

What are social, emotional and mental health needs?

Everybody has social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs at one time or another, and children and young people communicate how they feel through the way they behave. SEMH needs can appear in a number of different ways, including becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour.

What are the possible SEMH needs being communicated by concerning behaviour?

- recognising, processing, managing and expressing feelings in ways which you may not expect.
- understanding and responding to social situations in ways which you may not expect.
- not building and maintaining healthy relationships with adults or other children.
- not engaging in learning opportunities and/or not feeling happy and confident about themselves and their futures.
- not controlling attention, resisting distraction, not being able to wait for rewards or organise and plan ahead.

Some or all of these difficulties may have their roots in another area of need.

For example, a young child with speech, language and communication needs will find it difficult to make themselves understood and/or to understand others. This often leads to frustration and a need to communicate in the only way they can, i.e. through their behaviour.

A child or young person with unidentified learning difficulties may find it difficult to cope in the classroom or when doing homework and easily become frustrated.



Worry about difficult housing, family or other domestic circumstances may be contributing to a child or young person's presenting behaviour.

If a child has experienced very negative interactions, or difficulties with interacting, or limited or poor bonding with caregivers in their early life; they may find it difficult to make and maintain positive relationships, have trust in people and have a good understanding of 'unacceptable' behaviour. They may present as confident or untouchable but usually feel insecure, wrong and powerless.

Children and young people's SEMH needs may be expressed as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may be identified (by their difficulties and via appropriate specialist referrals) as having [attention deficit disorder \(ADD\)](#), [attention deficit hyperactive disorder \(ADHD\)](#) or attachment disorder.

Special Educational Needs

When a child or young person has a SEMH need which is impacting on their ability to function and learn at school, and for which they require special educational provision, then they should be regarded and treated as having a Special Educational Need. Pupils do not need to have a diagnosis to access special educational needs provision.

Early identification and intervention can significantly reduce the need for more expensive and intensive interventions in the long-term. While some children and young people with SEMH needs will benefit from the support of professional agencies, it is important to remember that all adults and peers who have daily contact with children and young people can help. With good networks of support, children and young people with SEMH needs can move forward to live successful lives.

If, as a parent or carer, you have concerns about your child you should speak with your GP, health visitor or school SENCo about your concerns.

'Child in Mind' is a series of 20-minute podcasts that discuss important issues in child and family mental health:

<https://www.annafreud.org/parents-and-carers/child-in-mind/>

This link is to a NHS website with useful suggestions for looking after your children's mental health: <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/#custom-2column-share-shelf>