



Department
for Education

Peer support for children and young people's mental health

A call for evidence

Launch date 17 February 2016

Respond by 24 March 2016

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Introduction

Young people have told us they would like to see more peer support as a way of supporting mental wellbeing, and they need more opportunities and help in how to provide it effectively. We have therefore launched this call for evidence to find out more about what works in peer support for children and young people's mental wellbeing, the approaches that are currently available and how things might be improved.

More than half of all adults with mental health problems have problems that were diagnosed in childhood. The last national survey into the prevalence of mental health disorders in children and adolescents (ONS 2004) found that at any one time about 10% of children and young people aged between 5-16 years have a diagnosable mental health disorder: around 3 in every class.

That is why good mental health, character and resilience are a priority for Government. We have high aspirations for all children and young people and we want them to be able to fulfil their potential both academically and in terms of their mental wellbeing. This attainment is best supported if they have good mental health, character and resilience. Schools, colleges and children's services have an important role to play in supporting the resilience and mental health of children and young people, through the development of approaches that suit the particular needs of their pupils.

The Department for Education has produced or funded a range of information, guidance and activity to help schools and children's services support children and young people's mental health. These can be found at: www.gov.uk

Who this is for

- Families
- Schools and college staff
- Adults who work with children and young people
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Mental health professionals
- Any other interested organisations and individuals.

A separate document is available for children and young people to give their views.

Issue date

This call for evidence was issued on Wednesday 17 February 2016.

About this call for evidence

We are focusing on two key aspects of peer support:

- What is working now - we would like to understand more about existing peer support approaches for children and young people's mental wellbeing; and
- What important evidence and lessons should we apply so peer support can be developed in the future.

Mental health is a key priority for the Department for Education and we value your views and opinions.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of this document you can contact the team on:

- 02476 660260 and ask for Sarah Carter; or
- 0207 783 8011 and ask for Sameea Ahmed (Monday - Wednesday); or
- 0207 340 7739 and ask for George Christian (Wednesday-Friday)

or email: PeerSupport.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations. If for exceptional reasons you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may send us your views by email to PeerSupport.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk or by post to:

Sameea Ahmed / George Christian
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings, 2nd Floor,
Great Smith Street
London. SW1P 3BT

Deadline and response

This call for evidence closes at **5pm** on **Thursday 24 March 2016**. The results of the call for evidence and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in spring 2016.

Peer support for mental wellbeing

What we mean by peer support

Peer support can encompass a variety of models and levels of formality from helping a friend discuss emerging issues, through buddying and befriending schemes, to formal 1:1 and group support sessions within supportive environments. It is equally about promoting good mental wellbeing for all and supporting those with problems.

We define 'peers' to mean friends or contemporaries, including an older young person, or near-peer.

Peer support is not a replacement for specialist support from a mental health professional but it should help to signpost those who need it to the appropriate services and might help to complement it going forwards.

Proposal and rationale

We want to create an environment - in schools, colleges, community groups and online – which promotes good mental wellbeing, and where young people have the skills, confidence and knowledge to give and ask for help from one another.

We want this to happen within a 'safe' structured system, which, if young people want it, recognises and accredits the support they are providing. We also want to make sure, that if young people are accessing online support, they know what to look for.

Many schools already provide peer support schemes on a wide range of topics including friendships, transition and bullying. Some already run peer support programmes for mental health. Many other organisations outside of school settings, including online approaches, have also developed schemes for peer support.

We have launched this call for evidence to find out more about your knowledge and experience of peer support for children and young people's mental health. We want to understand what best practice looks like, how it might include training and accreditation and how and where peer support fits within wider mental health support and treatment offers. We value your views and opinions, which are vital for the development of this programme.

We know that young people understand better than anyone the pressures their peers face. We want to crucially hear from children and young people and will be seeking their views through a separate young people's call for evidence, as well as other engagement activities.

The Survey

In this survey we are asking you about your experiences of peer support programmes. This might be experience in running them, commissioning them or taking part in them. We will report on what you have told us about your experiences.

We have established an Advisory Group comprised of a range of practitioners, academics and experts with the aim of identifying ways to increase and improve the quality of peer support for mental wellbeing made available to children and young people by schools. They will work with us to consider the results of this call for evidence and other activities and make recommendations about the key features of good peer support programmes and what we can do to encourage more excellent practice.

This survey should take you no more than 20-30 minutes to complete.

Questions

Peer support – your views and experiences

These questions are about your experiences of peer support across all types of issues (e.g. transition, bullying, friendship, mental wellbeing) and across all settings - schools; colleges, and community settings (we will cover online support in a later question).

The questions ask what best practice looks like for good peer support programmes in your experience. If possible, please describe how they operate and your views on what their impact has been. Where you have any formally collected evidence (e.g. data, evaluations, research) to support your views we would like to hear about that as well.

1. What are your experiences of what best practice in peer support across all types of issues looks like?
2. How can this best practice be translated into supporting children and young people's mental wellbeing?
3. How could good peer support approaches in community settings be used to support programmes within schools and colleges?
4. What are your experiences of peer support for mental wellbeing or mental illness (e.g. loneliness, depression, eating disorders etc.)?
5. What in your experience do schools, colleges and community settings need to set up and facilitate peer support (e.g. advice on which models to use, training for young people, an external facilitator etc.)?

Support, training and accreditation

These questions are about your experiences and views of what support and training that peer supporters need to have to be knowledgeable, confident and effective.

We also want to know if you have any experience of the types of recognition or accreditation that might encourage and reward both the peer supporters and their organisations, and inspire them to take part.

6. What support or training for peer supporters is needed to make the support effective?
7. What recognition is effective in encouraging young people to take part in peer support activity (group or 1:1) and helping them to capitalise on it in the future?
8. What is effective in encouraging schools, colleges and community settings to offer peer support?
9. What information or support do children and young people need before they start receiving peer support, or while they are having peer support?

Online peer support

These questions are about the increasing number of peer support online and mobile apps that children and young people are accessing for help.

10. What do you think the important features are of effective online support models for mental wellbeing?
11. How do you think online support could be used effectively by schools, colleges and community settings?
12. What information and/or reassurance would you need to feel confident recommending particular online peer support apps to young people?

Peer support and linking with specialist services

Peer support is not a replacement for support from adults or specialist support from mental health professionals, but it should be able to signpost those who need it to the appropriate services.

These questions are about how peer support models can fit with, or link to, wider mental health support systems.

13. What are your experiences, including any evidence that you can share, about how peer support fits within the wider continuum of mental health support?

14. How can good peer support models ensure appropriate referrals and a swift response to professional help when needed to prevent escalation and crisis of a mental health issue? Please give examples if possible.

Risks

We want to know more about what you think the possible risks might be in providing peer support for young people's mental health, both for those offering and those receiving the support.

15. What are your experiences, including any evidence that you can share, about the risks of providing peer support, either through face-to-face or online support?

About you

16. Are you responding as or on behalf of :

- A parent/carer
- A school/college
- A community setting
- A voluntary organisation
- A mental health professional
- A provider of online support
- Other (please state)

Thank you very much for completing the survey. The results will be used to help us better understand what good peer support looks like.

Please let us know any further comments or thoughts that you would like to share with us by emailing us at: PeerSupport.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk



Department
for Education

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