



***What you need to know about* Making Sense** – a new initiative to improve support for children and young people in Wales with a mental illness

• Who is this initiative aimed at?

We want all young people to enjoy good mental health.

In support of that goal we want everybody who supports young people - and young people themselves - to gain a good understanding of:-

- What mental health for young people means
- The role of families
- The role of professionals who work with young people – teachers, youth workers, and others
- The role of GPs
- The role of mental health services.

This initiative is concerned specifically with young people aged up to 25 years.

• Who is behind the initiative?

Mental health charities Hafal, Bipolar UK, and the Mental Health Foundation, are supporting the initiative, supported by Diverse Cymru which is helping us reach out to minority groups. The initiative is led by a panel of young people with experience of mental illness or caring for someone with a mental illness

• What does mental health mean for young people?

Mental health is important for everybody. It is particularly important for young people to enjoy good mental health so that they can enjoy their youth and set themselves up for the rest of their adult lives.

For most young people having good mental health is about growing up and enjoying life in a healthy and grounded way: we sometimes call this “well-being” but *that doesn't mean anything different*.

Young people themselves will know best what works for them in staying happy and leading an active and healthy life – and the older they get the more they take on responsibility for looking after themselves.

But all young people also need the support of family, friends, teachers, youth workers and others to enjoy and sustain a good life. In most circumstances they will support young people to sustain their well-being: for healthy families this is a natural and instinctive thing; for good professionals it is a core part of their role.

Young people themselves, their families, and teachers and youth workers are the experts on how young people can lead a good life and enjoy good mental health: doctors, mental health services, and voluntary organisations like ourselves know that the well-being of all young people is important *but it is not us but those experts who can help most young people sustain their well-being.*

• What if things go wrong?

Everybody faces problems at all ages and there are particular challenges for young people as they grow up. Most of these are best addressed through a young person's established support networks. But some young people need additional support as they grow up.

If families can't cope or have trouble giving support to young people then there may be a need for additional support from social services, teachers, and others. This will generally involve giving extra help to the family or directly to the young person.

Usually this extra support will quite rightly not be seen as a response to a problem with the mental health of the young person but the support can of course provide valuable help in protecting the well-being of the young person - indeed that will be a key reason for giving the support - and so that will in fact protect the young person's mental health.

Sometimes the support is needed specifically because the young person is feeling troubled or showing signs of distress within themselves. This might be referred to as a "mental health problem": but not always – it is more important to get insight into the problem rather than to give it a label. In many of these instances the best people to help are still the people who are most familiar with the young person – family and teachers for example. They may also get extra help from in-school counselling services or similar.

It is always best if help can be provided by mainstream services who know the young person (and who knows them).

In some cases the GP may get involved or will be the first point of contact. In most cases the GP will treat the matter like any other health matter – they don't provide a specialist mental health service but, as well as their own expertise, they have access to some valuable services at primary care level (in their surgery or elsewhere) such as counselling; and they can refer across to school-based counselling and similar services if these are not already involved.

Most problems are best dealt with at this level – good communication between the GP, family, school, and other professionals can provide the appropriate support needed by a young person even if they have significant problems.


• Where do mental health services come in?

If a GP wants to check up on a problem which might require specialist help then they can refer a young person for an assessment.

The assessment will be carried out by mental health services (at secondary care level) and they will *either* refer the young person back to the GP (having concluded that the young person does not need the specialist support) *or* begin to provide specialist services as necessary: these services are called Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

This sounds bureaucratic but in practice it is right that referral is conducted methodically and that the right decisions are made. This is not just about the best use of resources – thought that is itself very important – but in fact it *is not in the interest of a young person to receive specialist services if they could have been helped successfully by their GP and other primary care services.*





Occasionally referral is urgent. Indeed in some cases a young person may need to start receiving specialist help on the same day that their symptoms first occur. It is vitally important that these urgent cases can be dealt with quickly and that requires that all referrals are made carefully on a case by case basis.

• What kind of problems require specialist support?

There are no hard and fast rules about who might need help beyond what the GP can do but the kind of problems which might require assessment and then follow-up, specialist support include:-

- Symptoms of psychosis - this means having delusions such as hearing voices or otherwise losing touch with reality
- Symptoms of paranoia – this means believing people mean to do you harm
- Severe depression or mood swings
- Severe eating disorders
- Suicidal thoughts which pose a risk.

Not all people with these problems require specialist services – especially if the GP-level services are good quality and well-organised. And many people with these problems can in time revert to getting their support only at GP level – again, depending on good practice at that level.

If somebody has clinically-recognised symptoms then their problem might be referred to as a “mental illness” – but this doesn’t mean somebody needs any particular level of service.

Some common mental illnesses which often require specialist mental health services include schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

• What happens when people reach 18?

In Wales there is a transition point at a young person’s 18th birthday where they move from CAMHS into adult mental health services.

This can be a difficult time because the young person can find themselves dealing with different people and different services – in fact the whole environment can seem completely different.

Efforts are being made to make this transition smoother but there is a long way to go. It is important that non-mental health professionals, as well as young people themselves and their families, are aware of the transition point and make sure they ask CAMHS team how the transition will be made and who will be providing support in the future.

• What about families?

Families who are looking after a young person with a mental illness should be involved and supported by services – by their GP if that is the level of support and by specialist mental health services if that is being provided. Families and carers are often the most important part of the team supporting somebody with a mental illness.

Young people who themselves look after people with a mental illness (often parents or siblings) should get support from specialist mental health services.

• How can I find out more?

If you want more information or to get involved please contact the High Needs Collaborative c/o:-

Hafal

former Gellinudd Hospital
Lôn Catwg
Pontardawe
Neath Port Talbot SA8 3DX

Tel: 01792 832400

Email: hafal@hafal.org

Web: hafal.org

Hafal is Wales' leading charity for people with a serious mental illness and their carers. For more information go to: www.hafal.org

The **Mental Health Foundation** is a national charity which provides information, carries out research, and campaigns to improve services for people affected by mental illness. For more information go to: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Bipolar UK is the national charity dedicated to supporting individuals with bipolar, and their families and carers. For more information go to: www.bipolaruk.org.uk

Diverse Cymru is an equalities organisation in the Third Sector created in recognition of the difficulties and discrimination faced by people experiencing inequality in Wales. Find out more at: www.diverseecymru.org.uk

