

**Where is the teenage angst epidemic taking us?
80% of 12-to-16 year-olds admit to suffering from anxiety**

New stem4 survey reveals children's and parents' concerns over mental health

- Most children and young people believe the Government should radically rethink its approach to mental health: They want ready access to mental health professionals and see first aid by teachers as only useful if it can lead to treatment.
- Just 5% of 12-to-16 year olds would turn to a teacher for help if they felt depressed, anxious stressed or emotionally unable to cope, and just 2% would approach their GP. Half would turn to family for support
- A third of parents fear that mental health issues will leave their children unable to enjoy their teenage years
- One in five parents still believe that girls are more likely than boys to develop mental health problems
- Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist says *“Whilst I have the greatest respect for teachers and their skills you can't expect teachers to cover the role of mental health professionals - identifying and referring vulnerable young people to stretched and under resourced services that are likely to refuse the referral anyway. Our schools have currently become waiting lists for treatment.”*

Eight out of ten children (79%) as young as 12 and 13 have reported feelings associated with poor mental health since starting secondary school, a new survey commissioned by stem4 has found.

Topping the list of anxieties among 12- to-16 year-olds are exam worries (41%); work overload (31%); friendship concerns (28%) and worries about being accepted by their peers (23%); lack of confidence (26%); concerns with body image (26%); low self-esteem (15%), and feelings of being overwhelmed (25%). One in ten teenagers even reported strong feelings of anxiety around current world affairs.

These issues are now commonplace among 12-to-16 year olds – 79% of them reported feelings of stress and distress since starting secondary school – so it is no surprise to learn that two-thirds of parents have concerns over their children's mental health.

Parents fear that poor mental health will leave their children: unable to enjoy their teenage years (35%); isolated, with no friends (26%); unable to access suitable treatment to help them recover (20%); struggling to achieve good grades and failing to get into a good university (17%), and liable to suffer from poor mental health as adults if they do not benefit from suitable support sooner rather than later (28%).

All these findings emerge from a survey commissioned by **stem4**, a charity which works to prevent mental ill health in teenagers. In the survey of 500 12-to-16 year-olds, it found that most teenagers don't think the UK Government goes far enough in its “package of measures” to transform society's responses to increased stress and mental illness in young people.

The Government recently announced that it will pilot new approaches to young people's mental health, offering “first aid training for teachers and staff to help them identify and assist children experiencing mental health problems”. But **stem4**'s survey has found that only a third (38%) of teenagers thought the Government's proposal was a good idea.

A third (36%) of young people go as far as to say that the initiative will prove woefully inadequate, since one teacher in a school of over 1,000 pupils will make no difference. Three out of ten (31%)

said it will only be a good idea if the teacher is able to make referrals to a mental health professional and if the pupil is able to get help quickly. One in five (20%) would prefer to see a properly trained mental health professional in the school, not a teacher, while 16% want the option of seeing someone completely independent of their school.

Taking this further, a third (32%) of young people say that the Government should channel funding into the creation of dedicated young people's health hubs – away from school – where a young person could turn up without an appointment, talk to a doctor anonymously, and if need be, receive further treatment. One in five (20%) say that every secondary school in the country should provide workshops and counselling sessions – to be run by independent mental health professionals, not teachers. One in ten (10%) want private online consultations with a doctor or mental health professional and treatment through apps, while 12% wanted better access to healthcare professionals in a medical setting, such as a doctor's surgery or a hospital. Around a quarter, 27%, didn't have a view on the matter.

The survey also showed that just 5% of teenagers would turn to a teacher for help if they felt depressed, anxious, stressed or emotionally unable to cope. Half (50%) would ask a parent or carer for help; 18% would choose a friend and 11% a family member. Just 2% would seek help from their family doctor, while 4% say they wouldn't ask anyone for help.

Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist and founder of **stem4**, said:

“We've known for a long time that young people's health services are at crisis point, barely dealing with moderate to severe psychological problems. But, as this survey shows, more and more young people are now willing to admit that they struggle to cope emotionally with the challenges of daily life which are now posing much greater levels of stress. High levels of stress, if not dealt with at an early stage, are likely to lead to more serious problems in later life. The big question is: at this early stage in their lives, when appropriate support and intervention is most likely to be effective, where are young people going to turn for help?

Unless we want to lose the next generation to mental ill health we need to start investing properly in the future of the country – our young people. First of all, we all need to become mental health-literate so that we can spot the early signs of mental ill health. This applies not just to teachers, but also to parents and friends, who, as young people tell us, are the first people they will turn to for help.

Once the signs have been spotted, appropriate services need to be at hand. GP and primary care services need to become more user-friendly, making clear to children and young people that they can benefit from their services. Young people need better access to early interventions provided by properly trained mental health professionals who can either deal with these problems directly or make referrals to appropriate secondary services. Unfortunately, although the Government has pledged money to early intervention and specialist services, no money has been ring-fenced for increasing the training or retention of expert professionals.”

The survey was commissioned to support **stem4**'s first Conference on Teenage Mental Health, designed to help parents identify and respond positively to any early signs of mental ill health in their children. The conference took place on Monday 20th March at Wimbledon College, London and was attended by 130 parents. In addition to polling 12-to-16 year-olds, the survey asked 500 parents in the UK for their views on children aged 12 to 16:

- Three out of four parents (74%) report that their children have shown signs anxiety since starting secondary school.

- Just 40% are confident they could identify poor mental health in their children
- 22% think girls are more likely than boys to develop mental health problems, particularly in the areas of eating disorder (58% of girls vs 2% of boys), self-harm (35% of girls vs 5% of boys), mood disorders (20% of girls vs 10% of boys) and anxiety (13% of girls vs. 7% of boys).

Iain Maitland, author of *Dear Michael, Love Dad*, spoke at the conference, along with his son Michael, who suffered from anorexia nervosa and clinical depression while at university. He said:

“It is a fact that girls are more likely to develop an eating disorder than boys, so in a sense parents are correct in their assumptions. However, mental health problems can strike anyone, regardless of their gender, at any time. When I finally woke up to the reality that Michael was suffering from anorexia, I was shocked. ‘Surely this is a disease that affects girls, not boys’, I thought. By stereotyping mental illness, we become blind to the blinding obvious. What I’ve learnt, and what I hope to impart to other parents, is that we all need to become mental health-literate, and not just rely on the professionals, if we are to give our children the best chance of happiness in the future”

- Ends -

Notes to Editors

For further information about stem4, comment or interviews, please contact SENSO Communications.

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About the survey

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from OnePoll. The total sample of 1000 respondents comprised 500 adults and 500 12-to-16 year olds. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th February and 24th February 2017. The survey was carried out online.

Stem4 Parents Conference on Teenage Mental Health

The **stem4** conference brought together mental health experts and parents at Wimbledon College at 7pm on Monday 20th March. It was designed to help parents with children in secondary school and who want to know more about mental health trends and common mental ill health problems in children and young people. The conference helped parents develop their awareness of mental health, understand how mental ill health affects learning and social development, and identify strategies, which could help every parent manage their child’s mental well-being. It focussed on the early identification and intervention in four specific areas of mental health: eating disorders; anxiety and depression; self-harm and addiction.

Speakers included

- Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, and founder of **stem4**
- Iain Maitland, and author of *Dear Michael, Love Dad*, along with his son Michael
- Miriam George, a parent of two sons who have suffered with mental health problems.
- Rosie Day, the actress, who talked about the impact of having a brother or sister who suffers from mental illness

Anxieties affecting 12 to 16 year olds, by gender:

	Male	Female
Exam worries	34.57%	47.08%
Work overload	26.34%	36.19%
Body image concerns	17.28%	35.02%
Friendship concerns	20.99%	35.02%
Lack of confidence	21.40%	31.13%
Social worries (e.g. worries about being accepted by your peers)	15.23%	29.57%
Feeling overwhelmed	20.16%	29.18%
Arguments with parents/family members	18.93%	22.96%
Uncertainties about my future	14.40%	21.79%
Over-thinking	13.58%	19.46%
Low self-esteem	11.52%	19.07%
Dislike of school/anxiety at attending school	18.52%	17.51%
Worries about world affairs	6.58%	12.06%

Following **stem4's** 2016 survey on GP training needs in child and adolescent mental health*, **stem4** trains GPs in early identification and intervention, and is part of the RCGP toolkit. **stem4** is also currently developing guidelines for GPs on engaging and working with children and young people when it comes to their mental health needs.

*'A Time Bomb Waiting to Explode' (Krause, 2016 for **stem4**)