



A Happy Generation: Our Proposal for Investment

Introduction



We know that children's mental health is declining, not least for the generation who have grown up through the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet services aren't joined up and far too many are going without the support they need to thrive.

We need a collaborative and holistic system that ensures all children and young people have the support they need to build lifelong skills and thrive.

To do that every child, and their family, should have access to the right support, in the right place, at the right time. We believe this means:

Right support:

a range of mental health and wellbeing supports, including counselling

Right place:

in schools, with support provided for the wider school community

Right time:

as soon as children need it and early in their life

In Scotland, we're seeing a welcome investment in perinatal and early years support for families, as well as counselling in schools for children aged 10 and up. But what about children in that crucial period of development between 5 and 10?

With school budgets under pressure, the key barrier to providing this support is money. This plan sets out how the Scottish Government can provide the positive investment in childhood needed to ensure mental health and wellbeing support can be delivered in all schools, closing a key gap in provision and ensuring no child faces mental health alone.



The case for investment



Children's mental health is declining

In 2022, almost 1 in 5 (18%) aged 5 to 7 were already experiencing mental health difficulties – rising to almost 1 in 4 (23%) of children aged 8 to 11^[1].

More than 1 in 3 adolescents surveyed in 2022 were classified as having low mood or depression, according to the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index^[2]. Similarly, almost 1 in 3 (32%) of 13 and 15 year olds were classified as having moderate or severe anxiety (according to the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale)^[3].

We also know that 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14 so help is needed early.

The impact of mental health difficulties is keenly felt in schools

A Scottish Government survey of school staff, found a perception that behaviour in classrooms and around the school has deteriorated in recent years^[4].


While the Scottish Government survey found most types of behaviour got worse by age, violent behaviour was worse in primary schools, particularly in primaries 1 to 3.

The impact of poor mental health is also seen in declining school attendance, with Emotionally-Based School Avoidance a big factor. In Scotland, 28.5% of pupils were persistently absent from school in 2024-25, rising to 37.4% in secondary schools ^[5].

The system of support for children's mental health isn't joined up

Responsibility – and funding – for preventative mental health and wellbeing support is currently split across the health service, local authorities, and schools. This siloed approach means funds don't always work in tandem to provide holistic and comprehensive preventative support.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government has provided funding for counselling in secondary schools and for children aged over 10 in primary schools but does not fund therapeutic mental health services in primary schools for children aged below 10. We believe this is a key gap in provision.



A photograph of children sitting on a green mat, playing with various toys including a small dog, a horse, and a sheep. The image is partially obscured by a large orange rounded rectangle containing the title.

Our proposal

We are calling for an investment of £15 million in a Children's Mental Health Early Intervention Fund and the creation of a National Framework of Providers to support primary school headteachers to fund mental health and wellbeing support in schools.

- Budgets would initially be set by the Scottish Government to ensure equity of access, with consideration given to CAMHS need in the local authority area; poverty; and rurality.
- Children's Services Partnerships, themselves collaborations between local authorities and the NHS, will set local priorities for the fund.
- The funding will sit with headteachers who can commission services from the National Framework, ideally working as a cluster of schools.
- National guidance on how the funding should be spent should support delivery should be developed in line with the [Mental Health and Wellbeing Whole School Approach Framework](#).

Over time the provision of this funding would be mainstreamed to local NHS Boards, supporting them to shift resources from crisis services to early intervention and increasing overall spending on children's mental health.

Outcomes

The fund should encourage collaboration and partnership working

Schools should be encouraged to work in partnership across secondary school and primary school clusters. For example, £15 million would be enough for schools to put in place a Mental Health Practitioner in their secondary school cluster working around three days per week across the primary schools.

This level of service across the country could deliver up to 164,000 counselling sessions, potentially supporting over 13,500 children.

This could have a positive impact on the mental health and education of children

Our data shows that after 1-1 counselling with Place2Be in Scotland:

- 75% of primary school children had an improvement reported in their mental health by one or more measure;
- teachers reported an improvement in classroom learning for 55% of children;
- and teachers also reported an improvement in behaviour for 57% of pupils.

External research has also shown the benefits of 1-1 counselling for primary school-aged children:

- It reduces the odds of persistent absence: research from the [University of Cambridge and Place2Be](#) found that school-based one-to-one counselling has the potential to reduce the chance of persistent absence by 18.5%, and could be most effective for primary school-aged pupils.
- It could bring an economic benefit to society of £8 for every £1 invested: experts at [PBE](#) found that Place2Be's one-to-one support in primary schools could generate an average of £8,700 in economic benefits over the lifetime of the individual child, through higher employment prospects and wages, decreased truancy, school exclusion, smoking and criminal behaviour.



Our call to action



We all believe that our children should grow up healthy and happy, developing the lifelong skills they need to thrive. Yet far too many children in Scotland are facing mental health difficulties without access to the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

To tackle this, we need a joined-up system that provides help early. Our proposal is just one part of the solution, but a £15 million Children's Mental Health Early Intervention Fund could close a key gap in provision and ensure that every primary school is able to invest in mental health and wellbeing support. Doing so can improve children's engagement in their education, improve their happiness and wellbeing, and ensure they can make a valuable contribution to society.

We ask all political parties seeking election to the Scottish Parliament to commit their support to this vital investment in the happiness of children in Scotland.





About Place2Be

We create a Place2Be: a safe and creative space in schools for children to open up about their emotions and any difficulties they are facing, so mental health problems don't grow with them. In 2024-25, we provided embedded in-school mental health support services in over 50 primary and high schools in Scotland, and peripatetic services to a further 190 schools – meaning we were available to over 70,000 children and young people.

Contact us

If you are interested in finding out more about Place2Be, please get in touch:

0207 923 5500
scotland@place2be.org.uk
place2be.org.uk

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