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Children living in care are more likely to have problems with their mental health than children who aren't in care. And if we don't help children and young people early enough then these problems can get worse.

If a placement breaks down it can have a detrimental impact on a child's emotional wellbeing and mental health. It can also mean increased costs to the system to find a new placement. And if a child's mental health grows worse they may need increasingly specialist placements.

We believe we all have a responsibility to break this cycle. We want to inspire system change to support good emotional wellbeing for all looked after children and to keep their placements stable.

Children in care are 4 times more likely than their peers to have a mental health difficulty.

Source: Calculation based on Office of National Statistics data.


The research found that 45% of looked after children in England, 45% of looked after children in Scotland and 49% of looked after children in Wales had a mental disorder. This included: clinically significant conduct.
disorders; emotional disorders (anxiety and depression); hyperactivity and less common disorders (pervasive developmental disorders, tics and eating disorders).

This compares to a rate of 10% for children aged 5–16 living in private households in Great Britain. This figure is from research conducted by the Office of National Statistics (Green, H. et al, 2005). Children living in foster care were excluded from this survey.

Watch: Improving the mental health of children in care

Building new evidence about what works

We've trialled a new intervention model called Face to Face, which offers short-term support to children in care using a solution-focused approach. We've been measuring how Face to Face has supported improvements in looked after children's emotional wellbeing so we can help more children.
Exploring a whole system approach

We've partnered with 4 local authorities in the UK to explore how we can take a whole system approach to promoting good emotional wellbeing for looked after children.

Our report identified 5 key priorities for system change:

1. embed an emphasis on emotional wellbeing throughout the system
2. take a proactive and preventative approach
3. give children and young people voice and influence
4. support and sustain children's relationships
5. support care leavers' emotional needs.

Read more on Achieving emotional wellbeing for looked after children: a whole system approach.

Research on the emotional wellbeing of children in care

Achieving emotional wellbeing for looked after children: a whole system approach

We report on our work with 4 UK local authorities to design a care system that better promotes the emotional wellbeing of children in care. Part of the NSPCC's

What works in preventing and treating poor mental health in looked after children?

Overview of the evidence about what works in preventing and treating poor mental health of children in care.
Promoting the wellbeing of children in care: messages from research

A book presenting chapters from academics, practitioners and policy analysts on how we can improve care for looked after children in the UK.

More about children in care

Statistics

Research and resources
Find out how many children are living in care in the UK, and other statistics about looked after children.

Research, reports and resources about children in care.

Read more

Read research and resources

Legislation, policy and guidance

Legislation, policy and guidance around children in care.

What's the law on children in care?

Support for professionals
CASPAR

Our Current Awareness Service for Practice, Policy And Research delivers free weekly email alerts to keep you up-to-date with all the latest safeguarding and child protection news.

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Information Service

Our free service for people who work with children can help you find the latest policy, practice, research and news on child protection and related subjects.

For more information, call us or email help@nspcc.org.uk.
0808 800 5000
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Impact and evidence
Find out how we evaluate and research the impact we’re making in protecting children, get tips and tools for researchers and access resources.

Our impact and evidence

Get expert training and consultancy
Grow your child protection knowledge and skills with CPD certified courses delivered by our experts nationwide and online.

Get expert training

Sharing knowledge to keep children safe
Read our guide to the NSPCC Knowledge and Information Service to find out how we can help you with child protection queries, support your research, and help you learn

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References


EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Helplines

Help for adults concerned about a child
Call us on 0808 800 5000

Help for children and young people
Call Childline on 0800 1111

For donation and fundraising queries
Call us on 020 7825 2505

Links

What we do
Preventing abuse
Donate
Services and resources
NSPCC Shop

Follow us

The NSPCC

Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH.
Leading children’s charity, incorporated by Royal Charter

Registered charity number 216401. NSPCC, charity registered in Scotland, charity number SC037717. Jersey registered charity number AJC179.

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