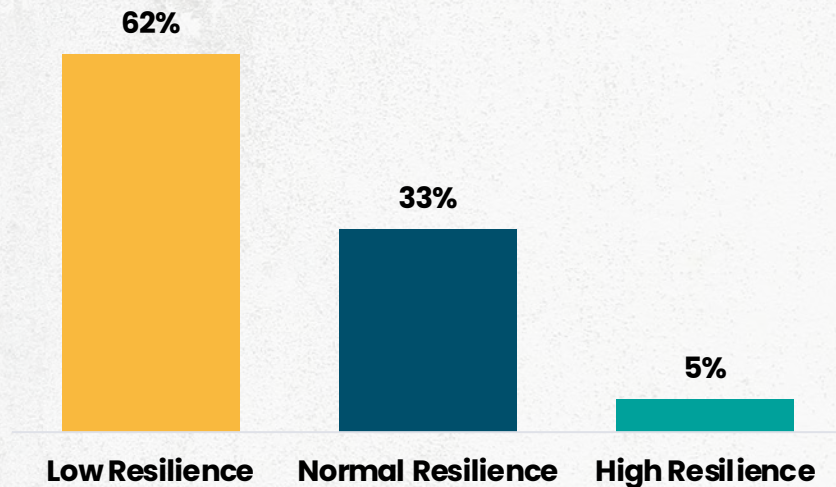
Resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). It was created to assess the perceived ability to 'bounce back' or recover from stress. More information available from:

www.whatworkswellbeing.org.

There are six statements on a five-point scale ('Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neutral', 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree'). An average score across these statements of 0 - 3 is considered 'low resilience', 3 - 4.3 is 'normal' and 4.3 - 5 is considered 'high resilience'.

- ▶ **4,469** young people responded to questions about resilience this year.
- ▶ For more information about the resilience of young people in Suffolk, please download our part one report.

3 IN 5 young people had low resilience.



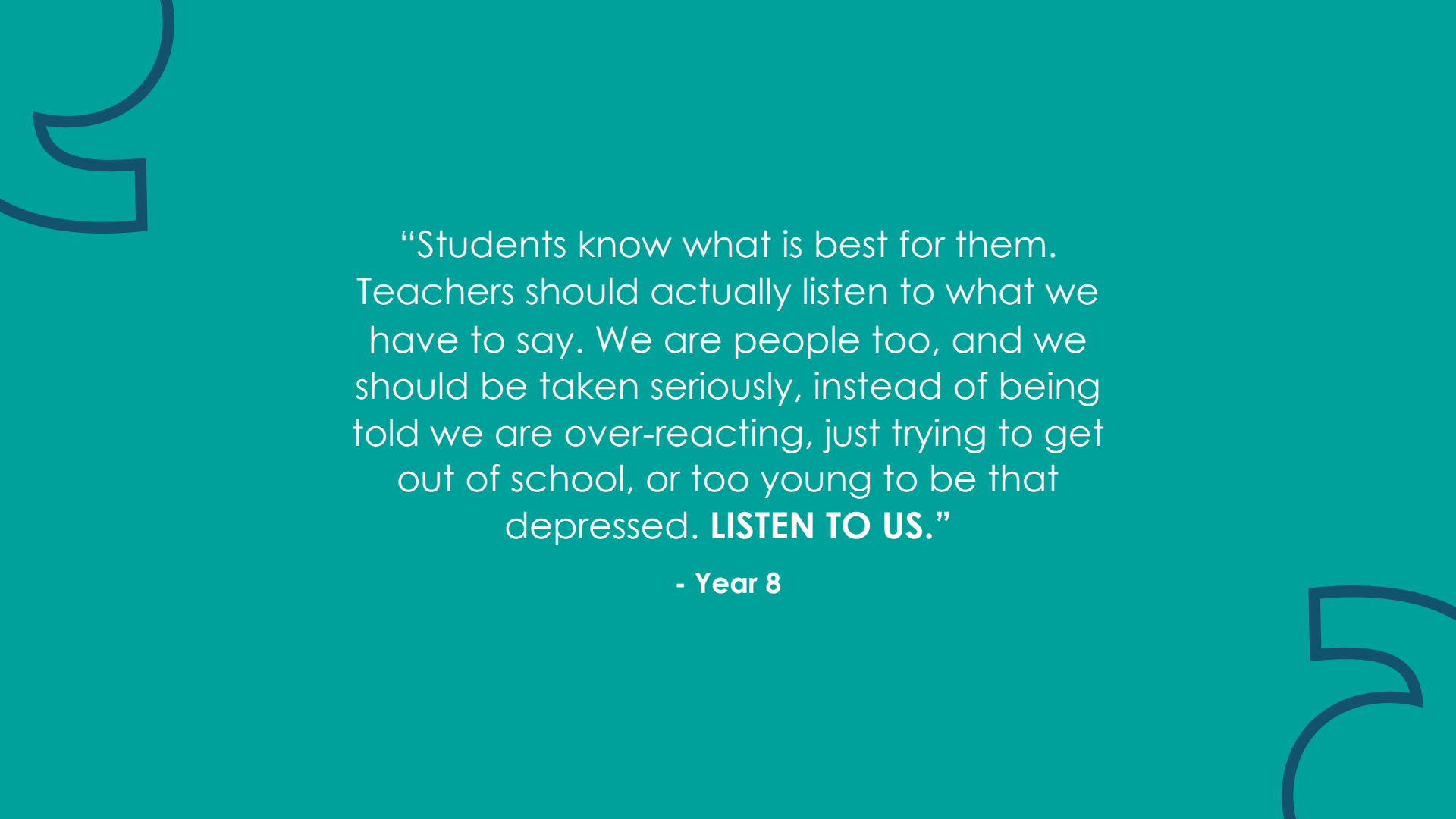
HOW WE MEASURE ANXIETY

- ▶ In this report, you will find references to differing levels of anxiety amongst young people in Suffolk.
- ▶ Students were asked about their experiences of anxiety using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7) – a scale of seven statements to measure the severity of Generalised Anxiety Disorder.
- ▶ Like SWEMWBS, the scale asks the respondents to rate the severity of their symptoms over the past two weeks. Response options include ‘not at all’, ‘several days’, ‘more than half the days’, and ‘nearly every day’.
- ▶ The possible score across the seven statements ranges from 0-21. A score of less than 5 indicates mild anxiety, 10 indicates moderate anxiety and 15 indicates severe anxiety.

IN OTHER RESEARCH...

The Prince’s Trust (2021) reported a 19% increase in the percentage of young people aged 16 to 25 feeling anxious “always”, “often”, or “all the time” since 2009.

See <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/youth-index-2021>



“Students know what is best for them. Teachers should actually listen to what we have to say. We are people too, and we should be taken seriously, instead of being told we are over-reacting, just trying to get out of school, or too young to be that depressed. **LISTEN TO US.**”

- Year 8

OUR RESULTS

PART 3

SEEKING SUPPORT

- ▶ Young people were asked about their experience of seeking support for their mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- ▶ **4,413** young people responded to the question.

IN OTHER RESEARCH...

In 2018, the Mental Health Foundation found more than one in 10 children (11%) aged 10 to 15 said they have no one to talk to, or wouldn't talk to anyone in school if they felt worried or sad. See:

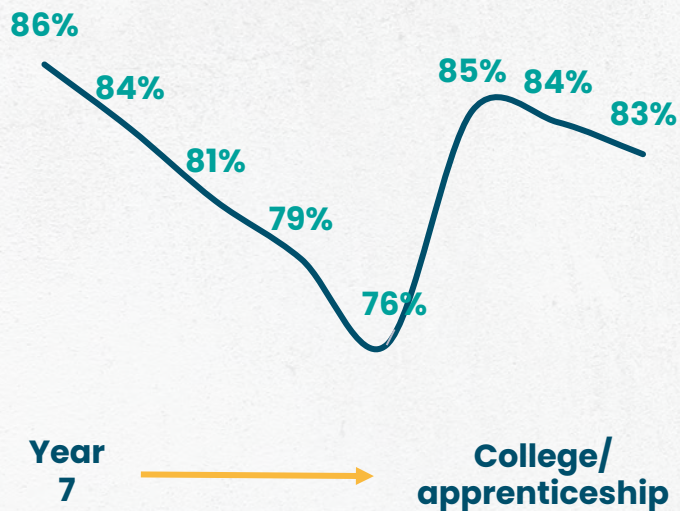
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/about-us/news/1-10-children-have-no-one-talk-school-when-they-are-worried-or-sad>



**ALMOST
1 IN 5**
said they don't
have anyone
they can turn to
for support with
their mental
health wellbeing.

TURNING TO OTHERS FOR SUPPORT

- ▶ There is a decline in the number of young people who feel they have somebody to turn to for support between Year 7 and Year 11.



- ▶ Young people with identified additional support needs were only slightly more likely to say they didn't have anybody to turn to for support with their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

No 'vulnerabilities'



Receiving free school meals



Special educational need



Disability



Young carer



Currently or previously in care



Mental health diagnosis





**TWO
THIRDS**

**of those who
described their
gender another
way had no one
to turn to for
support.**

TURNING TO OTHERS (CONT.)

Young people were asked whether they had turned to various sources of support for help with their mental health and wellbeing, and whether they felt they knew how to help them.

- ▶ LGBTQ+ students were more likely to say they did not have anybody to turn to for support compared to straight students **(24% vs. 15%)**.
- ▶ Students who preferred to describe their gender in another way were the least likely to say they had somebody to turn to for support **(30%)**.
- ▶ Male students were the most likely to say they had somebody to turn to for support with their mental health. This was closely followed by female students **(85% vs 82%)**.

SUPPORT – IMPACT ON OTHER MEASURES

Feeling like you have somebody to turn to for support appears to have a positive influence on multiple aspects of wellbeing. Young people who felt they had nobody to turn to were:

- ▶ More likely to say they are currently 'struggling' or 'emotionally unwell' (**74%**) compared to those who say they do have somebody to turn to (**44%**).
- ▶ More likely to have low wellbeing (**27% vs 7%**), low resilience (**78% vs 59%**), and moderate to severe anxiety (**64% vs 36%**).
- ▶ Almost **four times** as likely to say they currently self-harm compared to those who say they do have somebody to turn to (**18% vs 5%**).
- ▶ More likely to experience bullying (**45%**) compared to young people who say they have somebody to turn to (**31%**).

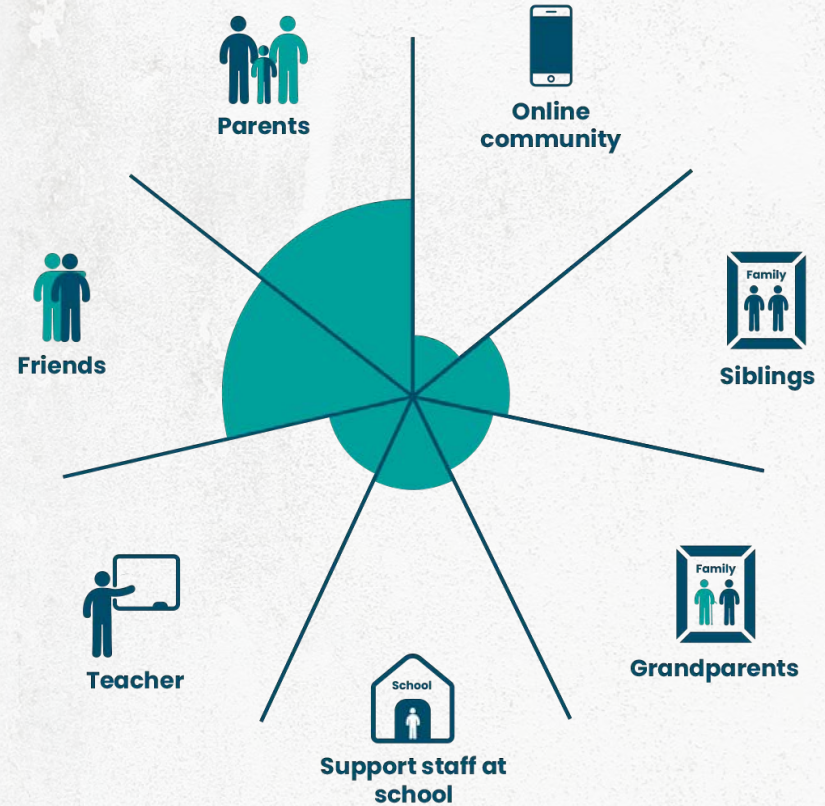


- Felt they had someone to turn to
- Felt they had nobody to turn to


WHO CAN HELP?

Young people were asked whether they had turned to any of the following people for support with their mental health and wellbeing, and whether they felt these people knew how to help them.

- ▶ Young people were most likely to seek support from their parents, carers and friends, whilst the online community and grandparents were the least likely.
- ▶ Young people were most likely to say that they did not feel teachers and members of support staff at their school were able to help them.
- ▶ Young people felt that parents, carers and friends were able to help them the most.



● This person was able to help me



“Struggling with the loss of someone close. I had several meetings with my head of year who **helped me by far the most, despite not being a healthcare professional.**”

- Year 13



WELLBEING SUPPORT – SERVICES

Students were asked about their experience of services that support young people's mental health.

What was good?

Some highlighted services had helped them to obtain an official diagnosis, enabling them to access support or treatment.

“The doctor was able to help me realise I was suffering from anxiety, and I was able to tell the high school who helped.” - Year 12

“The GP pushed for my diagnosis for both ASD and mental health, but only tested then straight referred me to Emotional Wellbeing Hub.” - Year 13

Some young people received useful advice that encouraged them to keep going and to manage their condition.

*“The person I saw helped me and showed me different ways on how to control my anxiety.”
- College*

“Most of the time what they said with all I can say is encouraging for me to keep moving on and fighting.” - College

WELLBEING SUPPORT – SERVICES

Students were asked about their experience of services that support young people's mental health.

What could be improved?

Young people sometimes felt dismissed, ignored and not listened to when visiting services. Some felt services had made things worse for them.

“The doctor would barely listen and dismissed me with general exam anxiety, even though the exams were not what I went to talk to them about.” – Year 13

“Half the time they wouldn't listen, or they would say just things I heard before.” – College

“They only saw me once and told me I was fine when I was literally suicidal.” – University

“CAMHS were cold, and I got the impression that they wanted me out of there ASAP.” – College

“I have been let down. They let me deteriorate in plain sight after an inpatient admission.” – Not in school

“CAMHS worked for a short while but ended up causing more issues for me.” – Year 13

SCHOOL NURSES

Young people were asked about seeking support and school nurses were mentioned multiple times.

Students stated that leaflets provided weren't helpful, and others felt they couldn't speak honestly with school nurses because they felt judged. However, positive comments suggested that school nurses often offer students a space to have a breather and provide one to one support meetings.

The most reoccurring comments mentioned that school nurses were extremely busy and only had a limited amount of time available to speak to students. Others said school nurses no longer attended their school, despite high demands from students who want more frequent visits from school nurses.

"School nurse let me speak (cry if needed) and just listened to me and made me feel like my feelings were valid".

"School nurses were extremely busy at my school due to the amount of people that wanted to be seen. This meant meetings weren't as often as I would have liked but those that I did have helped massively."



**School nurses were rated 2.6 stars
(based on 256 ratings).**

**"I felt judged and just
didn't feel like I could
be openly honest
about things with the
school nurse."**

SUPPORT - WHAT WORKED AT SCHOOL/COLLEGE?

- ▶ Students were asked to identify what methods of support had worked to support their mental health and emotional wellbeing at school.
- ▶ Young people highlighted multiple methods of support that had worked when turning to a teacher, or member of support staff, for support.





“We need to get support sooner rather than later. **I found that adult mental health services were bad when supporting my mum.** She waited a long time to get an appointment and has been let down by them massively.”

- College



SUPPORT - WHAT WORKED AT SCHOOL/COLLEGE?

DEALING WITH BULLYING EFFECTIVELY



"When I was assaulted, my parents got in touch with the school. **They dealt with it properly.**"

"My Student Support Leader was amazing. I told her I was being bullied, and **in less than a week, she sorted it out.**"

"When I was assaulted, the wellbeing team was really helpful. **They made sure the person didn't come close to me in class and offered me support** if I wanted to contact the police."

NO WRONG DOOR – BEING THERE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



"My lecturer at college helped me deal with overthinking and anxiety, **she is someone I can turn to.**"

"Whenever I felt sad or depressed, I talked to my parents, my teachers and other school staff. **It really helped me get over my depression.**"

"My teacher and other members of school staff helped me with tests and worries I had about the future."

SUPPORT - WHAT WORKED AT SCHOOL/COLLEGE?

GIVING USEFUL INFORMATION AND ADVICE



"A member of staff **gave me helpful advice regarding home life and my mental wellbeing.**"

"What helped me most was **advice about the future and careers** etc. from teachers and other staff in school."

"My teacher, who is part of the mental health support team, helped me out a lot. I would talk through stuff with him, and **he helped me learn to cope with and prevent panic attacks.**"

SUPPORT MEETINGS AND 1:1 SESSIONS



"I have **one-to-one mental health support sessions at school, and it has worked.**"

"Every week I talk with teachers and reflect on the week, both positive and negative events. **While it did help to find the positives, it was hard to talk about some subjects.** I found it difficult to talk positively about myself."

"I had weekly meetings at college, and **it made me feel listened to and not judged.**"

SUPPORT - WHAT DIDN'T WORK AT SCHOOL OR COLLEGE?

- ▶ Young people highlighted multiple methods of support that didn't work when turning to a teacher or member of support staff for help with their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

NO INTERVENTION

Not dealing with bullying effectively.



LACK OF SUPPORT

Not having enough support available in school/college.



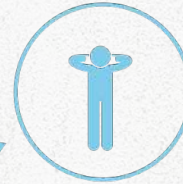
NOT UNDERSTANDING

Young people often felt school staff did not understand their concerns.



NOT LISTENING

Sometimes young people felt school staff did not listen to their concerns.



SUPPORT - WHAT DIDN'T WORK?

NOT DEALING WITH BULLYING

"Teachers didn't help me with bullying. They tried to put me in a different room for the whole lesson... but that **didn't work as the bullies talked behind my back.**"

"I was bullied relentlessly. **I told every teacher and headteacher about what was happening and yet nothing was done** to solve it. The education system has failed me."

"No real support when I was assaulted. **They told me... I was probably misinterpreting it, they just wanted to be friends, and that I should feel guilty** because I told other people in class when I broke down."

LACK OF SUPPORT AT SCHOOL OR COLLEGE



"The **support provided by school wasn't consistent** and was only at the beginning of school year."

"The wellbeing team in school didn't help me. **They turned me away and said I was fine**, and my anxiety seemed better as I went out with my mates."

"My teacher told me **all my stresses, anxieties, 'fun and happy' thoughts were normal for my age.** They did not offer support and were not concerned by what I was saying."

SUPPORT - WHAT DIDN'T WORK?

NOT LISTENING TO THE YOUNG PERSON



“Staff members act like they care so much about students’ mental health, but **they don’t genuinely ask you how you’re feeling or want to sit and listen.** They just talk about the options of online counselling and don’t seem to put in any effort to listen and be there for someone in need.”

“**I feel like teachers should just listen to students,** instead of feeding them mostly negative words in a professional way. For example, ‘I understand how you feel but I’m going to have to tell...’ or ‘This is very bad you’re going to have to stop.’”

“I’ve had countless appointments arranged with the mental health officer in school but **it’s almost as if they aren’t actually interested in helping you** and more interested in the image it’s giving them. It’s more for show so they can say ‘We try our best in supporting students’ but **they forget about you as quickly as you come.**”

SUPPORT - WHAT DIDN'T WORK?

NOT SHOWING UNDERSTANDING



"The **school use extremely artificial responses to things** and don't treat you like an individual."

"Most teachers don't understand mental illness in terms of anxiety or social anxiety. **They recognise that you are nervous but continue with teaching methods not suited to your needs**, placing you in situations detrimental to your wellbeing."



NOT SEEKING SUPPORT – WHY?

When young people were asked what support worked and didn't work. Many used this space to express why they didn't ask for help. The table below shows some of the common reasons.

Reason for not seeking support	Mentions
People don't understand	11
First time asking did not go well	11
Felt like a burden	9
Did not feel comfortable asking	8
Unable to articulate feelings	6
Did not want to talk about feelings	6
Perception that other people are worse off	4
Being scared, embarrassed or awkward	4
Feeling judged	2
Unable to trust other people	2

"I think people need to be a lot more understanding as I've never felt like I can reach out – **like I would receive a bad reaction, and this was true whenever I tried before and I haven't tried again.**" – Year 13

WHY I DIDN'T SEEK SUPPORT...



"I didn't tell people because I'm scared. I feel like if I tell them they will contact my parents. Then my teacher, friend or my parents might have a go at me for not telling them in the first place." – **Year 7**

"I didn't feel comfortable asking others for support. Many of my friends are either on the same page as me or didn't know how to react, therefore weren't able to help." – **Year 7**

"I've generally had a hard time articulating what I want to say when asking for help from these people, especially my parents. **I feel I cannot express what I am struggling with or say what I intend to say correctly.** This leads to me not being able to receive sufficient help." – **Year 13**

"I think people need to be more understanding as I've never felt like I can reach out, as I would receive a bad reaction every time I tried." – **Year 13**

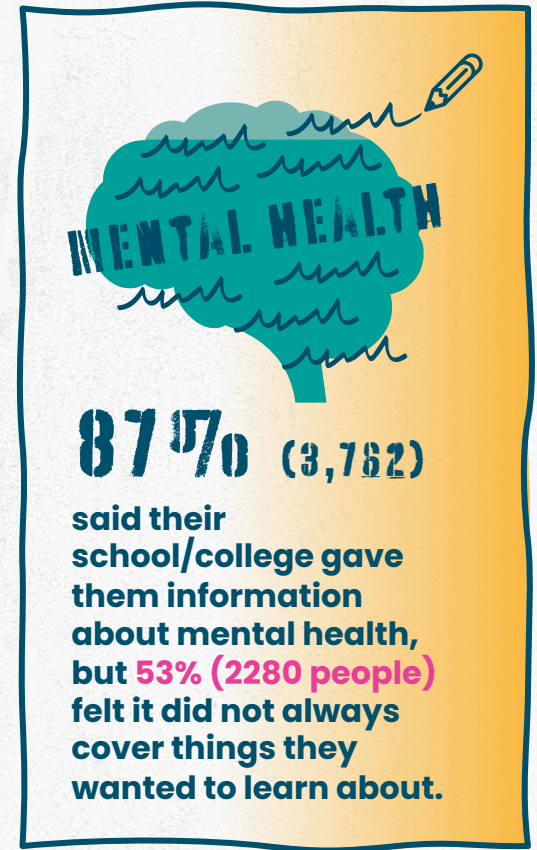
"I couldn't reach out to these people because everyone thought I was fine. **I didn't want to burden anyone.**" – **Year 12**

"I wasn't helped because i didn't ask. **There are people who need the support much more than I do** so why ask." – **Year 9**

MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Students were asked if they had been taught about mental health at school or college. **4,298** answered the question.

- ▶ **12%** said their school or college does not give them information about mental health.
- ▶ Students with vulnerabilities were more likely to feel their school or college does not provide information about mental health, excluding young carers.
- ▶ Students with a mental health condition (**42%**), and those who are or have been in care (**42%**), were most likely to say their school or college offers information, but not topics they are interested in.
- ▶ Students who would prefer to describe their gender in another way were most likely to say their school gave them information about mental health, but not the topics they wanted to learn about (**56%**). This was compared to female students (**37%**) and male students (**29%**).





EDUCATION

The percentage of young people that said they have received information about mental health in school slightly increased since the 2021 survey. However, 10% more young people said the information didn't always cover topics they were interested in.



“I feel the topics we’re trying to educate people about at school should be taught at a younger age and spoken about more regularly, instead of having specific classes only once a year or an assembly.”

- Year 13



TOPIC PREFERENCES

Young people were also asked about which topics they would most like to learn about in school. **4,889** young people answered the question.

Topic	%
Anxiety	48%
Body image	42%
How to manage my own mental health and wellbeing	41%
Depression	41%
Understanding and managing stress in school or college	40%
How to help others with their mental health and wellbeing	38%
Eating disorders	38%
General mental health and wellbeing	36%

Topic	%
Self-harm	35%
Sexual orientation, and information relevant to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer (or questioning)	28%
Gender identity, and information relevant to people who are trans, non-binary, genderqueer or agender	26%
Borderline Personality Disorder	25%
Schizophrenia	23%
Psychosis	12%
I don't want to learn about mental health and wellbeing at school or college	12%

TOPIC PREFERENCES - ANXIETY

- ▶ **48%** of young people said they wanted to learn about 'anxiety'. This was the most selected topic. This is consistent with last years results.
- ▶ There were multiple comments from young people who were unsure if what they were experiencing was anxiety.

"I'm unsure if what I'm feeling is anxiety. It feels more like reluctance and fear due to past experiences that make me dislike myself and feel like I shouldn't be around other people or that they don't like my presence."

- Year 13

"I think I'm more bored than anxious. But I do worry quite a bit that I have anxiety or something like that."

- College



48%

of students wanted to learn about the topic of anxiety. That makes it the most selected topic choice, and remains consistent with findings in 2021.



78%

of young people with severe, moderate, and mild anxiety levels indicated that they wanted to learn about anxiety in school or college.

OTHER TOPICS

Multiple young people highlighted various other topics they wanted to learn about in school.

Topic	Mentions
ADHD	21
Autism	13
OCD	12
PTSD	9
Recognising how to help others	7
Personality disorders	7
Gender identity and sexual orientation	6
Suicide	6
Bullying	5
Loneliness	4
Men's mental health	3
Dissociative Identity Disorder	3

Topic	Mentions
Coping with grief	3
How to ask for help and where to go	3
Sleep disorder	3
Phobias	3
Information on sexual and domestic abuse	3
Tourette's	3
Religion and difficult cultures	3
Racism	2
Puberty and hormones	2
Dealing with rejection	2
Addiction	1
Masking	1
Healthy eating	1
Information on sexual health	1
Skin conditions	1
Dyslexia	1

PREFERENCES FOR LEARNING AND TOPICS

MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

"When teaching about body image please teach us how it can manifest in more ways than a girl feeling under pressure on social media. **Men also can be severely affected by body image issues. We also need to focus more on understanding and respecting gender identity and sexuality.**

We certainly need more education on more mental health conditions." – Year 11

"Men's mental health does feel overlooked at college. It is not necessary to compare it to women's mental health, I understand that the statistics are higher but not for all women." – Year 12

"We should get taught about all the topics, but lessons should be carried out differently. Learning about eating disorders and self harm may 'encourage' children or trigger them to do negative things to themselves.

It needs to be very carefully planned to be discouraging."

– Year 10

TOPIC PREFERENCES (LGBT*Q+ STUDENTS)

- ▶ Overall, almost half of LGBT*Q+ students felt their school did not explore topics of interest to them **(48%)**. Compare to **31%** of heterosexual/straight peers.
- ▶ LGBT*Q+ students were more likely to say that they wanted to learn about all mental health topics than their peers.
- ▶ LGBT*Q+ students were more likely to say they wanted to learn about sexual orientation, and information relevant to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer (or questioning) **(61% vs 20%)**. They were also more likely to want to learn about gender identity and information relevant to people who are trans, non-binary, genderqueer or agender than their peers **(57% vs 19%)**.



TOPIC PREFERENCES (GENDER & OTHER FACTORS)

- ▶ Male students were slightly more likely to say they don't want to learn about mental health.
- ▶ Students who preferred to describe their gender in another way were most likely to say they wanted to learn about all topics of mental health. In particular, gender identity (81%), sexual orientation (76%), and eating disorders (72%) were the most popular topics they wanted to learn about.
- ▶ Male students wanted to learn most about anxiety (41%), depression (38%), and how to help others (33%).
- ▶ Female students wanted to learn most about body image (55%), anxiety (58%), and understanding stress (50%).

- ▶ The percentage of students who did not want to learn about mental health in school was consistent across year groups. However, Year 7 were the most likely to say they did not want to learn about mental health.
- ▶ Older students (Year 13, 12, 11, 10) indicated the most interest in all topics on mental health, apart from self-harm. Year 7s showed the most interest in learning about self-harm.



Female students showed the most interest in learning about body image.

IMPROVING WELLBEING

Young people identified multiple things that would benefit their emotional health and mental wellbeing in school. This included:

- ▶ More respect and feel like they are being listened to.
- ▶ Being taught more about mental health, but this needs to be more in-depth, on various topics, and carefully carried out.
- ▶ More anonymous surveys that are carried out throughout the year, so schools can see what students need at the right time and make useful changes.
- ▶ Guest speakers with lived experiences to talk about mental health topics.
- ▶ More clubs after school, and during lunch time, that are cheaper (or free) for students, including sports, history, or wellbeing clubs.
- ▶ Relaxation spaces to give students a place to go when they feel overwhelmed or anxious.



To feel like they are heard and taken seriously.

A space to go when feeling anxious or overwhelmed.



Invited guest speakers to talk about mental health.

IMPROVING WELLBEING (CONT.)

- ▶ More opportunities to talk with somebody about their mental health and emotional wellbeing, whether it is a teacher, tutor or professional.
- ▶ Mental health training for staff as they are often unprepared.
- ▶ More accessible information about support services and where to access them.
- ▶ Support with homework as many people said they were struggling .
- ▶ Normalise talking about mental health; instead of it being a one-off assembly or 'wellbeing day'.
- ▶ Improve support with bullying, sexual assault, harassment, homophobia, and racism.
- ▶ More LGBT*Q+ support in school and a better approach to LGBT*Q+ issues.



Train staff to support mental health issues in school.

Support young people to stand against bullying and harassment.



A better approach to supporting LGBT*Q+ young people.



This report has been produced to support the ongoing development and implementation of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing support in Suffolk. It will be publicly available on the Healthwatch Suffolk website. It will also be made available to Healthwatch England, and bodies responsible for the commissioning, scrutiny or delivery of local health and care services.

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