

Many teachers are not adequately trained to respond to mental health problems in children

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Schools and teachers who have not received adequate training are

buckling under the strain of providing mental health support for children. A group of education and health experts, writing in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, says investment in schools and teachers is urgently required to support them to promote good mental health and respond to problems.

Rates of mental illness among children have increased by 50% in just three years with only a quarter of children with a mental disorder receiving support from [mental health](#) professionals. Data from the Office of National Statistics shows that teachers are the most common source of support for such children. Like overstretched professionals on the frontline of healthcare, disproportionate numbers of teachers also experience poor mental health themselves.

Teachers, together with general physicians (GPs) and social workers, constitute "tier 1" of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and are considered able to offer general advice and treatment for less severe problems, as well as referring to more specialist services. In practice, say the authors, teachers end up providing crucial support for children across the spectrum of need, because it is difficult to access specialist services.

The study's lead author and former teacher Chloe Lowry, of the Institute of Education at University College London, said, "It is both astonishing and alarming that teachers are not adequately trained for these roles. Given the essential role schools and teachers play in supporting children's long-term health and well-being, and responding when problems arise, funding support from the health sector to equip this forgotten [health workforce](#) could be transformational."

The government currently funds mental health awareness [training](#) for only one teacher per school. The authors point to government research that found just 40% of classroom teachers in England report feeling

equipped to teach children in their class who have mental health needs, and only 32% know how to help pupils access specialist mental health support outside school.

Another of the authors, Dame Alison Peacock, CEO of the Chartered College of Teaching, said, "Despite this background of unprecedented need, inadequate training, and a workforce eager to learn, training in promoting children's healthy development was omitted in the final stages of the recent teacher training reforms in England, in favor of a narrow focus on improving academic attainment."

Regardless of socioeconomic status, children with better social and [emotional development](#) achieve higher GCSE results, while those with mental health difficulties are more likely to perform poorly. Research has shown that the influence of individual teachers on pupils' mental health is as significant as their influence on academic test scores.

The authors go on to offer recommendations including integrating comprehensive training in child development, health and well-being into teacher training courses, as well as being provided free of charge to all current [teachers](#). They also recommend investment in schools to become hubs for children's services, from social workers to social prescribing link workers.

Dame Alison added, "We offer these recommendations to create a healthier education system, turning vicious cycles of poor pupil and teacher well-being into virtuous circles that enhance children's long-term physical health, mental health, educational and economic outcomes."

More information: Teachers: The forgotten health workforce, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/01410768221085692](https://doi.org/10.1177/01410768221085692)

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