

# SAFE & SOUND



03

Welcome to Best Foot Forward's safeguarding newsletter, bringing you the latest insights on current safeguarding topics and educational legislation. Let's take a look at what's new and unfolding in this constantly changing landscape!

## SEXUALITY & GENDER IDENTITY

The NSPCC has published information demonstrating the significant impact sexuality and gender identity have on adolescents and young people

For a more detailed look at the data surrounding this, and a full picture of the NSPCC's findings, please check out this article.

**LEARN MORE ON PAGE 2**



## WAITING TIMES & INEQUALITY IN MENTAL HEALTH

The demand for children's mental health services continues to increase, putting a higher burden on services than the investment made in them.

If you are interested in knowing more, please read on.

**LEARN MORE ON PAGES 3 & 4**







# SEXUALITY & GENDER IDENTITY

In 2024/2025, Childline delivered over 2,400 counselling sessions to children and young people with issues or concerns about sexuality and gender identity.

The data reveals that two in five of these counselling sessions were about coming out. That is 40%. Many young people expressed their anxieties about being judged if they were to reveal their sexuality. These same young people said they were especially worried about their parents' reaction, being alienated from peer groups and were recognising the impact that this was having on their own mental health as a result.



**"I want to tell my parents I'm bisexual but I am scared of what they'll think. They come from a strict background, and I've seen them judging others for being gay. We're close but they don't have a clue about me. I don't want to disappoint them, I just want to be accepted for who I am." Boy, aged 16**

Childline reports that of the calls taken from young people about sexuality and gender identity, some further concerns included;

- Questioning sexuality or gender identity
- Discrimination or prejudice
- Bullying

Childline Director, Shaun Friel, says:

**"Coming out remains one of the main subjects that young people want to discuss when contacting Childline about their sexuality or gender identity."**

**It is a privilege that young people turn to the service to help them navigate a pivotal and potentially difficult moment in their lives. Our trained counsellors are there to offer impartial support to help them to manage these often complex emotions."**

Although July was Pride Month, the matter remains very topical and prevalent in people's minds, and Childline is a confidential place for young people to turn to for help and support.

## Help and resources for adults and children:

- Childline phone number 0800 1111
- [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)  
(Web pages, 1 to 1 chat and BSL interpretation)
- [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- [www.genderedintelligence.co.uk](http://www.genderedintelligence.co.uk)
- [www.switchboard.lgbt/](http://www.switchboard.lgbt/)
- [www.mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk)
- [www.dsdteens.org](http://www.dsdteens.org)
- [www.akt.org.uk](http://www.akt.org.uk)
- [www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)
- [www.mindlinetrans.org.uk](http://www.mindlinetrans.org.uk)
- [www.mindout.org.uk](http://www.mindout.org.uk)
- [www.transactual.org.uk](http://www.transactual.org.uk)

# Waiting Times & INEQUALITY IN MENTAL HEALTH

The Children's Commissioner's annual report on the state of children's mental health services provides some stark findings on the huge inequalities when it comes to accessing support. This report highlights that some young people find themselves waiting up to 17 times longer than others, depending on the area in which they live. The data captured within the report represents children's experiences with the mental health services in England and portrays a very dismal picture. Nearly 60,000 children in England between 2023-2024 were referred to mental health services for being in 'crisis'. However, a further 50,000 more children with active referrals were still waiting for treatment to commence at the end of March 2024. Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner for England, has urged health

professionals and politicians to put children at the heart of the forthcoming NHS 10 Year plan. Previous research by the office shows children with additional vulnerabilities are often the ones most at risk of missing out on education. The most recent report published in May 2025 finds that children in England awaiting treatment for mental health conditions face a mixed picture, despite increases in funding for mental health services. As well as regional inequalities within the mental health services, the data showed that black children, older teenagers and girls among groups were most likely to be referred for a mental health crisis. New analysis reveals greater waiting times for treatment when looking at children's direct contact with professionals only. Please see below for a breakdown of the findings:

## Total Numbers

More than 958,200 children in England have an active referral to Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS). This is an equivalent to 8% of England's population of 12 million children.

## Referral Reason

Anxiety was the most common primary referral reason, followed by neurodevelopmental conditions excluding autism, suspected autism and 'in crisis'

## Age Groups

More than three quarters of children entering treatment were over the age of 10. Children aged 13 - 15 were the largest group accessing treatment making up 35% of all those entering treatment.

## Waiting Times

More children began treatment in 2023-2024 - 92% entered treatment within the year, and 45% within four weeks. 50,000 more children with active referrals were still waiting for treatment to begin at the end of the year.

## Direct Contact with Professionals

New analysis of previously unpublished data reveals waiting times are higher when only counting direct activity with children and discounting other types of contact usually counted in official published data, such as a professional attending a multi-disciplinary meeting to discuss a child's case.

To support a reform, particularly through the NHS 10 Year Plan, the Children's Commissioner has made the following recommendations:

## *Early Access to* **SUPPORT**

All children should be able to get mental health help in their schools and communities without needing a diagnosis or medical label. Mental Health Support Teams must continue being rolled out to all schools ahead of 2030 in line with the government's manifesto commitment, and the new Young Futures Hubs must offer open-access support in every Integrated Care Board area.

## *Support in* **SCHOOL**

Alongside the roll-out of Mental Health Support Teams, any child on a CYPMHS waiting list or receiving treatment and beginning to disengage from school should automatically be referred to a multi-agency attendance forum and assigned a key worker to address underlying issues.

## *Shorter Waiting* **TIMES**

Children should wait no longer than four weeks for assessment and four weeks for treatment. This will require additional, annual, ring-fenced funding for children's mental health services in every area.

## *Better Data &* **TRANSPARENCY**

The government must introduce a single, meaningful national measure of waiting times from referral to treatment - not just 'activity' that may not involve direct contact with children.

## *Support for marginalised* **CHILDREN**

Targeted investment in community-led therapeutic services is needed to reach children less likely to access NHS services - particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled children, and children in care.

## *Improved diagnostic* **PATHWAYS**

Children with autism, ADHD and other neurodevelopmental conditions face some of the longest waits. The government must commission urgently an independent review of diagnostic and post-diagnostic support for children, so that whether they are referred for diagnostic assessment or not is not subject to a postcode lottery.