3.1 Guidance on Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs and reducing Exclusions

Working together to support South Gloucestershire Children and Young People

SEMH (Social, Emotional & Mental Health) is a term that was introduced in the Special Educational Need and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice in 2014. It replaced the terms BESD (Behaviour Emotional Social Development) and EBD (Emotional & Behaviour Difficulties). The new abbreviation, SEMH, was the first term to drop the word 'behaviour', in an attempt to emphasise that behaviour is only ever a way of communicating something more significant. In other words, referring to behaviour meant that many practitioners were focusing on the behaviours on display, rather than the needs behind the behaviour. Another key change to the term is the inclusion of mental health. Although the use of this term needs to be carefully managed (not least with the young people themselves) it has increased the focus on tackling issues which have an impact on the mental health of children and young people.

- Unlocking Potential www.up.org.uk

What are the causes of SEMH needs?

There are many factors which can impact upon or be the cause of a child or young person's (CYP) SEMH needs. The most common causes of social, emotional and mental health need are believed to include the following:

- Attachment history (lack of acceptance, positive feedback, needs being met, emotional warmth)

- Trauma history (domestic violence, abuse, neglect, violent crime, Adverse Childhood Experiences, hate prejudice, loss)

- Current family dynamics or peer group dynamics

- Other systems and support around the child or young person (school, community, society)

How are SEMH needs expressed?

Children and young people who have difficulties with their emotional and social development may have under-developed social skills and find it difficult to make and sustain healthy relationships. These difficulties may be displayed through the CYP becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as through challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. SEMH can manifest as difficulties relating to problems of mood (anxiety or depression), problems of conduct (oppositional defiance and more severe conduct problems including aggression), self-harming, substance abuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained.

It is important to remember that these behaviours are a way of the CYP trying to express themselves and communicate. The use of the graduated approach (section 2.7) will support practitioners and school leaders in developing an understanding of the CYP's needs and how best to support them.

Impact of SEMH needs on a CYP's life chances

National data shows that children with any Special Educational Need or Disability are significantly more likely to leave school without any qualifications, to get stuck in a cycle of unemployment, to develop drug problems, to become involved in criminal behaviour, to become homeless and to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

If the child is also from an economically disadvantaged household all of these risk factors increase significantly.

Children and young people with SEMH are often the most likely to be affected by one, and often a number, of these risks. This is because they are more at risk of being excluded from school, they are more at risk of being branded as 'bad' children due to behaviour which is seen as anti-social by ill-prepared professionals and others and due to the lack of really joined-up thinking on how to help these young people in most cases.

How Section 3 of the toolkit can support practitioners

It is important to use the tools, advice and guidance from Section 3 along with other aspects of the toolkit, such as the graduated approach (section 2.7) and a co-produced plan of support for the CYP (Section 1.8, 1.9, 1.10).

The South Glos Way: A SEND and inclusion toolkit for South Gloucestershire education settings and professionals

This section of the toolkit provides some in-depth guidance for school practitioners, Headteachers and SENCOs, to take **a preventative approach of early intervention and support,** to ensure the risk of exclusion for children and young people are minimised.

In this section you will find guidance on:

- **Reduced timetables** – ensuring this is used effectively and appropriately in partnership with parents/carers.

- **Managed Moves Guidance and process** – ensuring needs are carefully considered, working with professionals and parents/carers to maximise success.

- **Alternative Provision Guidance** – ensuring school leaders are aware of their legal duties and again, working collaboratively with external professionals and parents/carers in nay decision making process.

- **High Risk Group** – ensuring school leaders are aware of the support, advice and funding that can be accessed if a pupil is at risk of a permanent exclusion.