

Roles, Routes & Resources

A practical guide to wellbeing support
for children & young people



**Children's
Alliance**

Better starts, brighter futures

Roles, Routes & Resources

Contents

Foreword - - - - -	3
Levels of Support - - - - -	4
Possible Pathways - - - - -	5
Taxonomy - - - - -	6
Building Connection - - - - -	9



Roles, Routes & Resources

Foreword

Welcome to this *Easy-to-Read Guide* to support for children & young people

Mental health and emotional wellbeing are at the heart of every thriving, supportive, and inclusive educational establishment, yet for many the multitude of roles and interventions can feel unclear or even confusing.

The Children's Alliance have produced this accessible guide based on research from the National Counselling & Psychotherapy Society (NCPS) and support from our Emotional Health Working Group.

There is an extensive network of support before the need to access specialist crisis services, such as CAMHS.

For commissioners, this guide offers a framework to help determine the types of mental health support available and/or needed in communities and educational establishments.

For parents and educators, it provides much-needed clarity on what the different job titles mean and what to expect from practitioners.

Most importantly, for young people, it shows all the different ways they can access the kind of support that works for them.

Preventing worsening mental and emotional health can be achieved through creating environments where children & young people feel safe, supported, and equipped to handle the inevitable challenges in life. Whole-school mental health programmes, peer-support initiatives, and digital tools can all help when things start feeling hard.

We all have a shared responsibility: practitioners, schools, and policymakers must all work together to create and develop spaces and services that allow relational support – based on trust, connection and compassion – to thrive. While expertise undoubtedly matters, it's the quality of the relationships that practitioners are able to build with young people that can make the biggest difference.

This guide is designed to bring clarity to the wide range of mental health support roles available within education, highlighting common roles, interventions, and pathways to care.

Whether you're a parent, an educator, or a commissioner, this guide will give you a clear starting point for action and escalation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and joining us on our journey to make sure that children & young people get the support they need and deserve.

Meg Moss

Co-Chair, Emotional Health Working Group
Children's Alliance



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Levels of Support

Note: depending on the practitioner, some earlier support roles may be able to also offer more specialist interventions

CAMHS
Counsellor
Psychotherapist
Social Worker
Intensive Support

Potentially lengthy waiting lists for CAMHS

Specialist Interventions
Social Worker Psychotherapist
Counsellor
High-level CBT practitioner

Teachers, coaches, school nurses and support staff are often a child's first port of call for help

Targeted Mental Health & Social Support
Play & Creative Art Therapist Psychotherapist
Educational Mental Health Practitioner Counsellor

Self-referral often possible, short to medium waiting lists

General Emotional & Behavioural Support
Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)
Family Link Worker Educational Psychologist
Children's Wellbeing Practitioner

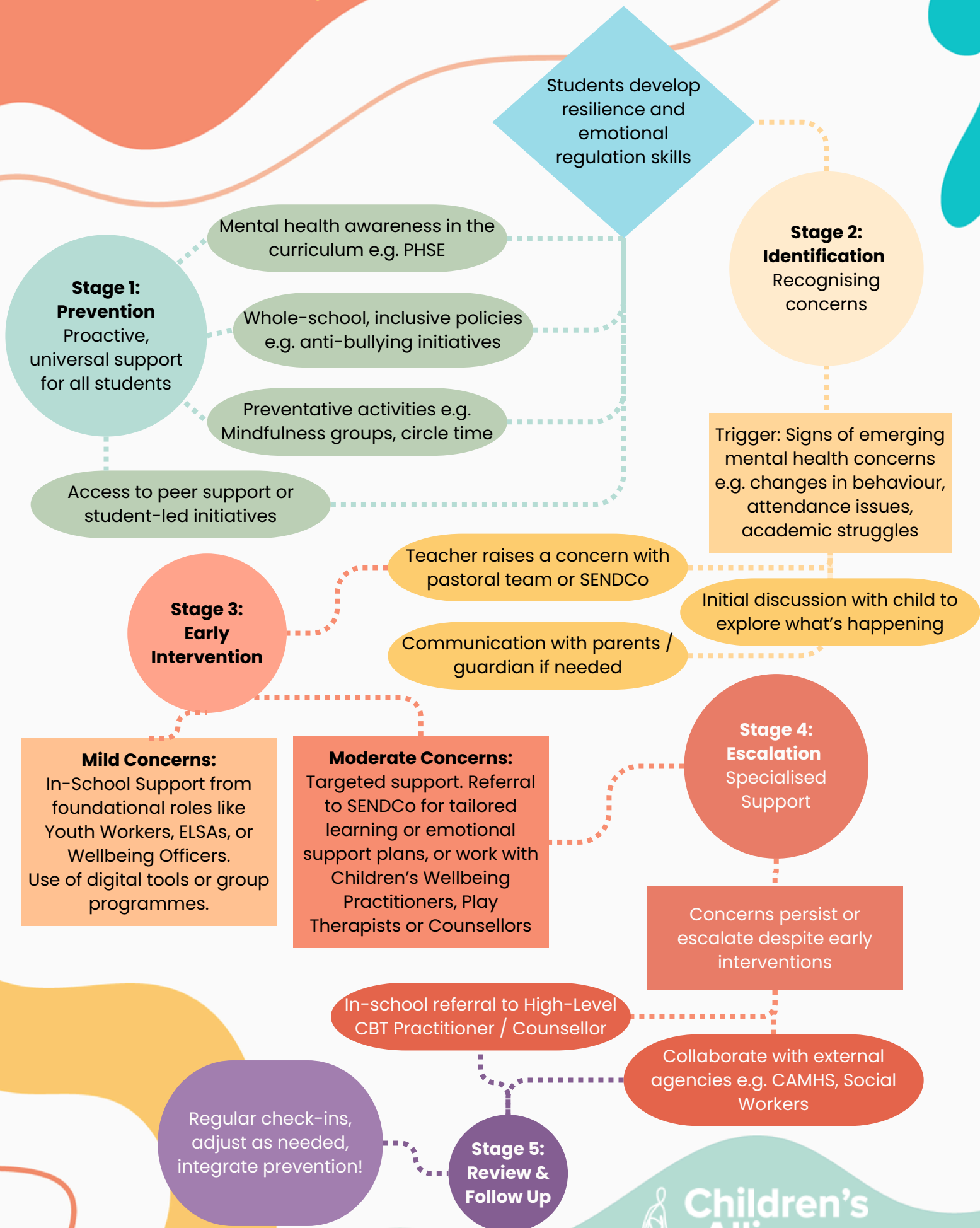
Foundational Support
Wellbeing Officer Safeguarding Officer Support Mentor
Mental Health First Aider Mental Health Nurse Youth Worker
Learning Support SENDCo Mental Health Co-Ordinator

Preventative Practices
Mindfulness Programmes Staff Wellbeing Initiatives
PHSE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education) School Nurses Anti-Bullying Campaigns
Mental Health Apps School Wellbeing Platforms Restorative Practices Parent Support
Mental Health Awareness Curriculum Circle Time Parent-Child Activities Peer Support Programmes
Whole-School, inclusive policies Student Led-Initiatives



Roles, Routes & Resources

Possible Pathways



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Taxonomy

Role	Description	Qualifications	Professional Body
CAMHS Practitioner	Offers specialised mental health support to children and adolescents dealing with complex issues. Available at all levels, often as a part of external mental health services.	Varies depending on the role (e.g., counsellors, nurses, psychologists in CAMHS)	Check relevant registration via the PSA, NMC, HCPC, or other professional bodies.
Children's Wellbeing Practitioner	Supports children and families with mild-to-moderate mental health issues through guided self-help. Present at all levels but commonly seen in primary settings.	Postgraduate certificate or diploma in Children's Wellbeing Practice (often Level 6/7)	Check relevant registration via BPS or BABCP
Counsellor / Psychotherapist	Provides talking therapy to help children and young people explore their feelings, build resilience, and make positive changes. Available across all levels, from primary through to HE.	Minimum Ofqual Level 4 Diploma, with specialist training in working with Children & Young People	Check registration with NCPS, BACP, UKCP, or another Professional Standards Authority (PSA)-accredited body.
Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)	Helps young children understand and express emotions, building social skills and emotional resilience. Mainly in primary and secondary schools.	Level 3/4 qualification in supporting children or a similar field, with ELSA training	No specific registration; check completion of ELSA program.
Educational Mental Health Practitioner (EMHP)	Delivers low-level psychological support for students with mild-to-moderate mental health concerns. Works across primary, secondary and FE settings.	Postgraduate diploma (Level 7) in Education Mental Health Practice	Check relevant registration via BPS or BABCP
Educational Psychologist	Assesses students' learning needs, developing strategies to support their educational and personal development. Works across all levels, mainly in primary and secondary schools.	Doctorate in Educational Psychology	Must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

Roles, Routes & Resources

Taxonomy

Role	Description	Qualifications	Professional Body
Family Link Worker	Acts as a connection between school and families, addressing attendance and behavioural issues. Primarily in primary and secondary schools.	Often Level 3/4 in social care, education, or equivalent experience	Not typically registered
High-Level CBT Practitioner	Provides targeted cognitive behavioural therapy interventions for students with anxiety or behavioural issues. Found across all settings.	Postgraduate diploma or Master's in CBT (Level 7)	Must be registered with BABCP
Learning Support	Provides tailored assistance to students with special educational needs, making learning more accessible. Found across all settings.	Level 2/3 in Teaching and Learning Support or equivalent experience.	Not typically registered; ensure safeguarding checks in place.
Mental Health Coordinator /Advisor	Manages mental health services and provides specialised guidance to students. Typically FE and HE settings.	Degree-level education (Level 6) or postgraduate qualifications in mental health.	Not typically registered
Mental Health First Aider	Offers initial support in mental health crises, providing guidance and encouraging professional help. Mostly in secondary schools, FE & HE.	Trained via certified Mental Health First Aid courses.	Not typically linked to a professional body
Mental Health Nurse	Delivers clinical support for students with complex mental health needs. Present at all levels, often in secondary schools, FE and HE.	Degree in Mental Health Nursing (Level 6)	Must be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)
Play & Creative Art Therapist	Uses play to help children express emotions, develop coping skills, and process experiences in a safe, therapeutic environment. Mostly found in primary settings.	PGDip or MA in Play Therapy (Level 7).	Must be registered with BAPT, PTUK or other PSA-accredited body.

Roles, Routes & Resources

Taxonomy

Role	Description	Qualifications	Professional Body
Safeguarding Officer	Ensures the safety and wellbeing of students, addressing any potential signs of abuse or neglect. Common across all educational levels.	Level 3/4 training in safeguarding or equivalent experience.	Not typically registered; must have safeguarding certifications and checks.
SENDCo (Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator)	Coordinates support for students with special educational needs, creating tailored plans to help them succeed. Found in primary and secondary schools.	QTS is required, with additional completion of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (a PGCert, Level 7)	Not typically tied to a professional body; SENDCos should be fully qualified teachers registered with the DfE and compliant with safeguarding regulations
Social Worker	Supports students and families dealing with challenging situations, connecting them with community resources. Seen across all educational levels.	Degree in Social Work (Level 6)	Must be registered with Social Work England
Support Mentor	Offers practical and emotional support to secondary, FE, and HE students, helping them manage academic and personal challenges.	Often Level 3/4 or relevant experience in mentoring or coaching	Not typically registered; look for safeguarding checks and relevant training
Wellbeing Officer	Oversees mental health initiatives and provides individual support to support student wellbeing. Found in all educational levels, particularly secondary, FE, and HE.	Level 4/5 qualification in mental health, education, or social care	Not typically registered; ensure they have relevant training and safeguarding checks.
Youth Worker	Supports young people in social and personal development, promoting positive life choices. Common in FE and HE settings.	Degree in Youth Work (Level 6) or Level 3/4 qualification with significant experience	Must be registered with the National Youth Agency (NYA) if qualified

Roles, Routes & Resources

Building Connection

There's a diverse range of mental health and wellbeing support roles found in the UK, especially in educational establishments. From foundational support roles to specialised therapeutic practitioners, each offers unique skills to address the varied needs of children and young people.

The taxonomy we've provided in this guide likely isn't exhaustive despite the breadth of research conducted, but it does highlight the spectrum of support available.

Many practitioners in foundational roles, such as Youth Workers or Learning Support staff, often bring additional training that means they can offer more specialised interventions when needed.

A Youth Worker might have advanced training in mental health first aid, trauma-informed practices, or conflict resolution. Similarly, Learning Support staff may bring expertise in areas like emotional regulation or behavioral interventions, allowing them to respond effectively to different needs.

This blend of skills within a team also allows for a more cohesive approach to

mental health in education. Rather than viewing each role in isolation, educational establishments can see how various expertise levels interconnect so that that young people benefit from a holistic network of support that adapts to their needs over time.

Mental health support is inherently relational, meaning that the impact of any intervention relies heavily on the quality of the relationship between the practitioner and the young person. It's not just about the qualifications or expertise that a counsellor, youth worker, or support mentor brings; it's about their ability to create an environment of trust, where young people feel seen, heard, and valued.

Building this sense of connection allows young people to open up about their experiences, feel safe in expressing their vulnerabilities, and engage fully with the support being offered.

Effective wellbeing support goes beyond providing a specific service or intervention – it's about nurturing relationships that help to build resilience, empathy, healthy communication.

When practitioners approach their work with compassion and understanding, the young people they're working with learn to better understand and manage their emotions, develop healthy coping strategies, and build confidence in asking for help when they need it.

We hope to see more schools and policymakers working together to create supportive environments that allow relational work to flourish, and would love to see a culture within education where mental and emotional wellbeing are the priority; where young people know they can turn to a network of caring adults for support.



If you'd like to discuss the information contained in this guide, or anything else on the topic of supporting children and young people's wellbeing, please contact:



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COUNSELLING &
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SOCIETY

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