

'MOVEMENT IS THE MAINSPRING FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH'

News from The All Party Parliamentary Group on A Fit and Healthy Childhood

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Getting children moving can kick-start a solution to the children's mental health crisis according to the APPG on A Fit and Healthy Childhood. Welcoming '*Mental Health through Movement*,' APPG Chair, Steve McCabe MP said:

'Nobody nowadays will deny that a crisis in children's mental health exists. We're saying that getting children moving is an obvious part of the solution.'

Health education has been statutory since September 2019 and pupils should expect at least thirty active minutes per day. Professionals and parents need guidance but unless some of the excellent examples that we list here are shared, most children won't derive the benefit. This is a responsibility of Government just as much as providing much-needed additional funding streams for children's mental health services.'

The report cites an '*all pervasive*' digital culture for instilling a compulsion for children to stay indoors and stay still; alongside draconian reductions in opportunities for outdoor play. Children are '*pushed indoors*' by screens and '*pushed away*' from outdoor play but the schemes (some of which are listed) below can offer a way forward if advocated by Government as part of a '*Movement in Mind*' strategy:

- **Stormbreak (www.stormbreak.org.uk)** CIO is a charity registered in England and Wales (Charity no 1182771) that works with senior primary school-leavers and teachers in shaping a whole school approach to embedding mental health benefits through movements for every child every day
- **Girls Active** (funded by Sport England) is a flexible action-planned framework to help teachers and girls in understanding what motivates them to move more
- **OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) Programme** is a structured play-based intervention, successfully delivered into hundreds of schools in ten countries worldwide
- **Energise for Healthier lives (E4HL)** is a year London Borough of Camden lifestyle year support package for children and families who are inactive and have an unhealthy lifestyle
- **Clear Sky (Play and Creative Arts) charity** is an intervention model to help children who have been referred for therapy following trauma.

The report was jointly sponsored by the universities of Bournemouth and Winchester. Professor Mike Silk (Bournemouth) and Dr Vicky Randall (Winchester) said:

‘Through this report, we celebrate the many fantastic ways that movement in all its many forms, is being realised. The relationship between movement and positive mental health is absolutely crucial but is often ignored.

As the many examples of excellent practice show, movement can be a simple, inclusive yet powerful medium for young people to learn how to thrive in this modern world. We hope that our report encourages more people to celebrate just how wonderful movement can be in forming positive relationships, growing confidence, strengthening resilience and nurturing optimism in young people.’

APPG Lead Author Helen Clark added:

‘The examples that we are proud to showcase in this report are proof that simply throwing money at the problem won’t do. Parents need help in learning how to dissuade their children from excessive screen use and to promote positive movement and activity. Otherwise, how can they benefit from the great schemes operating in some parts of the country?’

Parents want the best for their children and rather than resenting ‘Nanny State’ interference are seeking a helping hand from the Government. All too often there is none forthcoming.

It is time now for the Government to step up. Mental health services need money. But equally, parents must be empowered to create the opportunity in which to enable their children to develop the healthy movement behaviour that will enhance minds as well as bodies.

Government must understand that to diffuse the crisis in children’s mental health before it becomes an epidemic, ‘motivating’ and ‘meddling’ are not synonymous.’

ENDS

Contact: Helen Clark, 07504 460315