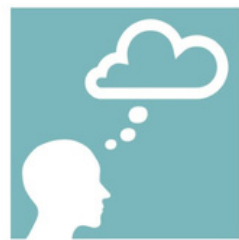


# SENIOR MENTAL HEALTH LEADS

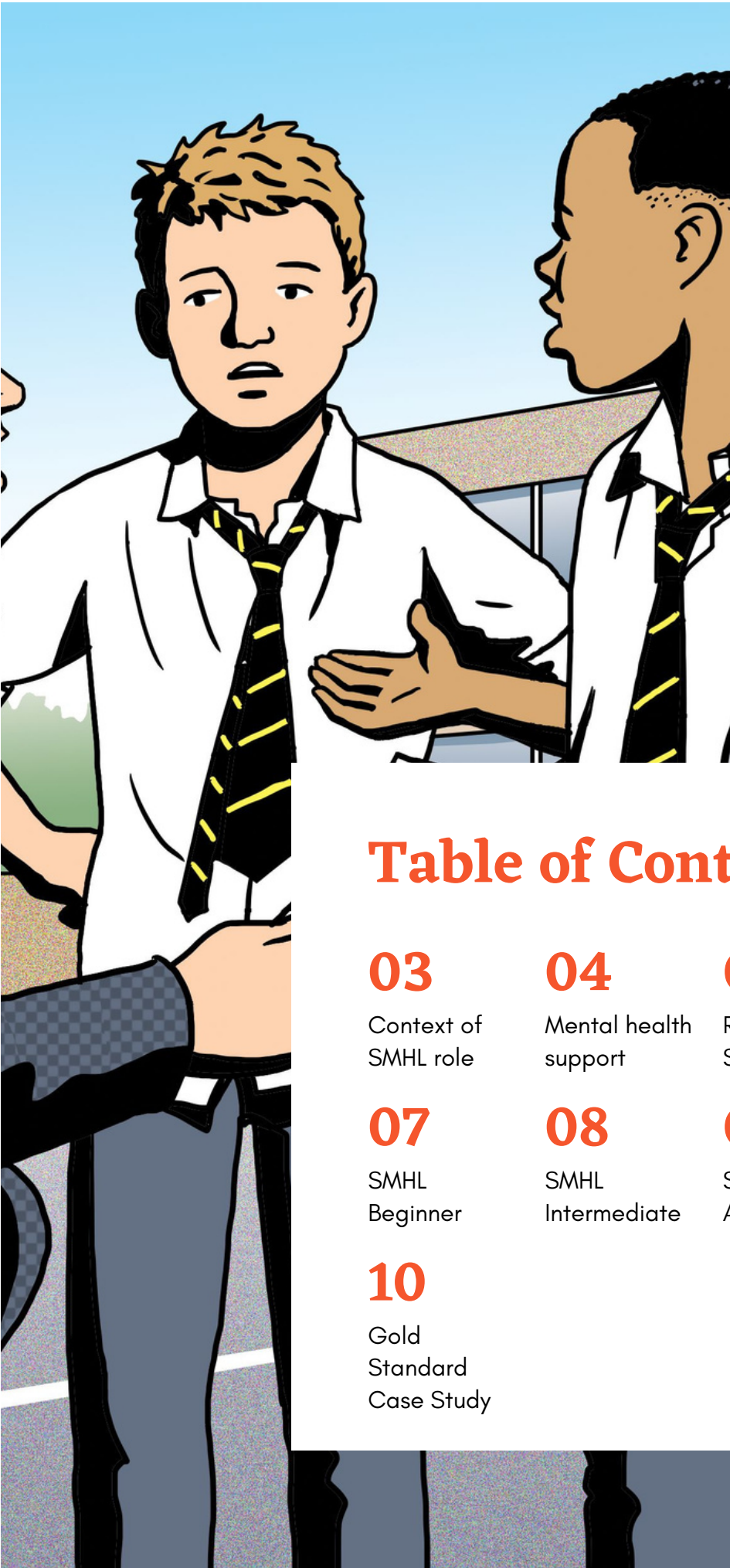
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# Context of the Senior Mental Health Lead role



In 2017, the Government published its [Green Paper for Transforming children and young people's mental health](#), which gives details of proposals for expanding access to mental health care for children and young people. The role of the Senior Mental Health Lead (SMHL) in primary, secondary and special schools has become ever more prominent since the Covid-19 pandemic.

[Figures from the NHS](#) suggest that 14 per cent of primary school children now have a probable mental health condition (NHS, 2020). According to a [survey by YoungMinds](#) in January 2021, 67 per cent of young people with mental health problems believe that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health.

There is a growing need in schools for coherent and accessible provision to drive and enable the positive mental health and well-being of pupils and staff. As part of the government's health and well-being strategy, the government would like every school to have a designated mental health lead in place by 2025.

Research indicates that taking a coordinated and evidence-informed approach to mental health and well-being leads to improved emotional health and well-being in children and young people, which in turn leads to a greater readiness to learn. Schools and colleges placing a focus on assessing/improving their mental health and well-being strategy and practice often report improved attendance, attainment, attention and behaviour.

## Mental health support for children and young people

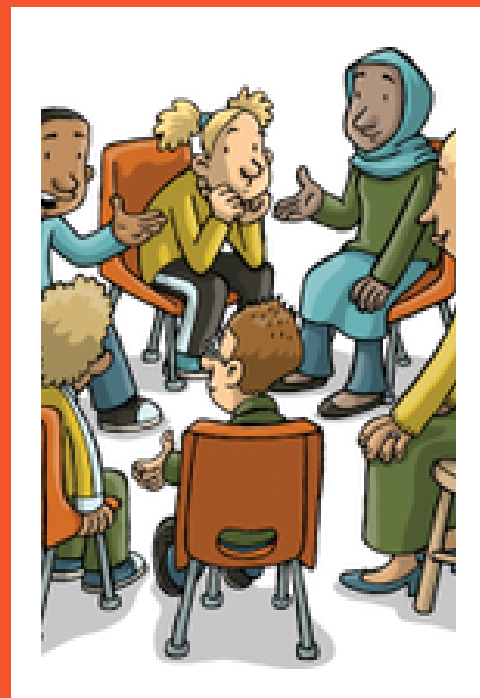
NHS figures say that one in six children aged 5-16 in England have a mental health condition.

The DfE is funding the Senior Mental Health Lead role in all state schools and colleges in England and the NHS is establishing Mental Health Support Teams to work alongside SMHLs and to deliver evidence-based interventions for mild-to-moderate mental health issues.

As a whole school approach, mental health and well-being can make a significant and sustainable difference to the mental health of pupils and staff.

Family links are hugely important to help teachers better understand the lives students have at home. The SMHL can help parents and carers seeking answers to questions about mental health so they can be better prepared to support their children at home.

Developing a positive mental health culture takes time. A SMHL can help create a culture that guides the whole school community to value mental health in the same way as physical health, encouraging everyone to care for their own mental health and that of others.





# Role of the SMHL

The duties outlined in the Green Paper response include to:

- Oversee the help the school gives to pupils with mental health problems.
- Help staff to spot pupils who show signs of mental health problems.
- Offer advice to staff about mental health.
- Refer children to specialist services.



## Role expectations

In its Green Paper response, the DfE said that the SMHL role should not be filled by a mental health professional and, at the same time, education staff should not be diagnosing mental health conditions or delivering mental health interventions.



## Role focus

*"The focus of the lead should be strategic, putting whole school/college approaches in place, ensuring a coordinated approach."*



## SLT support

The government recommends that a Senior Mental Health Lead is a member of the Senior Leadership team or works very closely with them and has their support to influence strategic change and embed mental health and well-being into the culture of a school.

## Where to begin?

The following resources help Mental Health Leads to assess and reflect on their existing approach to mental health and well-being, and to help plan ahead:

- the National Children's Bureau (NCB) preparing for recovery: [self-review and signposting tool](#)
- an approach developed by Oldham Council, [the whole school and college approach to emotional health and mental well-being](#)

The sets of questions on the following pages may help to shape your thinking as you begin/continue in the role of SMHL. Our team is here to support this thinking; to coach you through developing your whole school mental health strategy; to help identify referral pathways and local mental health support agencies; to help you identify how restorative practice can support and enhance your mental health and well-being provision.



## SMHL Beginner



### Key considerations when new to the SMHL role:

- How do I define the role of the SMHL? Do I need support with this and, if so, who is best placed to provide this?
- What is the SMHL relationship with the SLT?
- Is there an existing mental health strategy in school?
- What are the current strengths in our school (people and strategy)?
- Is there a recent audit or survey that can help inform my thinking?
- What's our vision for mental health and well-being provision?
- Where can I find information to develop an understanding of the intersection of the role of the SMHL with statutory roles in my school/college?
- Who are the key local partners that I need to connect with (external agencies or providers such as CAMHS and third sector organisations depending on what is available in my local area)?
- Which members of staff have attended training courses and do I need to think about developing training provision for staff in a particular area?
- If I need to, how can I find clarity for my role?
- How am I looking after my own mental health and well-being?
- How can restorative practice help me in getting started and how can restorative practice help staff in how they support and receive mental health and well-being provision?

## SMHL Intermediate



### Key considerations for intermediate level SMHLs

- How does my role influence school strategy and overall objectives for mental health and well-being? What do I do well and where could I develop further?
- How far am I across the main statutory requirements relevant to schools and colleges, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education and the SEND Code of Practice?
- How have I planned to work with statutory roles in school: leads for child protection, pastoral, safeguarding and SENCOs?
- What are strengths of the school's mental health strategy?
- What are the gaps and how do I prioritise these?
- What are the needs for staff training this year and who can deliver this training?
- Are other local schools specialising in an area of mental health and well-being that I could learn from?
- Am I up to date with local partners and individual experts and interventions?
- How is pupil voice playing into our whole school strategy?
- How have we involved parents (training, information, expertise)?
- How can restorative practice help to develop our expertise and provision and how can RP support staff in how they support/lead and receive mental health and well-being provision?



## SMHL Advanced



### Key considerations for advanced level SMHLs

In addition to the points above ...

- How do we know we are improving mental health and well-being with pupils, staff and parents? What's our evidence base?
- How successful is my school at referring pupils to the right support services at the right time? What's the evidence base for this?
- What are pupils and parents saying about mental health support and provision at school?
- What's happening this year to develop and embed pathways for specialised support for pupils and staff with mental health needs?
- Is there anything we do really well that we can share with local schools?
- How well do I lead in this area? Can I do this better? Which aspects of restorative practice can help me in this area?



## Gold standard mental health provision

To help your understanding of what 'gold standard' might look like, please see the web page of a school we've worked with to introduce and embed restorative practice as part of their mental health provision:

<https://www.holy-family.co.uk/mental-health-wellbeing/>



*"As a Restorative Practice school we understand the importance of building, maintaining and repairing relationships and ensure the well-being of all our pupils is at the heart of everything we do."*





## Let's start a conversation ...

The Restorative Thinking team comprises a Local Authority Education Director, a former Headteacher and former member of a secondary SLT. We have worked together and with primary, secondary and special schools for over ten years, successfully implementing whole school restorative practice and mental health strategies.



### Further information and resources:

- DfE & DHSC: Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps, July 2018: <http://bit.ly/2nOHFeI>
- DfE & DHSC: Consultation outcome: Quick read: Transforming children and young people's mental health provision, July 2018: <https://bit.ly/3gvkjEA>
- DfE: Press release: Schools and colleges to benefit from boost in expert mental health support, May 2021: <https://bit.ly/3ezMqRs>
- NHS Digital: Mental health of children and young people in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey, October 2020: <https://bit.ly/3myohMp>

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