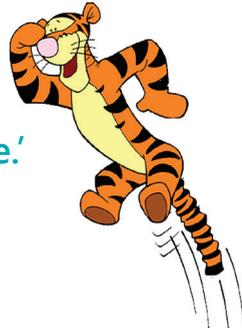


MHARS

A framework for mental health
and resilience in schools

'Life is not about how fast you run or how high you climb but how well you bounce.'

Vivian Komori



A framework for mental health and resilience in schools

This document is based on the Islington MHARS which was developed with the Islington Community of Schools. Thanks to Islington Council for giving us permission to use this guidance in Halton.

Why does mental health and resilience matter in schools?

A child's mental health will affect them for the rest of their life; it influences their overall health, happiness and productivity into adulthood. Promoting and protecting mental health in school pupils is therefore one of the most important things we can do for them.

Half of all lifetime mental health problems develop by the age of 14, affecting approximately three children in every classroom. Untreated problems in early life lead to adult mental illness.

As well as lifetime wellbeing there are immediate benefits to positive emotional health. Children are happier, make friends and sustain relationships, are aware of and understand others, face problems and setbacks and learn from them, enjoy their play and leisure time and, most importantly for schools, they LEARN BETTER.

The factors that influence whether or not a child develops an emotional or behavioural problem are complex but broadly fall into two categories: risk and resilience. We cannot always protect children from risks (for example parental substance misuse, bereavement or refugee status), but we know that individuals respond differently to difficult life events, failure and mistakes. Building resilience is about supporting and enabling children to cope better with what life throws at them. Risks don't in themselves cause illness, but they are cumulative, whereas resilience is developmental.

What is resilience and how does it contribute to mental health and school achievement?

The factors that help children to develop resilience are: supportive families, positive expectations, a sense of self-worth and belonging, participation, positive friendships and relationships with adults, problem-solving and communication skills. These are already important in schools because they are all factors that also support effective

learning. They are experiences that can be supported or attributes that can be taught, demonstrated and developed in young minds.

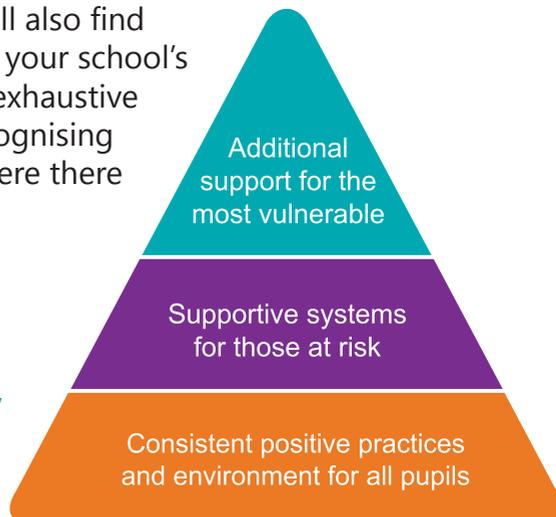
Children can get better at managing problems and coping well despite difficult circumstances, and the protective effect of such skills and experiences can be immense. Individuals who can bounce back from adversity, are strengthened by life's challenges. This is the quality that we call resilience. **Resilience protects against mental health problems and enables effective life-long learning.**

What is the MHARS framework? How should my school use it?

The MHARS framework sets out the components of school practice and ethos that effectively develop resilience, promote positive mental health and support children at risk of, or experiencing, mental health problems. The seven components have been distilled from a wide body of evidence and, alongside the supporting practices, have been developed and tested in Islington schools. You can read more about the evidence on page 22.

On each page of this booklet you will find a component alongside its supporting practices. You will also find ideas about how you can audit your school's work; the suggestions are not exhaustive but will enable you to start recognising effective practice and areas where there are gaps.

While reflecting on how the framework is embodied in your school you will need to consider how it meets pupils' differing needs through a 'stepped approach'.



A whole school, inclusive approach

The framework will be most effective when it is embedded in school culture and applied consistently across the whole school community.

Children and adults learn new ways of interacting, thinking and behaving when they observe and experience these consistently - from the classroom to the playground, at staff meetings, events and after-school clubs.

Everyone will benefit from this approach, and resilience breeds resilience: a resilient community enhances the resilience of its individuals and vice versa.

'Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities but from the everyday magic of ordinary human resources in the minds, brains and bodies of ordinary children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.'

Ann Masten, University of Minnesota



A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



Support and training for all staff to build skills, capacity and own resilience

Schools can achieve this through:

- Effective staff professional development
- Involving all staff in decision making
- Facilitating trusting staff relationships
- Training and supporting staff to understand pupils' emotional and mental health needs
- Consistent, positive and effective management
- Support for staff wellbeing

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Running** a staff focus group to gather perspectives on staff support, wellbeing and training. Ensure the focus group includes a broad range of staff (e.g. administrative staff, support staff, teachers and the caretaker)
- **Conducting** a staff survey to explore levels of morale and staff wellbeing
- **Analysing** staff attendance on a monthly basis
- **Looking** at which members of staff have accessed training
- **Interviewing** individual members of staff to find out how the school could better promote positive mental health and wellbeing



A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



Support networks that enable pupils to develop social relationships

Schools can achieve this through:

- Teaching social skills, listening and empathy
- Well organised peer support programmes
- Planned opportunities to socialise with different pupils and different people
- Teaching pupils to be able to ask for help
- Encouraging kindness

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Asking** pupils to draw and write who they would go to for help
- **Running** a focus group with pupils involved in peer support schemes, such as playground friends or peer mentoring
- **Asking** pupils to confidentially list three of their trusted peers, and analysing this to identify isolated pupils
- **Analysing** bullying data
- **Observing** lessons to identify how teaching encourages social skills



A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



Teaching and learning that develops resilient learners

Schools can achieve this through:

- Encouraging perseverance, risk taking and learning through mistakes
- Providing formative and meaningful feedback
- A variety of interactive teaching methods that engage all pupils
- Opportunities for collaboration and team work
- Providing all pupils with appropriate levels of challenge
- Teaching creative and systematic problem solving strategies

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Speaking** to a variety of staff to explore how their teaching supports pupils to make mistakes and be resilient
- **Asking** pupils to draw and describe the process they went through to learn a new skill
- **Looking** at marking and feedback in books
- **Observing** lessons to see how pupils respond when they find a task difficult
- **Analysing** the variety of questions teachers use in different lessons

A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has:





A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



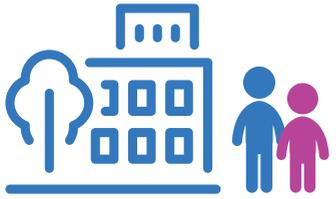
A clear vision, and values that are understood and consistently communicated

Schools can achieve this through:

- A culture of mutual respect, recognition and affirmation
- Staff behaviours that reflect these values
- Whole school policies and their consistent implementation
- Ensuring everyone feels safe within the school
- Encouraging feedback regarding decisions and practices
- Creating opportunities for fun and laughter

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Conducting** a learning walk to observe staff-staff, staff-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions
- **Observing** behaviour management strategies in the playground, dining hall and during lessons
- **Conducting** a survey to see how safe pupils feel in the school
- **Running** a focus group with pupils to explore their understanding of the school's values
- **Comparing** senior leaders' and staff members' perception of the school's vision and values and how these are followed



A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



A curriculum that teaches life skills, including social and emotional skills

Schools can achieve this through:

- A planned comprehensive PSHE education curriculum
- Opportunities for pupils to contribute to the school and the local community
- Developing pupils' critical thinking skills
- Encouraging reflection and self-awareness
- Involving pupils in school decision making processes
- Nurturing self-belief and positive qualities such as optimism and forgiveness

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Analysing** pupil progress in PSHE
- **Comparing** school councillors' and other pupils' perceptions of their involvement in school decision making
- **Interviewing** pupils about how the school prepares them for adult life
- **Asking** pupils to list the personal qualities that are valued by the school
- **Observing** lessons to see how they encourage critical thinking skills



A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



Specific help for vulnerable pupils

Schools can achieve this through:

- Early identification of pupils with emotional and mental health needs
- Staff, pupils and parents understanding mental health risk factors, referral and support systems
- Careful joint planning to meet specific pupils' needs
- Effective recording and monitoring of pupil progress
- Established school systems, practices and interventions
- Partnership working with a range of specialist agencies to support whole school practice and pupils with complex concerns

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Interviewing** external agencies to understand how the school works in partnership
- **Running** a focus group with pupils that attend a support group
- **Reviewing** exclusion, attendance, free school meal, equalities, special educational needs and pupil premium data
- **Talking** to individual staff to ascertain their understanding of particular vulnerable pupils' needs
- **Critiquing** the 'journey' of a particular pupil through the school's pastoral care system



A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



Effective partnerships with parents

Schools can achieve this through:

- Joint planning and decision making with each child's parent
- A range of activities that promote understanding and inclusive involvement
- Regular, meaningful communication
- Activities that support parents to feel welcome and part of the school community
- Providing appropriate support to parents who need additional help
- Working in partnership with parents and carers to promote pupils' social and emotional wellbeing

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Hosting** an event with parents to raise awareness of mental health, and use this as an opportunity to gather parent perspectives on partnerships with the school
- **Conducting** a parent survey
- **Using** a graffiti wall with a variety of staff (administrative staff, support staff, teachers) to understand their involvement with parents
- **Analysing** attendance at school events
- **Interviewing** individual parents about how the school has supported them and their child

Further reading

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2010), *No health without public mental health: the case for action*. Parliamentary briefing.

NHS Health Scotland, (2011), *Mentally healthy infants, children and young people: Principles for effective interventions*.

Williams, L; Hart, A, Young Minds, *Academic Resilience* [Online].

Islington Health and Wellbeing Team (2014), *Mental Health and Resilience in Schools Evidence Base*, Islington School Improvement Service, Unpublished.

Pilling, S; Marcus, E (2015), *A systematic review of reviews (from 2009-2014) of school-based interventions for the prevention of mental health problems and promotion of well-being*, Unpublished.

Mindset: *The New Psychology of Success*, Random House: New York. Dweck, C. 2006.

NICE (2008), *Social and emotional wellbeing in primary education*, London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

NICE (2009), *Social and emotional wellbeing in secondary education*, London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) (Scotland), corp creator. (2011) *Count us in: mind over matter, promoting and supporting mental and emotional wellbeing*.

Department for Education and Employment (2001), *Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings* [Online].

Hart, A Green, S (2014), *Fostering academic resilience: A short introduction to pros and cons of specific approaches for schools*, Centre for Health Research, University of Brighton and BoingBoing social enterprise.

Fazel, M; Hoagwood, K; Stephan, S; Ford, T (2014), *Mental health interventions in schools in high-income countries*, *Lancet Psychiatry* 2014; 1: 377–87.

Next steps

To begin you will need to audit your current practice within your school against the MHARS framework.

If you require support with this process Halton Health Improvement team can provide guidance. Alternatively you may be happy to begin this process without assistance and in that case you can access the relevant documents via www.haltonhealthimprovement.co.uk.

Once you have completed your audit you are able to focus on areas that require development.

Please remember Halton's Health Improvement team provide a healthy schools offer to support the mental health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and parents and carers.

For help and guidance please contact Kate Bazley katie.bazley@halton.gov.uk

