

# Neurodiversity and Mental Health.

A PINS presentation by WTT

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# Aims of this presentation

- ▶ To support the promoting of positive wellbeing for all students and staff, including those who are neurodivergent.
- ▶ Supporting schools' ability to recognise and respond appropriately to the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of all children particularly those who are neurodivergent.
- ▶ To support schools in identifying and considering other factors (including co-occurring conditions) that may adversely impact on the emotional wellbeing and mental health of neurodivergent children.
- ▶ To support schools in their understanding and supporting staff with the emotional impact of responding to behaviours that challenge.



# Why mental health education in school is important.



In an article written by Nancy Barile, M.A.Ed. on the importance of mental health awareness in schools, she relates how she noticed some drastic changes in one of her pupils over a short period of time.

The pupil no longer did her homework, and she would come to school in the same clothes, although she'd previously been meticulous about her appearance. She was withdrawn and distant when Barile tried to speak to her.

Barile had some training in mental health issues and recognised that the pupil was in trouble. Professionals on staff were able to speak to the pupil and found that she was sad, upset, anxious and in need of immediate interventions.



# What is mental health 1

Recent data from NHS Digital (2023) indicates a growing demand for mental health services. According to Young Minds (2023), one in six children now has a probable mental health condition, with girls being particularly vulnerable to low well-being. While this rise is concerning, it's also possible that heightened awareness of mental health has led to better identification and diagnosis.

Research highlights multiple risk factors that contribute to mental health challenges. These include income inequality, relationship breakdowns, parental conflict, health issues, school pressures, bullying (including cyberbullying), and body image concerns. Danby and Hamilton (2016) added further risks, such as low self-esteem, abuse, neglect, peer pressure, grief, and socioeconomic disadvantages.



# What is mental health 2

- ▶ An increasing number of children and young people are experiencing self-harm, phobias, depression, anxiety, substance misuse, attachment disorders, conduct disorders, and eating disorders (*Department for Education, 2014*). Evidence also suggests that children with special educational needs are more susceptible to mental health issues (Lindsay & Dockrill, 2012), especially those facing multiple risk factors.

Students with mental health challenges are more likely to miss school and struggle academically. *Ofsted's 2023* report emphasises the rise in emotionally based school avoidance and the growing use of part-time schedules for anxious students. While schools can play a crucial role



# What is mental health

## Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

supported by

**J O M A L O N E**

L O N D O N



# Anna Freud Teacher Toolkit

The Anna Freud Centre have developed a Teacher Toolkit for school staff to use alongside the animation which includes:

A lesson plan

An Assembly PowerPoint

An accompanying Assembly Plan

Tips for talking for parents and carers booklet

Various resources and classroom exercises

[www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/talking-mental-health-animation-and-teacher-toolkit/](http://www.annafreud.org/resources/schools-and-colleges/talking-mental-health-animation-and-teacher-toolkit/)



# Understanding mental health 1

- ▶ According to NHS Digital (2023), mental health needs are on the rise, with *Young Minds* reporting that one in six children now has a probable mental health condition. Girls, in particular, face a higher risk of experiencing low well-being. Although this trend is concerning, it may also reflect better identification and diagnosis due to increased awareness around mental health.

Research shows that a variety of risk factors contribute to the development of mental health issues. These include income inequality, relationship breakdowns, parental conflict, poor parental health, school pressures, bullying (both in-person and online), and body image concerns. Danby and Hamilton (2016) also highlighted factors such as low self-esteem, abuse, neglect, socioeconomic disadvantages, peer pressure, and grief.



# Understanding mental health 2

Mental health challenges often affect school attendance and academic performance. Ofsted (2023) noted an increase in emotionally based school avoidance and the growing use of part-time timetables for students with anxiety. While schools play a key role in promoting well-being through universal and targeted interventions, they cannot address all mental health needs alone. Some students require specialist support, especially in complex cases or where there is a risk of harm.

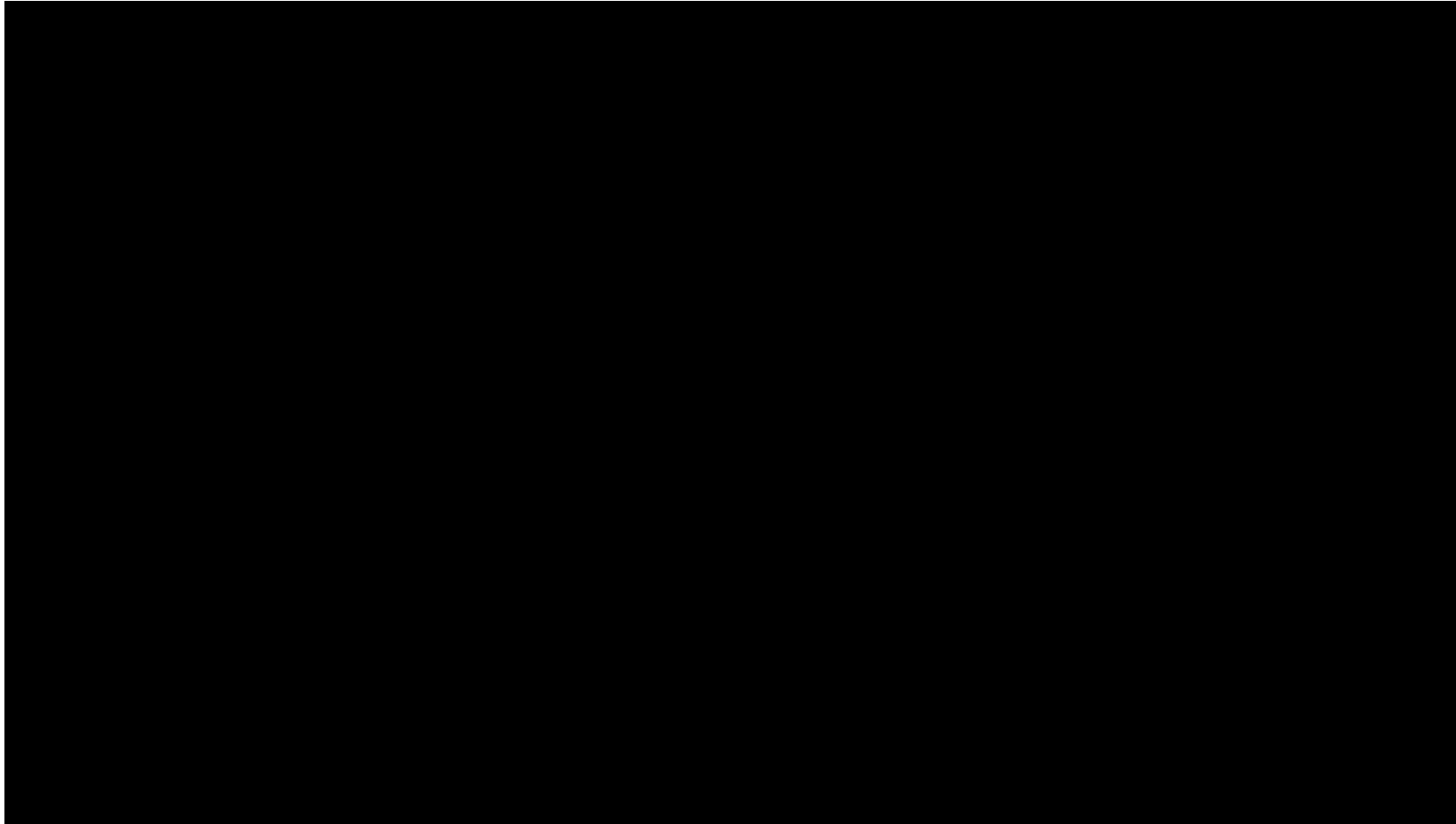


# Understanding mental health 3

Ofsted also raised concerns about the negative impact of limited access to specialist mental health services on children, young people, were seven times more likely to be absent from school.



# Understanding mental health - stigma



# The Impact of COVID-19 on Young People's Mental Health 1

- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and often adverse effect on the mental health and well-being of children and young people. Research from *Young Minds* (2021) found that the pandemic caused deep anxiety for many young people, with some resorting to self-harm, experiencing panic attacks, and losing motivation and hope for the future.
- ▶ The pandemic created numerous pressures, particularly for those who experienced bereavement or other forms of trauma.



# The Impact of COVID-19 on Young People's Mental Health 2

- ▶ Since the pandemic, there has been a marked increase in mental health concerns among children and adolescents. Research by *Newlove Delgado* (2023) revealed that:
  - The prevalence of a probable mental health disorder in children aged 8 to 16 increased from 12.5% in 2017 to 17.1% by 2020.
  - Children in this age group with a probable mental health disorder were seven times more likely to be absent from school.
  - Those with mental health challenges were more than twice as likely to experience poverty.



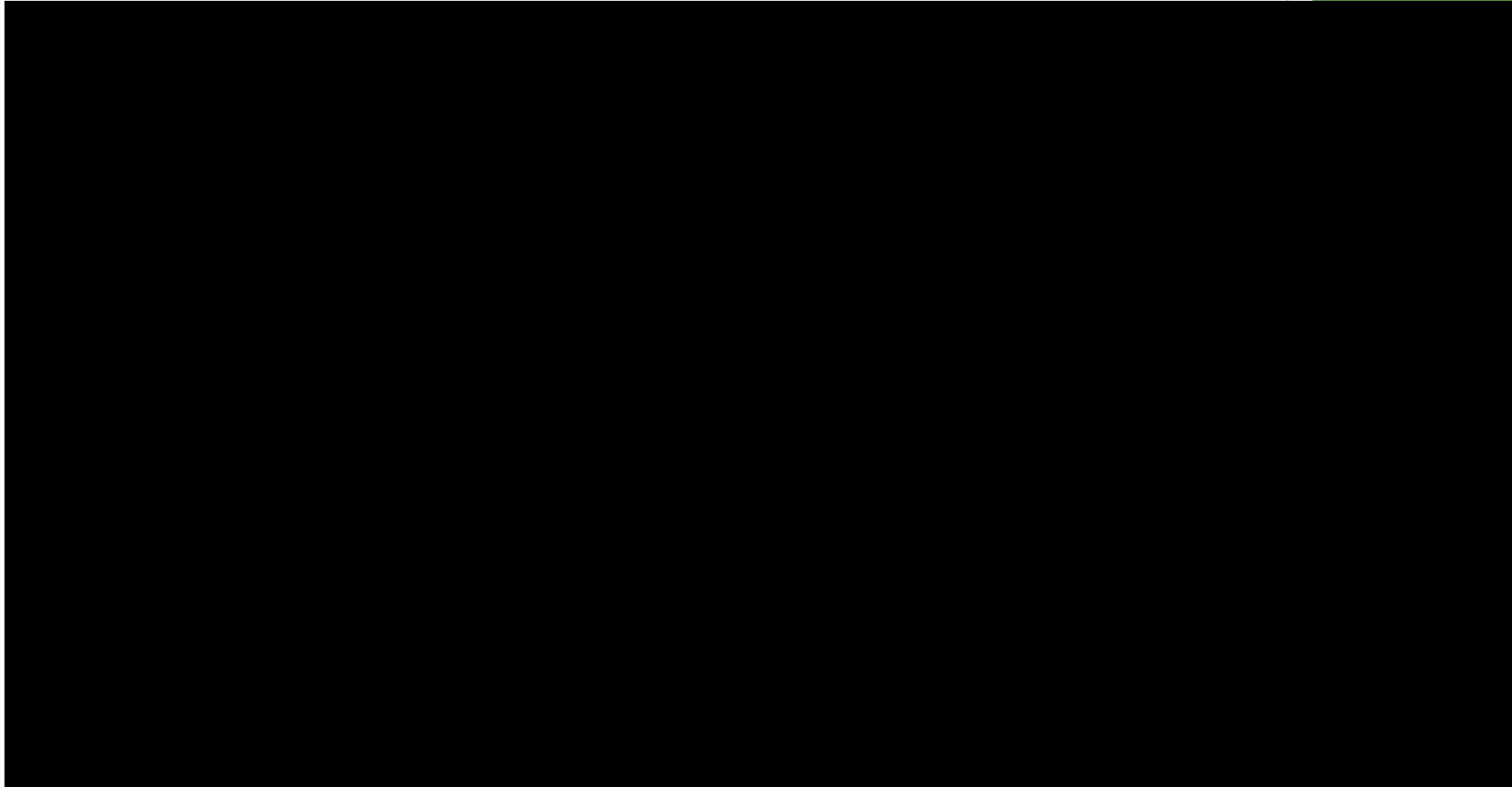
# The Impact of COVID-19 on Young People's Mental Health 3

These findings highlight the long-term mental health effects of the pandemic, with vulnerable groups facing heightened risks of anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions.

The data emphasises the importance of targeted interventions to support children and young people, especially those disproportionately affected by socioeconomic factors.



# ACES



# ACES - can we include COVID - 19?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events in a child's life that can have long-lasting effects on their physical, emotional, and mental health. As educators, understanding ACEs is critical because these experiences can significantly influence how children behave, learn, and engage in school. This guide provides insights into ACEs, their impact on children, and strategies teachers can use to create supportive classroom environments.

## What Are ACEs?

ACEs encompass a range of stressful or traumatic events that occur during childhood, typically before the age of 18. These experiences can be categorized into three broad groups:

Abuse: Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

Neglect: Emotional or physical neglect.

Household Challenges: Growing up in a household with substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, parental separation, or incarceration of a family member.



# ACES - can we include COVID - 19?

## ► Supporting our Teachers

Addressing the needs of students with ACEs can be emotionally taxing for teachers, so it's equally important that educators receive support. Schools should provide:

- **Professional Development:** Training on trauma-informed practices and regular workshops on how to respond to behavioural issues linked to ACEs.
- **Support Systems:** Access to counsellors, social workers, and trauma specialists who can collaborate with teachers to create individualized plans for students.
- **Self-Care for Teachers:** Educators should be encouraged to practice self-care and seek support when needed. Dealing with trauma in the classroom can lead to secondary traumatic stress, so it's important for teachers to maintain their own mental and emotional well-being.



# ACES - can we include COVID - 19?

ACEs have a significant impact on many children's ability to thrive in school. By understanding ACEs and adopting trauma-informed practices, teachers can play a crucial role in creating a safe, nurturing environment that supports all students, particularly those who have experienced adversity.

The goal is not only academic success but also fostering resilience and emotional health that can carry children into adulthood.



# The New Pandemic

6 mins

TED X - Lily Green discusses the severe decline in the mental health of teenagers, imploring parents and educators to take tangible steps towards improving the mental state of the youth.

[The New Pandemic: The Teenage Mental Health Crisis | Lily Green | TEDxYouth@LincolnStreet](#)



# School Mental Health in 10 stats

1 in 6 pupils have a mental disorder (diagnosis).

50% MH of problems start before 14

25% of girls are unhappy

76% say it'd be good to discuss their sadness / anxiety

40% of 16-year-old girls say they are unhappy

34% have access to a MH specialist in school

61% of parents say poor MH affects their child's performance

1 in 5 experience bullying behaviour.

70% of children with ASD have a MH condition.

60% have difficulty coping with stress in a healthy way.



Source -Mental health support in schools and colleges - DfE assured programmes - Minds Ahead