

# 25 | YOUNGMINDS

years | fighting for young people's mental health



**#FightingFor Report**





# Introduction

**YoungMinds was formed in 1993 by a group of children's mental health professionals who were passionate about improving mental health support for children and young people. In the 25 years since, we've seen many changes.**

Childhood has changed since many of us were children, and one of these big changes is the kinds of pressures children and young people now face. From the rise of social media to an increased focus on body image, young people today are living in a complex world that offers new and rapidly evolving challenges.

Another big, and positive, change is that young people's mental health is at last in the public and political spotlight. Having been overlooked for years, the mental health crisis is now widely recognised, and more young people feel able to talk about their mental health than ever before.

YoungMinds has played an important role with our partners in creating positive change in policy and practice, and in the public's understanding and awareness of these issues.

But despite the intensifying pressures on young people, and the progress and attention the issue is finally receiving, one thing hasn't changed: when young people do reach out for help, it is still much too hard to find. From an education system that prioritises exam results over wellbeing to long waiting times for specialist treatment, and funding that still represents only a tiny fraction of the NHS budget, there are clearly barriers to finding the right support at every stage.

In our 25th year, what we do has never been more urgent or necessary. We are leading the fight for a future where all young minds are supported and empowered, whatever the challenges. And we're here to make sure they get the best possible mental health support and have the resilience to overcome life's difficulties.

**We're fighting for young people's mental health.  
Join our fight.**

Sarah Brennan OBE



Chief Executive  
YoungMinds

**"When I was struggling, I just didn't know what it was that was happening and I didn't know how to talk about it. It was like there was a barrier that was up, and I just couldn't break through it."**

**Alex, YoungMinds Activist**



# Changing attitudes

Over the last few years, attitudes towards children and young people's mental health have come a long way.

Recent campaigns like Time to Change and Heads Together have made a huge difference by spreading the message that it's okay to talk about how you're feeling. And countless people in the public eye have opened up about their own experiences of mental health problems, which has contributed to people noticing more media coverage about mental health.

Today, we are more likely to talk about mental health than in the past, and more likely to believe that mental health is as important as physical health. Encouragingly, four-fifths (81%) of adults would seek help if they were struggling to cope.<sup>1</sup> In schools, colleges, homes and on social media, mental health is becoming a more normal thing to talk about.

However, while it is positive that there is less stigma about mental health, there is still work to do. In our poll of young people with mental health problems, 60% said that worrying about how other people would react was a barrier to seeking help.<sup>2</sup> That's why it's crucial that we keep working to raise awareness, and to ensure that everyone who works with children knows how to spot the signs of emerging mental health problems.

**"It wasn't until I was at university that someone simply asked me: 'Are you okay?' It was in that moment that I broke down and cried like never before. Those tears were like a release of all the stress and pressure of 'being normal and carrying on'. Following that, I spoke to my therapist, my university and my loved ones and began receiving support and although it didn't get better immediately, things started moving. It was progress. Hope."**

**Michaela, YoungMinds Blogger**



**In a survey of 2,100 adults about their views on mental health:**

**88%** agreed that people are more likely to talk about mental health than they used to be

**84%** agreed that media coverage about mental health has increased in the last two years

**79%** agreed that there is less stigma about mental health nowadays than in the past

**94%** agreed that mental health is just as important as physical health

**81%** would seek help if they were feeling stressed, anxious or low and were struggling to cope – often by talking to their doctor (52%) or to a friend (45%)<sup>3</sup>

**88%**



agreed that people are more likely to talk about mental health than they used to be

**“I felt like a burden had lifted. Instead of the constant anxiety of pretending everything is fine and like I had a dirty secret, I felt loved and supported and powerful that I finally owned this part of my life.”**

**Daniel Howell,  
YoungMinds Ambassador**

**Every year we train around 10,000 professionals, helping them to promote good mental health, build young people’s resilience and support young people struggling with specific issues like eating disorders or self-harm. Through our 360° Schools’ Community, we provide support and information to over 4,000 teaching professionals, helping them to spot the signs of emerging mental health conditions and to promote a whole-school approach to wellbeing.**

# The experience of young people

With an increasing focus on academic achievement in schools and brand new challenges emerging from the rise of the online world, growing up now is very different from in the past and comes with unique and heightened pressures. Traumatic childhood experiences – including abuse, neglect, bereavement, violence or prejudice – can also have a huge impact on mental health, often several years down the line.

One in ten children – that’s around three in every classroom – has a diagnosable mental health problem<sup>4</sup>, and one in four have experienced emotional distress.<sup>5</sup> That’s why the increased spotlight on mental health is very welcome – something we have campaigned long and hard to achieve.

But far too often, when a young person takes the brave step to reach out for help, it simply isn’t available, or it takes months and months to find the right support. We hear every day about the impact of being left without help – whether that’s because of schools not being equipped to spot the signs of emerging problems, long waiting times for specialist support, high thresholds for treatment or services not being designed in a way that young people find easy to use.

## We asked more than 2,700 young people about their experiences of looking for support for their mental health.<sup>6</sup>

**66%** said that they found it difficult to get support. Fewer than one in ten (9%) said that they found it easy to get support

**Only 6%** of young people who’ve looked for support for their mental health, agreed that there is enough support for children and young people with mental health problems.

**81% disagreed**

**Only 10%** agreed that it’s easy for young people to know where to find support for their mental health. **75% disagreed**

“When I first found YoungMinds and became an activist. Through working with them I was able to start talking about mental health and understanding it. The amount of times I’d tried to break out of this shell before that and say, ‘I’m feeling a bit down’, ‘I’m feeling a bit scared’ and just couldn’t do it. And now I can do it openly. I needed that initial help, and it kick-started everything changing for me.”

Alex, YoungMinds Activist

**66%**



said that they found it difficult to get support. Fewer than one in ten said that they found it easy to get support

# Barriers to finding support

When asked what the barriers were, if any, to getting support for their mental health:

**51%** said that they didn't ask for help because they didn't understand what they were going through

**31%** said that they had problems getting help from school or college

**29%** said that they had problems getting help from their GP

Of those who had support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), many experienced delays at every stage:

**44%** said that they found it hard to get a referral

**61%** said that there was a long wait between their referral and their assessment

**32%** said there was a long wait between assessment and treatment

**Only 11%** said that they'd received support from CAMHS and didn't face any barriers<sup>7</sup>

**51%**

young people said that they didn't ask for help because they didn't understand what they were going through



**44%**

young people who've had support from CAMHS said that they found it hard to get a referral



Through our Activist Programme we closely support young people who have experience of mental health issues, providing support and training to help them speak openly about mental health, campaign for change and shape the services that affect their lives.

We believe that young people's experiences are the most powerful tool in changing attitudes and improving mental health services – and so youth participation underpins everything we do.



# The experience of parents

Parents and carers of children with mental health problems often find it hard to know how best to provide support, and extremely difficult to access specialist services. Our Parents Helpline provides advice and guidance to over 13,000 parents every year. Many have described being turned away for help when their child is in need of urgent support, or waiting months for treatment.

**We asked 1,630 parents about their experiences of looking for mental health support for their child.<sup>8</sup>**

**Only 6%** said that it was easy to get the support they needed for their child. **84%** reported that their child had found it difficult. **More than half** said that it had been very difficult

**Only 3%** agreed that there's enough support available for parents of children with mental health problems.

**94% disagreed**

**68%** of parents say they didn't feel listened to when they looked for support for their child's mental health

**85%** agreed that growing up in today's world is harder than when they were a child

"Parents who call our helpline are often concerned about symptoms or behaviours that their child is experiencing, and don't know where to turn for support. They often describe feeling overwhelmed, angry or guilty about what's happening, or are worried that the GP or school are unable to help.

"Many of the parents who call us tell us about the long delays they've had trying to access specialist services. Some of them say that their children have started to self-harm during the wait for treatment – or that they've dropped out of school, which not only has a big impact on their own education, but also means that one of the parents is under huge strain and some are resorting to giving up their job to look after their child."

**6%**

said that it was easy



to get the support they needed for their child.

**84%** reported that their child had found it difficult. **More than half** said that it had been very difficult

**"Our trained volunteers and professional advisers provide expert advice and guidance, which equips parents with practical strategies to support their child. Critically, they also help parents to make sense of the mental health system and give them the tools to fight for better support."**

**Jo Hardy, Head of Parent Services, YoungMinds**



# Barriers to finding support

When asked what the barriers were, if any, to getting support for their child's mental health:

**23%** said their child didn't tell them what they were going through

**44%** had problems getting help from their child's school or college

**28%** had problems getting help from their GP

**Only 4%** of parents said they'd had no barriers to getting support for their child

Of those parents whose children had received support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS):

**42%** had problems getting a referral to CAMHS

**64%** experienced a long waiting time between the referral and the initial assessment

**42%** faced a long waiting time between assessment and treatment

**30%** believed there was a lack of funding for the right treatment<sup>9</sup>

"I was so desperate I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to cope. I didn't know which way to turn – without that person on the phone, calming me down, I don't know what I would have done. I think I would have handled everything wrong, and perhaps made everything worse. As a result of that it changed for everybody else as well"

Caller to our Parents Helpline

**23%**



said their child didn't tell them what they were going through

**42%**



of parents whose children had received support from CAMHS had problems getting a referral

# Fighting for young people's mental health

In our 25th year, YoungMinds is leading the fight for children and young people's mental health.

We're fighting for a future in which all young minds are supported through life, whatever the challenges. We're here to break down the barriers young people face when trying to get help, and to make sure they have the resilience to overcome life's difficulties.

We're there for parents when they have nowhere else to turn. We empower professionals on the front-line of the crisis. We give children and young people a stronger voice in their future. And because we hear their experiences every single day, we are driven to change things for the better.

**With young people, parents and professionals,  
we are fighting for every young mind.**

**Whichever young mind you are #FightingFor, join us at [youngminds.org.uk/25](https://youngminds.org.uk/25). You can help us towards a future where all young minds are supported through life, whatever the challenges.**

**"Being a YoungMinds activist has not only given me a boost of confidence and friends for life, it has instilled the hope I can succeed in whatever I wish to pursue in the future. It makes me feel like I can and will make a difference for other young people who are struggling, and excited for a time when things will be better."**

**Jacob, YoungMinds Activist**



# References

- 1 All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2100 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th - 30th January 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+)
- 2 From a YoungMinds survey hosted on surveygizmo.eu and promoted via social media in January and February 2018. There were 2,702 complete responses from children and young people up to the age of 25 who had looked for support for their mental health in the UK. 5% were 13 or under, 28% were 14-15, 40% were 16-17, 17% were 18-21, 10% were 22-25. 1,667 respondents reported having received support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- 3 YouGov Plc – see i
- 4 Green, H., McGinnity, A., Meltzer, H., et al. (2005). Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain 2004. London: Palgrave
- 5 Office for National Statistics (2016) Selected children’s well-being measures by country, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/adhocs/005283selectedchildrenswellbeingmeasuresbycountry>
- 6 YoungMinds survey – see ii
- 7 YoungMinds survey – see ii
- 8 The survey was hosted on surveygizmo.eu and promoted via social media in January and February 2018. There were 1,634 complete responses from parents of children and young people up to the age of 25 who had looked for support for their mental health in the UK. 39% had children who were 13 or under, 21% had children aged 14-15, 18% had children who were 16-17, 17% were 18-21, 4% were 22-25. 1,306 respondents reported that their child had received support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- 9 YoungMinds parents survey – see viii.

**“Days can turn into weeks, weeks can turn into months, months can turn into years- this refers to the waiting time for mental health support for many children and their families. With YoungMinds, I am striving to change this situation so no-one has to suffer like my son did.”**

**Catherine, Parent**





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