Well-Being Support for Guides and Rangers



HELP PACK FOR LEADERS

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What is well-being and mental health?

Well-being:

Well-being is an overarching term for the signals of the quality of life a person has. It highlights how well a person's life is going, their opinion of their life and the quality. Well-being is when a person experiences more favourable emotions and is satisfied and fulfilled with their life and lacks more negative feelings.

Mental health:

A person's mental health is the health of their mind. Mental health often influences our emotions and emotional responses, as well as how we perceive situations. Mental health is about the resilience we have towards certain situations and our ability to cope with negative emotions.

Mental ill-health:

When a person is not in a good mental space or has mental ill health, they often struggle with their emotions, controlling them, responding to them and fully understanding them. It often creates negative feelings, can change their everyday lives and cause them distress.

What is well-being and mental health?

Connection between well-being and mental health:

Well-being is a measure of our quality of life, and it is closely linked to mental health, as the positive actions we take to improve our well-being can have a positive impact on our mental health. To improve our well-being, there are said to be five areas in which we can boost it: connect, take notice, be active, keep learning, and give.

Well-being, for children and young people, can be advanced with communities, schools, services and parents and carers promoting interaction to help and continue the advancement of well-being. Good mental health and well-being habits can be promoted by adults acting as role models. Not only does this benefit the child or young person in the situation, but the adult also.

Connect. Take Notice. Be Active. Keep Learning. Giving.

Connecting can be with the people around you, family, friends, and the wider world creating and supporting relationships.

Take notice of the smaller things in life which you find beautiful and of interest to you and find pleasure in such things.

Being active and physical, something as simple as a walk a day, or attending exercise classes, just keeping your body active, in turn keeps your mind active.

Keep learning and developing skills, helping to build confidence and it should be fun.

Giving and helping people could be small, such as smiling at someone or large, such as volunteering with a charity, but these things can bring joy to others and yourself and make you feel a little better.

These acts of well-being can really help with mental health and improving it in the long term, particularly if these acts become habit.

What can affect young people's mental health?

Risk factors are aspects of or experiences in life which could have a negative impact on a person's mental health. Aspects of life that could impact mental health include people's diet, their living situation, their education, who they associate with, and family relationships. Experiences in life could include bereavement, traumatic events, bullying, and parental divorce/separation. People's mental health depends on their ability to cope and be resilient to these risk factors. For children, this can be harder, particularly so if things are out of their control or happen if several things happen at once; this can become a mental health issue for anyone, not limited to children.

The inability to regulate behaviour can be linked to mental health problems and other issues in life. This may be because impulse control, making better decisions about behaviour, expressing and sharing emotions, and socially acceptable behaviour are all developed from self-regulation. Problems with mental health may be signposted by a long period of difficulty with self-regulation; for example, not listening well to a story, a lack of interest in activities and games, and looking sad

and worried often are possible indicators of problems with mental health stemming from selfregulation issues.

What can affect young people's mental health? Puberty:

Puberty is a transitional period in life when a child becomes an adolescent and generally starts at around the age of 11 for girls. The emotional and physical changes which happen to the body can be a confusing time, but it can also be exciting. Other challenges can be presented at this time, such as moving from primary to secondary school. These developments, added together, can be a lot for a young person to cope with. A large change for girls is periods as part of the hormonal changes. Hormonal changes can cause mood swings/moodiness, and irritability; however, these can go away after puberty. The changes that occur throughout puberty can happen over a very short period of time, meaning they can have negative effects. Teenagers and adolescents generally need a lot of sleep as they are growing and developing more rapidly, thus using a lot of energy. Romantic and/or sexual feelings can also develop during puberty, and one may become interested in others in these ways. This can be very exciting, but may also cause anxiety and worry. All of these changes can become quite intense for a young person to deal with, and may feel lifechanging at the time. Therefore, they can have an impact on the well-being and mental health of the girl, so it is important to support them through it.

What can affect young people's mental health?

Protective factors are things that will help protect people by limiting the impact of the risk factors and enable children to develop resilience and cope with difficult situations and stresses.

Circumstances, values, attitudes, and characteristics are all examples of protective factors, that help to reduce the risk of mental health becoming poor. Protective factors act as a 'buffer' to mental health problems, they do not prevent them. Children are able to build up resilience to stresses and difficulties, resilience is a major protective factor against mental health problems and related conditions. Resilience allows children to bounce back from and cope with difficult situations as they grow up.

An example of a protective factor is being part of an organisation, for example, Girl Guides or Scouts. Research conducted by Edinburgh University in 2016 found that people involved were less likely to suffer from anxiety and mood disorders in later life as they develop self-reliance. They also present a range of opportunities to young people and children to socialise, have fun, take part in various activities and encourage them to develop new skills and learn about new topics.

Organisations and charities like these help to promote and protect the well-being and mental health of children and young people.

What can affect young people's mental health? Body image:

Body image is linked closely to self-esteem as it is the view a person has of themselves physically, and happiness and comfort with how a person feels they are physically can contribute to selfesteem. Distress and anxiety can be a result of remarks made by people close to a young person, even if the other people don't realise it. These can be remarks focusing on a person's appearance and body and are generally critical and/or teasing. Issues with body image can often stem from the media, as it often displays celebrities and models as being the 'ideal' in terms of their body and appearance, which is often unachievable for most. Girls can have feelings of dissatisfaction with their bodies and appearance, and this can lead to anxiety, eating disorders, and depression in the struggle to achieve the 'ideal' body. With the rise of social media, young people have constant access to images and videos of celebrities, models, and other media stars who have digitally altered or 'airbrushed' their photographs to look 'perfect', as well as artificial intelligence (AI) created content, thus increasing young people's comparisons of themselves to false ideals. This can lead to reduced self-esteem and poor body image, particularly for Guides and Rangersaged girls.

What can affect young people's mental health?

From Girlguiding's 'Girls' Attitudes Survey 2024':

'Girls tell us they're consumed by negative
thoughts about how they look and this
has a big impact on their self-confidence.
Girls feel under pressure to alter their
appearance both online and in real life.
And increasing numbers tell us they want to
lose weight and have been on a diet.'

6 in 10 girls and young women aged 11-21 are consumed by their own negative thoughts about how they look.

Girls and young women are facing unprecedented scrutiny over their appearance. 87% of 11-21-year-olds say they feel there's too much discussion about women's bodies in the media, an increase from 79% in 2018.

60% of 11-16-year-olds tell us they've received negative comments from other people about their appearance.

Most girls aged 11–21 know someone who experiences a mental health condition or mental distress.

Twice as many 17-21-year-olds say they have **no confidence** in their lives overall compared to those who say they're very confident.

It is important to know the signs of mental health conditions within children. Behaviours which may indicate that a child has, or is developing, a mental health condition could include but are not limited to, persistent anxiety, suicidal thoughts, difficulty or inability to cope with activities and tasks that occur daily, spending more time alone, behaviour and mood changes, persistent nightmares, weightless - unexpected/unexplained, attention and concentration struggles, unexplained feelings of fear, self-inflicted injuries or harm, excessive stomach or headaches and other physical issues, frequent outbreaks of anger or temper tantrums, and substance misuse. Although all of these can be symptoms of mental health problems, they may also be symptoms of other things, such as physical ailments, or even just normal behaviour patterns as a part of childhood. This may make it difficult for others to know what is wrong and accurately identify the cause. These are more likely to be symptoms of mental health problems if they persist, are frequent and/or are unusual for the child.

When a child or young person can find no other way of expressing their anxieties, fears, or needs caused by another problem in their life, they may demonstrate harmful and harming behaviours. Being depressed, stressed, or anxious because of something such as bereavement in life, or being bullied, may cause this to happen. Children and young people may find it hard to cope with life, and a range of emotions may arise. A behaviour which could arise is self-harming, which is the deliberate infliction of harm on oneself as a way of letting out their feelings and emotions. Another form of self-harm can be eating disorders. These can result in serious health issues and risks to life. It can be from stress and anxiety, and the need to feel in control of an aspect of their life. Some children and young people with serious mental health issues can have suicidal thoughts. These feelings often are a result of the child or young person feeling that there are no options or solutions for their problems.

Anxiety:

Starting/changing schools, moving areas, or other events may be a normal cause of stress in a child's or young person's life and can produce an expected amount of worry or anxiety. Some children do, however, experience anxiety at higher levels, which can result in their daily lives being interrupted and can cause difficulty functioning at school, home or with friends. Anxiety in children can have common signs, this can include: being angry a lot and having temper outbursts; being tense, irritable or unable to concentrate; having bad dreams/nightmares and trouble sleeping; complaints about physical ailments (tummy aches) frequently; constant worrying and expressions of negative thoughts; and significant changes to their eating habits, or not eating properly.

Depression:

Depression is the ongoing feeling of sadness that persists for a long time, not just the expected sadness and unhappiness as a normal reaction to events in life (bereavement, illness, or relationship breakdown). Depression can interfere with day-to-day life, and some people suffering may feel suicidal and unable to cope. It can be a common mental disorder which results in people feeling guilt or low self-esteem/worth, depressive moods, disturbed sleep or appetite, loss of interest or pleasure, and poor concentration. 1–3% of children and young people suffer from depression, one of the most common types of mental illness. Depression can have an impact on children and young people of any gender, age, race, background, or educational level. Often, girls are more affected than boys, with rates rising during adolescence, with 1 in 10 and almost a quarter of girls displaying signs of depression at 14 years old. Teenagers, particularly girls, appear to face more mental health issues now than in previous generations, as found by a study from Liverpool University.

What impact can well-being and mental health concerns have?

Well-being and mental health concerns can impact every area of a person's life. It can impact how they perform in education, how they cope with changes in their life, how they manage social situations, and their motivation. Some young people may find it difficult to find help and support. Therefore, it is important as Leaders that we offer support to all and encourage the girls to come to us for help, as well as form positive relationships with all the girls, so we can identify potential well-being or mental health concerns.

If a young person can get the support and help they need, they may get a formal diagnosis. A diagnosis of mental health conditions can help people to explain their experiences and understand their mental distress. It can help people to feel their experiences are legitimate and feel the relief that they know what is 'wrong'. It also enables children and young people to get the support, understanding and help that they need from their families and friends. It can help children and young people separate the condition from themselves and not feel responsible for the illness.

A Person-Centred Approach:

A person-centred approach to support is customised towards the child or young person's needs. It supports the child or young person with mental health conditions and allows them choice and express their wishes for the type of support they receive. Because the support is customised to the child or young person, the planning and developing of the support is focused on them and they are involved in how decisions are made and what decisions are made in a purposeful manner. Promoting the independence of the child or young person is essential in a person-centred approach and the adults involved encourage them to take more control and do things for themselves. From a person-centred approach, there is an increased understanding from all involved about the desired outcomes, the child or young person themselves and the support they need.. It can also help to improve the self-confidence and motivation of the child or young person because of the involvement they are given, thus changing their attitudes.

Developing coping mechanisms and resilience are, like recovery, processes that need time and commitment to be successful. Developing these is about the child or young person learning to feel more positive, how to problem-solve, stand up for themselves, their needs and views and finding ways that help them to keep calm.

Social networks and friendships can be formed as well as stress relief from partaking in group activities (such as Girlguiding) or team activities and sports, which can build children and young people's confidence, sense of achievement and generally be fun for them. From such activities, children and young people can build up resilience and a 'toolkit' to help them in situations in later life, additionally, relieving stress and lifting their mood.

There is the potential to recover from all forms of mental illness as rec overy is viewed as a very personal journey or process and forms a holistic impression of mental illness. Recovery is not about becoming the person you were prior to mental illness, but rather developing and achieving new goals, forming new valuable relationships and not focusing on the symptoms, illness or condition the person is experiencing. A significant factor in recovery is the support network the girl has. This can be their family, friends, professionals involved, Guide Leaders, teachers, and many more. The process or journey of recovery can look different for everyone and isn't always 'smooth sailing'. People can experience ups and downs as part of the process. It's important to hold an optimistic view of recovery, particularly during the downs, as each recovery is different and is not something to be compared with others and what their recovery appears to look like.

Recovery is a choice, even when the mental illness is not.

A barrier to many young people leading an active and healthy life is the use of digital media. Lots of young people spend their free time using devices and internet-enabled technology, which isn't necessarily bad; however, it reduces the time they may spend outdoors and getting involved with physical and/or group activities. Although the use of technology and digital media can have a negative influence on healthy lifestyles, it can be positive if used correctly and responsibly. Digital tools can allow children, young people and parents and families to better understand mental health and enable children and young people to have more control in terms of learning about their well-being and health. It can also help to create a network to allow people to learn from other people's experiences and learn how to cope with similar experiences. Helping girls to learn how to positively and safely use technology can help to develop their awareness and understanding of well-being and mental health as well as available support, should they need it. It is also important to help the girls understand other opportunities available to them. Guiding is positioned well for this, as girls are already attending and, hopefully, increasing their protective factors. Planning in events and activities to help boost well-being and mental health can help the girls too!

Children and young people's well-being and their confidence in interaction can be influenced by the environment in which they are. A place which is welcoming, warm-natured, is aesthetically pleasing and has an appealing atmosphere, can help children and young people to reduce the stigma which they may have felt about their mental health condition beforehand. Girlguiding Leaders can support this by greeting girls at the start of the meeting, ensuring a calm and happy atmosphere, having time to talk about the week and holding discussions about feelings as a group or with Leaders, having an 'open door policy' so girls know they can always talk to Leaders, and planning meetings and activities that are focused on promoting and boosting wellbeing and mental health. These sessions could be craft evenings, specific well-being and mental health evenings, walks in the local area (particularly in nature-rich areas), camps or sleepovers and

sessions and activities the girls would like to do! Keep the girls involved in the planning of the programme to help them have autonomy over the activities planned (where possible and practical).

Self-esteem and confidence are important to develop for well-being and mental health. Appropriate praise and support for achievements, lifestyle, activities, sexuality and friendships can help to build a child or young person's self-esteem. Teenagers and pre-teens can be more sensitive towards topics surrounding their appearance and teasing or criticism can be damaging to their self-esteem and confidence as it can be hurtful and make them feel more self-conscious. Self-esteem can be built from showing respect for a child or young person and their feelings and, even when it differs from your own or an adult's, trying to understand their opinion and view.