Central Bedfordshire Youth Parliament

# Promoting a positive approach to Mental Health & Wellbeing in Young People

Report of Central Bedfordshire Young Person's Mental Health survey

August 2017

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# Recommendations

### Recommendation 1 - A Step-Up, Step-Down System (Minimum Standards of Care)

The CBYP recommends a system that allows young people to be cared for after they have made any concerns about their mental health known. 45% of young people stated that the help they received either did not help or only partially helped and many individually expressed that they believed that the wait to receive any help was too long. They also felt that they had been forgotten about or that the number of sessions they received was not enough. Though we understand that there is a certain limit to the amount of money which can be spent, we believe that introducing a system that allows individuals to receive lower levels of help would benefit them.

We are proposing a system that allows the young person to receive help before and after undergoing therapy or counselling. To do so we suggest creating wellbeing groups that regularly meet, allowing them to be with other young people in similar situations and to have a place where they can share any issues. These groups would utilise existing resources (such as youth and community centres) and would be focused on a particular activity (for example, sport or art) to deliver a steady source of help.

These groups would mean that the young person is kept an eye on after voicing a concern (before receiving the help they may need) and after (when they may still not be completely ready to face the world). It would mean they are not abandoned and they would not be able to slip back into old habits.

### Recommendation 2 - Peer Support Network

In response to 24% of young people stating that they would like to have support available from people their own age as support, we recommend the creation of a network of young people in each school who would be available for a young person to express any concerns about their mental health (or somebody else's).

This would be a group of young people, trained to distinguish between young people who may have serious issues and those who are simply having a bad day. They would meet with an adult (who would be overseeing the school's group) regularly to report back on conversations and discuss what to do next for each pupil.

Each person in this network would also always have the opportunity to discuss any issues they were having themselves (as a way to "offload").

### Recommendation 3 - Parent Support System

In response to 45% of young people stating they would go to a family member if they were struggling with a mental health issue, the CBYP believe that parents should also be able to receive support.

This could include: the opportunity to go to support groups for parents/carers of a child with mental health issues; training to spot the signs of mental health issues; training on how to respond if their

child does disclose a mental health problem they are facing; resources and/or an advisor specifically for parents who can advise who to speak to and who can provide help for their child.

### Recommendation 4 - Male "Break the Stigma" Campaign

The CBYP also received comments from a large number of males who found it particularly difficult to open up due to the amount of stigma around mental health. This is reflected in the national number of male suicides. Our suggestion is that a campaign is created to target young males to encourage them to talk about their problems. We feel that the issue of the large number of suicides stems from growing up believing that they shouldn't talk about any issues they may have, and if this is stigma is diminished earlier on in life we may be able to decrease this number.

# Introduction

The report has been compiled from a survey of 1,254 young people (aged 11-18) living or attending school in Central Bedfordshire. Within this report we will highlight the main results and key information of the survey, before discussing some solutions and finally making some recommendations for the development of the Mental Health services for young people. The survey was created by young people and the recommendations have been created in consultation with young people.

## Background

Mental Health has been an agenda item for Youth Parliament for the past few years; from 2013, it has appeared on the Make Your Mark ballot paper (the UK's largest consultation for young people). In Central Bedfordshire, it has consistently been voted as one of the top 5 issues by local young people, polling first in 2015. Although Mental Health didn't appear first in 2016 (it came in third) on the Make Your Mark ballot in Central Bedfordshire, the Youth Parliament unanimously voted that they wanted to continue the work of Youth Parliament on this issue for another year. The Youth Parliament felt that because mental health has been a consistent problem identified by young people for a number of years, plus the current attention and awareness that mental health is receiving from both from politicians and in the media; they could still do more on this campaign.

The members researched mental health to discover if there was a specific way in which the Youth Parliament could target their campaign. Members spoke with their peers, spoke with mental health professionals (Mind BLMK and ELFT), and carried out some independent research to try to identify how the Youth Parliament could help with the issue of mental health. It was quickly evident that mental health is a national problem with the latest estimates suggesting that at least 1 in 10 young people will develop a mental health issue in the UK[1], and the Good Childhood Report stating that 10% of young people are "Languishing" – having low scores for both subjective well-being and psychological well-being.[2]

Furthermore, locally the SHUE survey conducted in 2015 revealed that young people in Central Bedfordshire have a particularly low resilience score. In addition, the conversations between the members, their peers, and local professional organisations revealed young people often find that services are often not suitable, that the young people don't meet the criteria, that there are long waiting lists, they can't access them without missing school or college, and they can't access them confidentially.

In view of this the members agreed a survey should be conducted specifically aimed at young people in Central Bedfordshire to identify what specific issues young people are facing in relation to mental health within Central Bedfordshire. This survey was intended to get an idea of how effective the current mental health services are, what support is available to young people struggling with stress or esteem issues, and how support options could be improved, particularly for young people with

[1] Mental Health Foundation, "Peer-led support to help young people look after their mental health" *Good Mental Health for all,* (November 2013) Retrieved from. https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/news/peer-led-support-help-young-people-look-after-their-mental-health

[2] The Children's Society, "*The Good Childhood Report 2016 Summary"* (2016): pg. 3

"low-level" (tier 1 and 2) mental health problems. The members formed a working partnership with MIND BLMK to produce this survey so that the survey could have professional guidance given the nature of the topic.

## Research Method & Limitations

The study used questionnaires which targeted young people in schools around Central Bedfordshire. The questionnaire was designed online (on Survey Monkey) but was available to be printed for ease of access. Data collection took place between February and May 2017. The main 2 methods of data collection were through young people requesting their schools to partake in the questionnaire by spending a few minutes within their form time to fill in the survey, and by Central Bedfordshire Youth Workers visiting some schools at lunchtimes to ask young people to complete hard copies.

All Secondary, Middle, and Upper schools in Central Bedfordshire were contacted to ask about participation in the survey. All pupils participated based on anonymous, voluntary informed consent and the total participants numbered 1,254. Whilst the Youth Parliament hoped for more engagement this did provide a good cross-section of young people across Central Bedfordshire with a good balance of age, gender, and location and this is a substantial response to inform any recommendations.

Due to the nature of a questionnaire format most of the information collected is quantitative, however, there was space given at regular intervals throughout the survey for the participants to provide more qualitative data. These two methods have provided a good basis to inform any recommendations. However, there is further scope for more qualitative data to be collected to continue to inform the implementation of the recommendations – particularly through a steering group.

A further consideration, to those highlighted already, when drawing any conclusions based on this research is the "no response" within particular questions. This particularly appeared within the question of "Would you know where to go or who to ask [about mental health]?" in which 57% of young people didn't respond; whilst this may indicate that young people don't know and therefore haven't answered the question, as the young people haven't responded we can't draw that conclusion. Therefore, we would suggest that there may be opportunity for some further research to find out if young people are familiar with the processes in relation to mental health, feel confident in those processes, and would know how information might be used or shared if they disclosed a mental health issue.

# Key Findings

Some of the key information from the data collected (available in full below) is as follows:

## Quantitative Data

*Number of young people reporting experience of Mental Health Problems*

As stated at the top of this paper, the current national statistic for mental health estimates that 1 in 10 young people will develop mental health difficulties at some stage. However, our data reports that 27% (343) of young people have experienced mental health problems which equates to over 1 in 4 young people; a huge increase on the national average.

*The number of young people receiving no help*

Of the 343 young people reporting to have experienced some difficulty with mental health, 113 have not received any formal help.

*Young people are recognising others struggling with mental health*

45% of young people have reported they have seen other people struggling with mental health; this could be peers, family, or others. Young people who recognise the struggles of others are also predisposed to help with 60% offering some help and support to that person through approaching them.

*Lack of good support networks for young people*

Whilst most young people (88%) have reported that if they are having a bad day there is some form of support available to them, 12% (141) of young people don't believe they have any support if they are having a bad day.

*Importance of friends and family*

When asked who young people would speak to if they were struggling, 33.8% would speak to a friend and 31.9% would speak to their mum or dad. Furthermore, when asked what support they believed should be available, 19.4% would like support from someone their own age.

## Qualitative Data

**The following are some of the quotes that have been pulled from the surveys and grouped by theme:**

*Lack of Continued Support and a plan:*

"The counsellor was awful and was then changed by the school, and I was never called back for another appointment"

"…There was no long-term plan and I soon slipped back into old habits"

"I think the services that are available need to be greatly improved, it's not down to schools, I think most of the schools do what they can. It is the external services that are a huge let down that are unsupported, unwelcoming and overworked"

"…I didn't feel I could open up fully about my issues, as I wasn't sure what support would be given to me after"

"Was fantastic when I had it [Chums support], but now it's worse I haven't gotten help again"

"Sometimes they stop it for the time being, however, it doesn't stop completely"

*Waiting times are too long*

"I did not benefit from private counselling but there was no way of getting help from [the] Samaritans because of the lengthy waiting list! The school service was only once a week and slightly helped"

"…CAMH is clearly underfunded and discharged me well before I was ready"

"…st francis [sic] isn't really working and with CAMH they have taken a while to get an appointment sorted, it took a few months for me to see them since they assessed me and labled [sic] me as [a] medium risk"

"I was rejected help by the councillors [sic] in school"

"Would have liked to receive support sooner"

*Uncomfortable speaking to a Counsellor*

"They [the school counsellor] were unfriendly, patronising and made me feel self conscious and uncomfortable"

"I personally wouldn't open up to a stranger"

*Young people need someone they can trust that will continue to help*

"I asked for support and it was given and they said another appointment would be made but it never was made. I didn't mention it to anyone and just ignored it"

"People should be taught how to handle it when a friend is struggling as people don't know what to do"

"The counsellor sent me away because she found me difficult to open up"

"Support shouldn't be forced on young people and trust needs to be formed between people that a person goes to support to [sic]"

"I haven't received any support but I have tried to talk to people (like my mum) and she doesn't listen"

"No 16-year-old (particularly boys) want to go and talk to a 40-year-old worker or counsellor employed by the school. Lads need telling from a young age that we need to talk to each other about stuff without being labelled as unmanly or gay"

*Too much stress and pressure at school*

"Maybe adults should notice. And perhaps realise that we need emotional support rather than just educational"

"Teachers tell us that our mental wellbeing is important and we shouldn't stress ourselves out too much, but I feel they don't truly believe what they say and they put too much pressure on us to get 'good' grades (I have, in the past, been upset over B grades)"

"…being a disabled person and a person of other minorities, it is literally torture to be at school often…they [the government] punish my parents if I can't go to school and struggle to get out of bed – because I'm not practically dying, I have to be in school, where the difficulty levels are getting harder and harder"

# Recommendations in Full

## Recommendation 1 - Step-up, Step-down System – Wellbeing groups

One of the key findings within the survey is the number of young people reporting to have experienced difficulties with mental health; 28% - over 1 in 4 - young people compared to the national estimated average of 1 in 10. Of these it is notable that over half have not received any formal help or support for their reported struggle. Whilst there isn't any quantitative data from our survey which reveals why this trend is apparent (and perhaps there is scope for further research to be done around this), one would presume that there is a combination of reasons for this (backed-up by some of the qualitative data received). Part of the reason for this trend is due to the strain on the current services which means that there can be long waiting lists;

> *"I did not benefit from private counselling but there was no way of getting help from [the] Samaritans because of the lengthy waiting list!"*

High "qualifying" need to access the service;

> *"I was rejected help by the councillors [sic] in school"*

And a limited timespan on the length of intervention:

> *"…CAMH is clearly underfunded and discharged me well before I was ready"*

Part of the reason is because some young people don't feel comfortable opening up to a stranger:

> *"I personally wouldn't open up to a stranger"*

And part of the reason will be down to personal and mental health complexities; there are some young people that worry about the information being shared:

> *"…even those [adults] you trust will tell others if they think it is necessary"*

And some who struggle to open up to anyone about the issue:

> *"Maybe adults should notice. And perhaps realise that we need emotional support…"*

In addition to the number of young people not receiving any help, the young people that have received formal support highlighted the issue of continual support. Currently the service is only able to offer a maximum of six sessions with a counsellor, however, following those sessions young people have felt that there wasn't any further support offered to them unless their mental health problems progressed again:

> *"…There was no long-term plan and I soon slipped back into old habits"*

> *"…I didn't feel I could open up fully about my issues, as I wasn't sure what support would be given to me after"*

> *"Was fantastic when I had it [Chums support], but now it's worse I haven't gotten help again"*

Therefore, it seems apparent that there is a need for a space in which young people can meet and receive some support if they are struggling with mental health and which young people can step-up and step-down into whilst they wait for more intensive support, once they've finished receiving counselling, or if they don't "qualify" for more intensive support. By utilising current services available to the Council there could be a series of "wellbeing groups" setup within the current youth centres and staffed by the commissioned youth workers, if given some specialist training and support, whereby young people that are waiting for mental health services, who have finished with mental health services, or who don't qualify for mental health services could meet to engage in positive activities e.g. art, drama, sport, etc. and support one another under the facilitation of a trained youth worker.

## Recommendation 2 - Peer Support Network

The data collected highlights the important role of friends and family in supporting young people struggling with mental health issues with 626 young people reporting that they currently talk to friends if they are having difficulties, and 332 young people suggesting that peer support should be made available to help young people who may be struggling. By introducing a formalised peer support network in schools, it would also help the 12% of young people who reported that they currently don't have any support if they are having a bad day.

Furthermore, when young people were asked about how they might support others that are struggling, no young people suggested referring them to any services (although 8.9% said they would seek advice from others). Although young people maybe comfortable talking to their peers if they are struggling with mental health, their peers may not be well enough informed and equipped to support them, particularly if it is a more serious mental health issue. Therefore, if a formal peer support network was implemented young people could be more confident that the advice and guidance that their peers offered was going to be better informed, as the "mental health champions" would be given training and support in order to do their role.

Through training young people and creating an identifiable peer support system within the schools in Central Bedfordshire, we will be utilising the existing social networks and support systems that young people use, and creating some support systems for young people who don't have strong social networks to depend on. In doing this we can address some of the issues raised by young people, such as building trust:

> *"Support shouldn't be forced on young people and trust needs to be formed between people that a person goes to support to [sic]"*

Receiving support from someone closer to the young people's age:

> *"No 16 year old (particularly boys) wants to go and talk to a 40 year old worker or counsellor employed by the school"*

And supporting young people to help others:

> *"People should be taught how to handle it when a friend is struggling as people don't know what to do"*

Whilst a peer support network wouldn't be adequate for young people experiencing serious mental health difficulties (tier 3 and 4), the network could be structured so that the young people would be able to refer the serious cases on. This might alleviate some of the current pressures on the services and go some way to helping young people feel a continued support before and after any counselling, whilst those that need less formal support when they were struggling could access this support when they needed it, to help prevent some instances escalating. For instance; when young people are feeling overburdened within school pressures as summarised in this comment:

> *"Teachers tell us that our mental wellbeing is important and we shouldn't stress ourselves out too much, but I feel they don't truly believe what they say and they put too much pressure on us to get 'good' grades (I have, in the past, been upset over B grades)"*

By having other young people who identify with this issue, the young people would be able to share their problem with a "Mental Health Champion" and within that space increase their resilience to these stresses and pressure.

## Recommendation 3 – Parent Support System

As highlighted previously, one of the main current support systems for young people is their friends and family. 31.9% (591) of young people said that they would go to their parents (mum or dad) if they were struggling, whilst 27.9% of young people said that they'd like to receive support from an adult offering help – whilst this is not directly suggesting a parent it could include them.

We haven't conducted a survey with parents and would strongly recommend this as further research to be conducted. However, from some of our qualitative data it is apparent that there may be a need for further support and advice to be made available to parents:

> *"I haven't received any support but I have tried to talk to people (like my mum) and she doesn't listen"*

This support and advice could be as simple as hosting support groups for parents with children suffering with poor mental health, in which parents could share some of their struggles with others experiencing similar situations. Within this context the parents could also be offered some training, advice, and signposting, to help ensure that the young people were receiving the appropriate support. In this way, we could utilise the young people's already established support networks and ensure that parents were supported to help their children, as mental health and the mental health support structure can often be confusing and daunting to anyone who has no prior experience or understanding of mental health.

## Recommendation 4 – Male "Break the Stigma" Campaign

From some of the results, and in particular some comments from the survey, it became apparent that a mental health campaign focused on young males would be useful. This issue was identified by a couple of young male respondents, with one respondent commenting:

*"… Lads need telling from a young age that we need to talk to each other about stuff without being labelled as unmanly or gay"*

This idea is further backed up by the results when broken down into gender, with 30% of males reporting that they would talk with their friends if they were struggling, compared to 36% of females. Furthermore, the issue of the "Gender Paradox", which results in a disproportionate number of male suicides every year, has been well documented. One article on the subject of the Gender Paradox writes:

*"…men and women equally suffer problems, equally consider suicide. But it is culturally acceptable for women to talk about problems and ask for help, but not for men"*[3]

Therefore, a targeted campaign focussing on young males would appear to be important. The campaign should focus on encouraging young men to talk about their feelings with their friends and to not be afraid of asking for help.

[3] Powell, Jane (2015) 'The Gender Paradox of Suicidal Behaviour and Why We Can't Address the Issue', *HuffPost UK,* 31 March, Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jane-powell/male-suicide-rate_b_6562478.html (accessed 1 August 2017)

# Conclusion

We must listen to the voice of young people and provide early help to prevent the current trend of mental health crisis in young people.

Whilst we accept that this survey has some limitations, it undoubtedly is a strong sample that represents the voice of young people across Central Bedfordshire, and therefore we believe that the recommendations of this report should be a high priority for Central Bedfordshire Council. We believe that the mental health services for young people in Central Bedfordshire can be improved by our 4 recommendations: a "step-up, step-down" system, a peer support system, parental support, and a campaign targeted at males. These recommendations should support, and not replace, the current service provision in Central Bedfordshire.

The recommendations of this report do require some investment from the Council, however, the primary commitment will be in time and resources rather than "new" money. Given the current cost of mental health to the Council, if the recommendations could offer "early help" to young people, and thereby prevent some instances from developing the investment made by the Council would be repaid in kind. As such we would strongly encourage the Council to invest good quality resources to these recommendations, including personnel, expertise, buildings and equipment, and where required, money.

The report has been created by young people and is based on the views of young people and we believe that the recommendations will better the services available. It would be our recommendation that if the Council should invest in the recommendations of this report that it should continue to be young person led, so that young people will oversee and assess the undertaking of the recommendations.

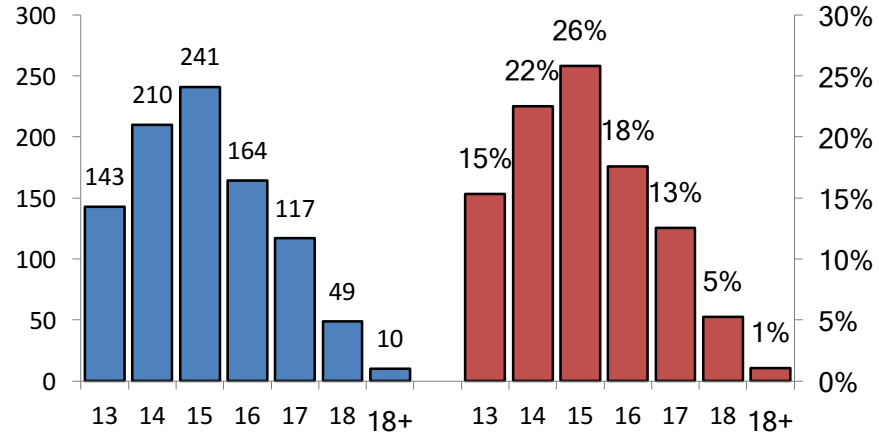
# Bibliography

The Children's Society, "*The Good Childhood Report 2016 Summary"* (2016)

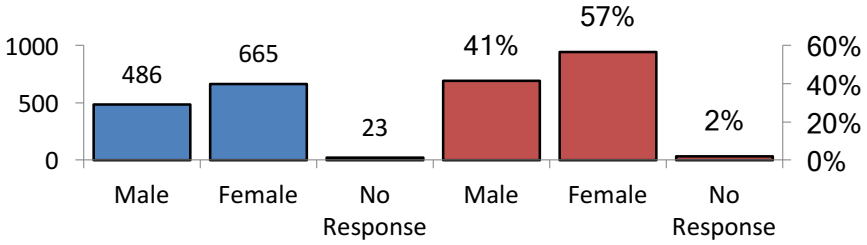
Mental Health Foundation, "Peer-led support to help young people look after their mental health" *Good Mental Health for all,* (November 2013) Retrieved from. https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/news/peer-led-support-help-young-people-look-after-their-mental-health

Powell, Jane (2015) 'The Gender Paradox of Suicidal Behaviour and Why We Can't Address the Issue', *HuffPost UK,* 31 March, Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jane-powell/male-suicide-rate_b_6562478.html (accessed 1 August 2017)

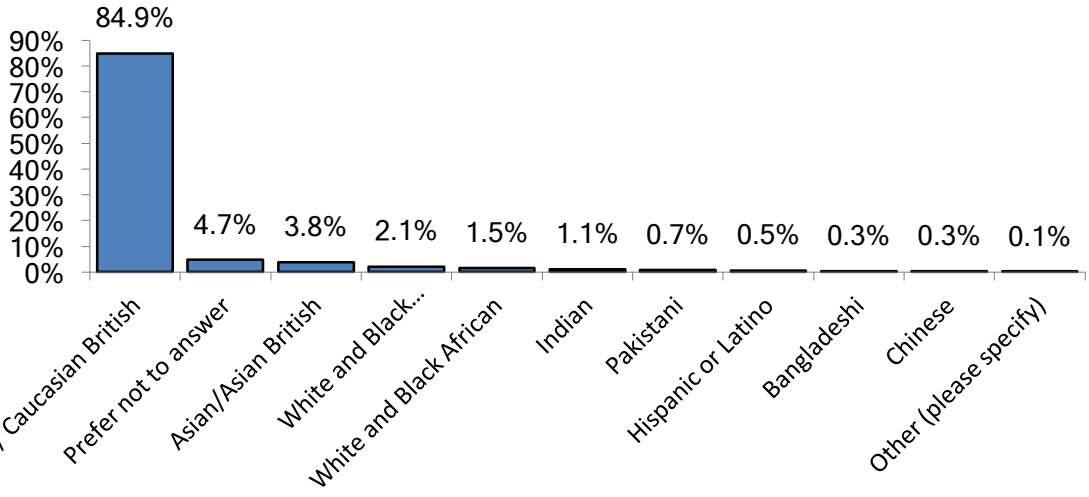
## Age Group

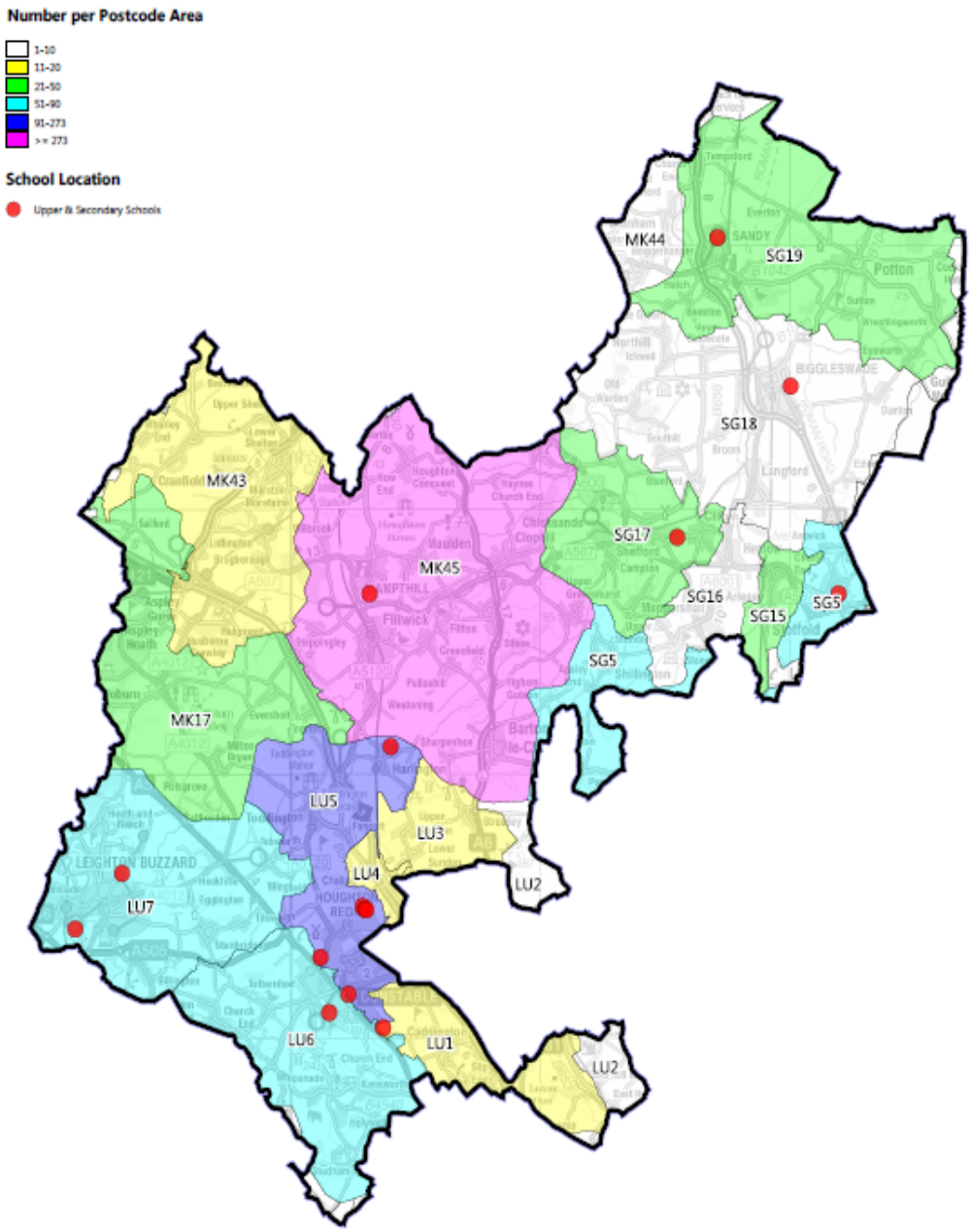



## Gender




## Ethnicity




Number per Postcode Area
1-10
11-20
21-50
51-90
91-273
>= 273
School Location
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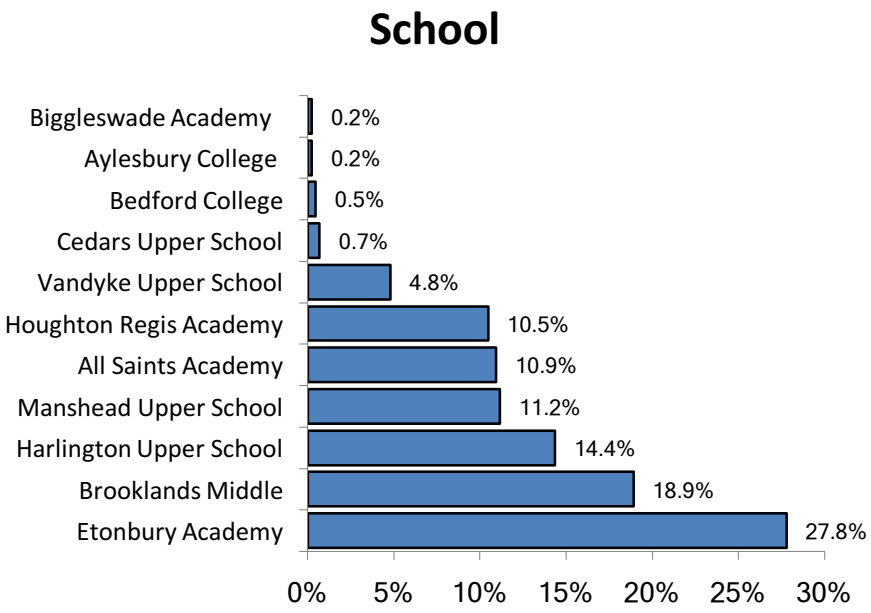
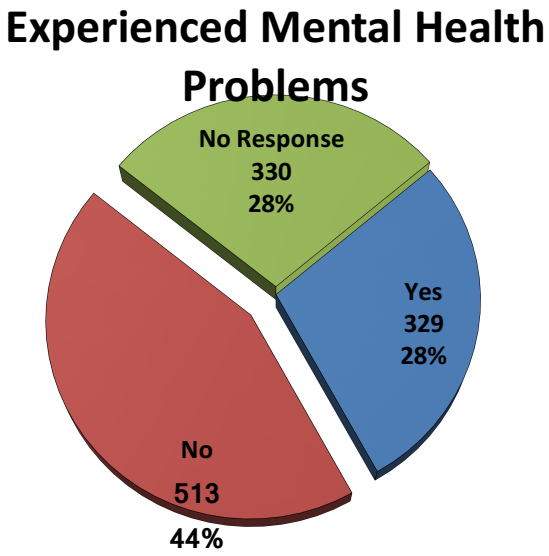
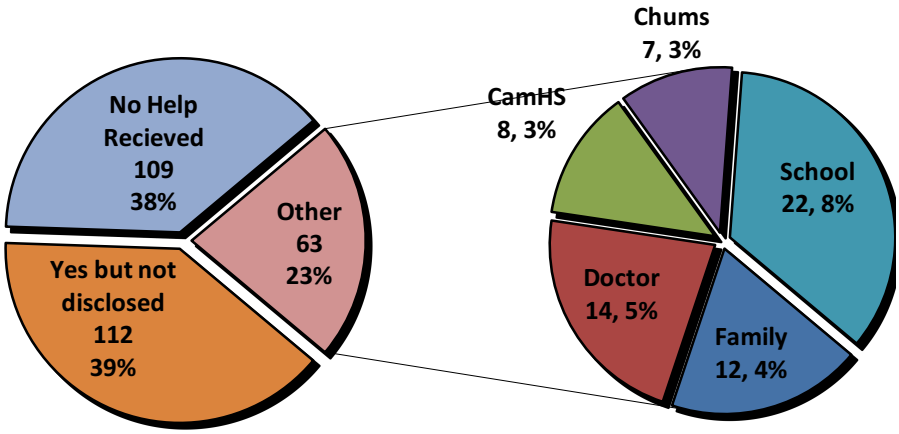
SANDY
SG19
Potton
BIGGLESWADE
SG18
MK43
Cranfield
SG17
MK45
AMPTHILL
Flitwick
SG16
SG15
SG5
SG5
MK17
LU5
LU3
LU4
LU2
LEIGHTON BUZZARD
LU7
LU6
LU1
LU2

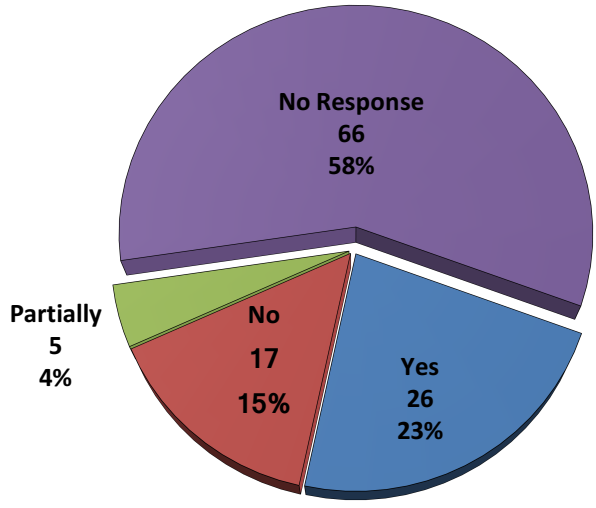

School
Biggleswade Academy
Aylesbury College
Bedford College
Cedars Upper School
Vandyke Upper School
Houghton Regis Academy
All Saints Academy
Manshead Upper School
Harlington Upper School
Brooklands Middle
Etonbury Academy
0.2%
0.2%
0.5%
0.7%
4.8%
10.5%
10.9%
11.2%
14.4%
18.9%
27.8%
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%


Experienced Mental Health Problems
No Response
330
28%
Yes
329
28%
No
513
44%

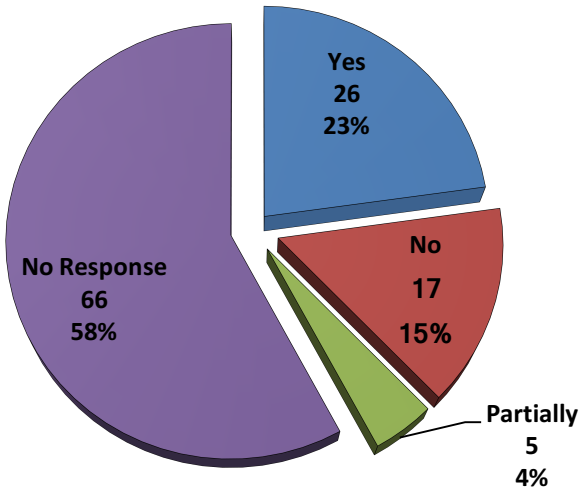
## What help did you recieve?



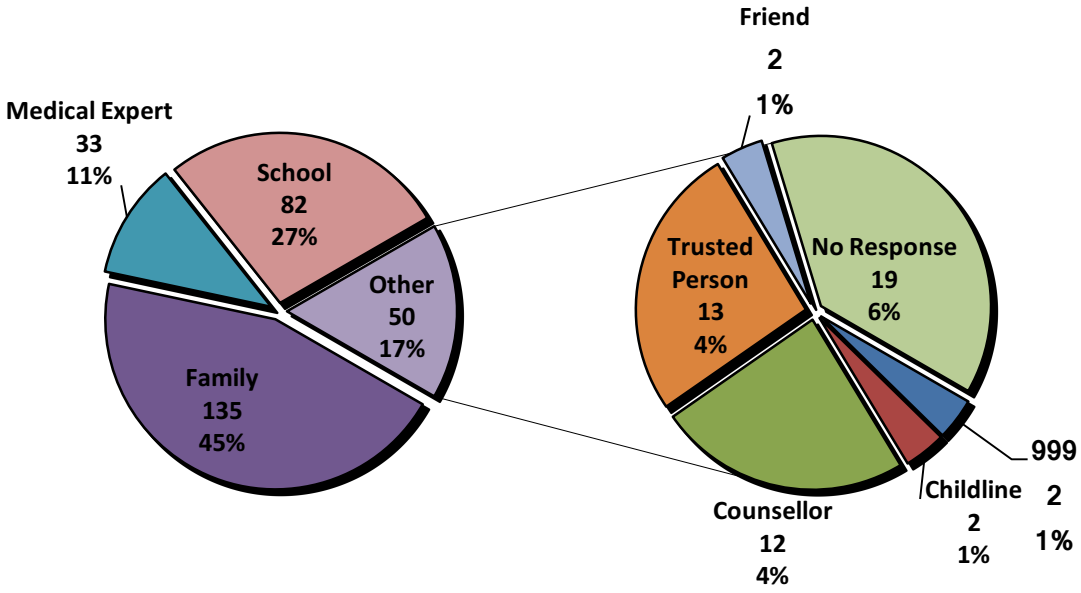

## Did the support help?



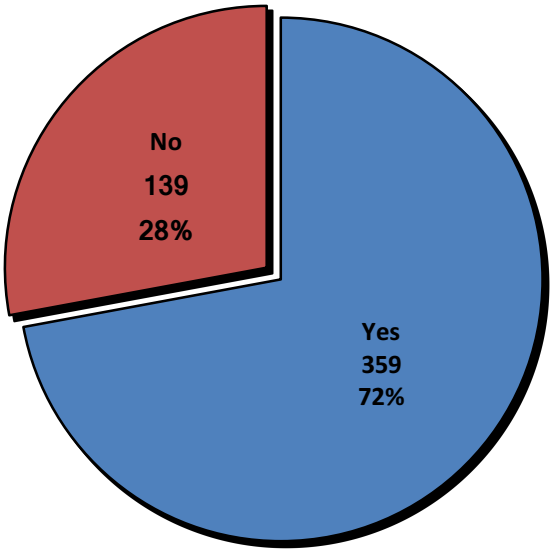
## Would you know where to go or who to ask?



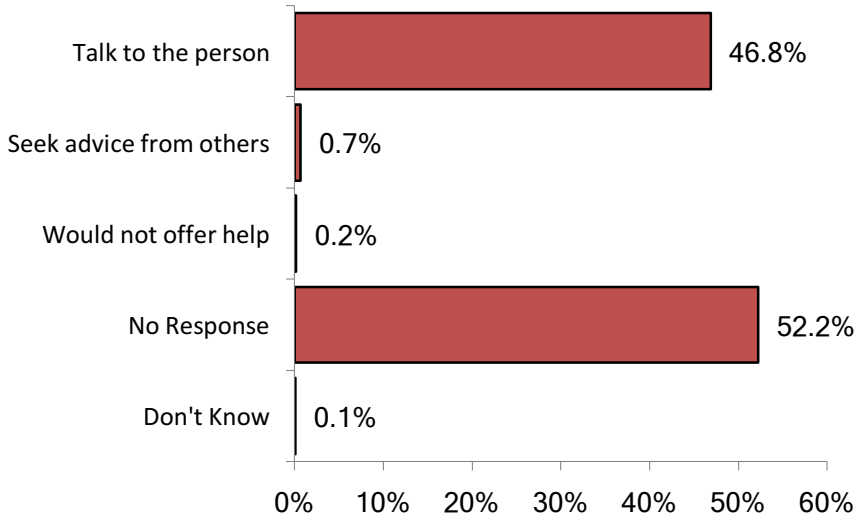

## Where would you go?



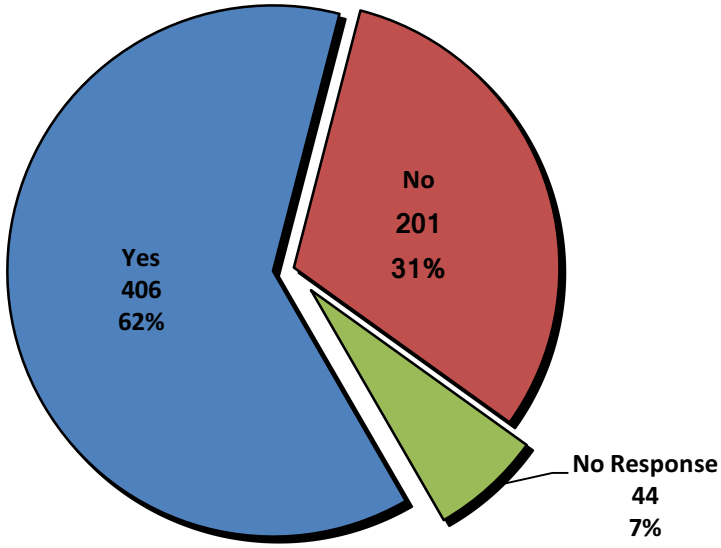
## Would you feel confident asking for help?



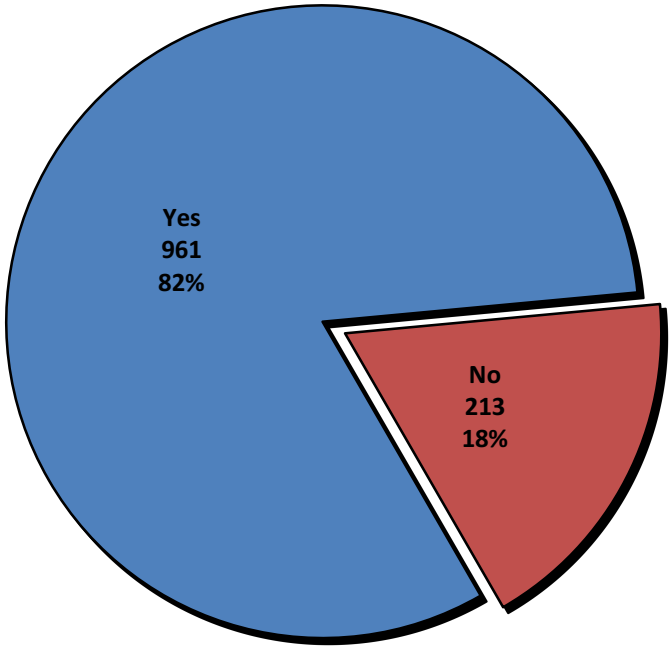

## How would you help?



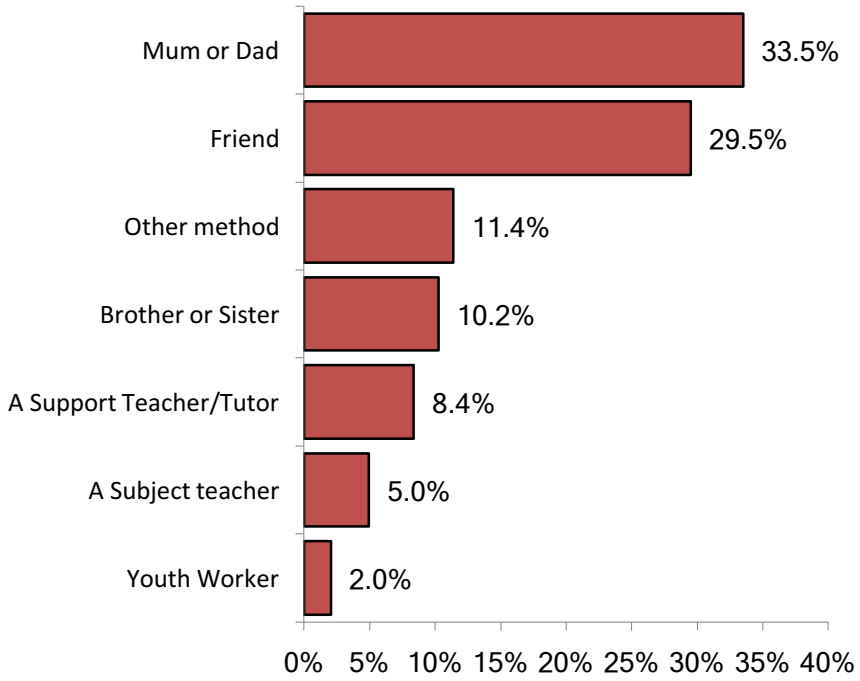
## Have you seen other people struggling?



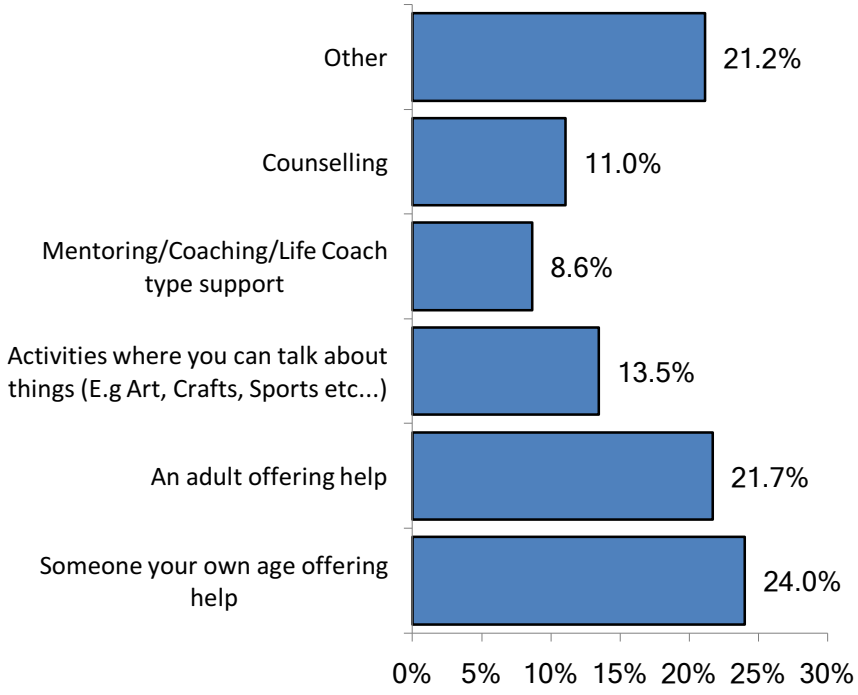

## Is there any support available if you are having a bad day?



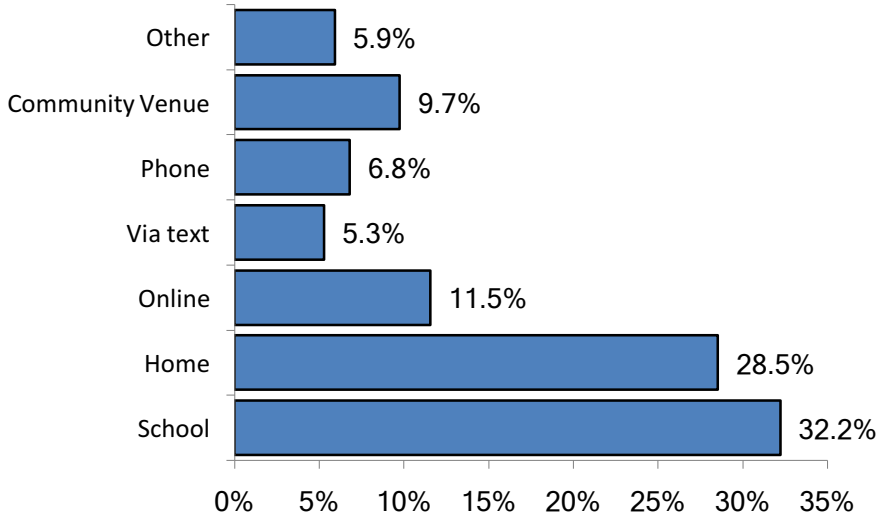
## Who would you talk to?



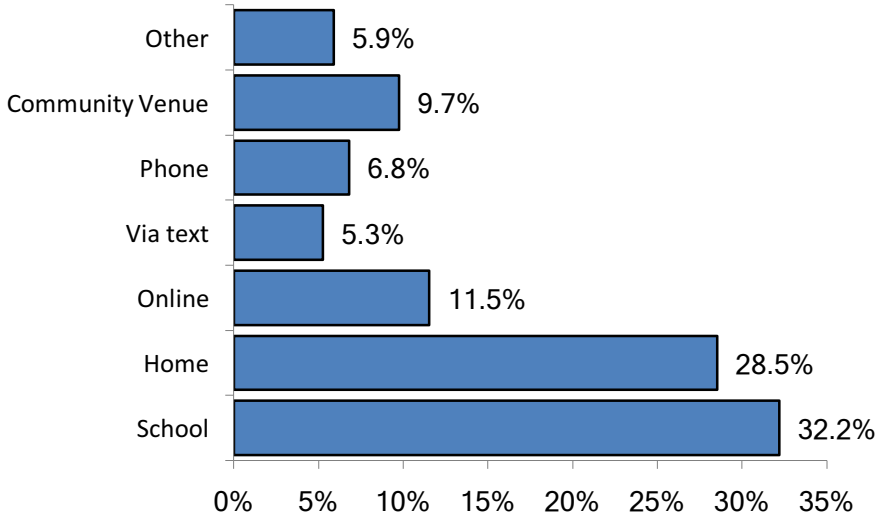

## What support should be available?



## Where would you want help?




## When would be the best time?



Central Bedfordshire

# Central Bedfordshire in contact

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