

Our response to the Government's new Green Paper on Children and Young People's mental health



Last month the Department of Health and the Department for Education released a Green Paper to consult on mental health provision for children and young people. It sets out 3 key proposals for schools and the NHS to improve services. These are:

- Every school and college will identify a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health, whose role will be to oversee the approach to mental health and wellbeing, and to assist in ensuring effective links are made to mental health services when needed;
- Funding of new Mental Health Support Teams which will work with schools and colleges to provide support to children and young people with mild to moderate needs, and to promote good mental health and wellbeing;
- A reduction in waiting times, with the introduction of a four-week waiting time to access specialist NHS children and young people's mental health services.

This approach will be rolled out to at least one fifth to one quarter of England by the end of 2022/23.

The Green Paper also includes further proposals which include:

- Convening a working group of social media and digital sector companies to explore what more they can do to keep children safe online;
- Production by the Chief Medical Officer of a report on the impact of technology on the mental health of young people;
- Consultation on draft statutory guidance for Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and potentially Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), to secure good quality teaching;
- Mental health awareness training for teachers;
- Research into interventions that support parents and carers with the quality of attachment relationships with their babies;
- Work on improving the mental health of 16-25-year olds.

A quick read version of the green paper is [HERE](#)

And the full green paper is [HERE](#)

THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH.
The consultation closes at noon on 2 March 2018. Take part in the consultation by clicking [HERE](#) and following the link

The Naval Families Federation will not have access to your comments unless you choose to share them with us directly. If you would like to tell us your views, please email us at contactus@nff.org.uk and include the words 'Green Paper on Children and Young People's mental health' in the subject field.

Our response

The Naval Families Federation welcomes the publication of the Green Paper, and its proposals for improving children and young people's mental health and well-being through earlier intervention and prevention, particularly through education settings and by exploring enhanced support to families.

We remain, however, concerned that the timescales and reach of the key three proposals will deliver too little, too late, for the unprecedented number of children and young people, and their families, who are currently in need of professional support.



We would like to see children and young people from Armed Forces families specifically identified in the Government's priorities and plans for the future, and in any future White Paper. We would also like to see

reference made to the provisions of the Armed Forces Covenant in relation to removing disadvantage in accessing healthcare for the children and young people of the Armed Forces community.

The Green Paper identifies the following potentially 'vulnerable groups' of children and young people:

- Children looked after or previously looked after
- Children in need, including young carers and children who have been exposed to domestic abuse
- Children and young people with special educational needs or disability
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people
- Young offenders
- Young people involved in gangs
- Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

Children and young people from Armed Forces families are not yet included. They are an 'invisible group' whose mental health and wellbeing needs are frequently overlooked, possibly because they do not fit with common perceptions of 'vulnerability' and may present as resilient and stoic.

They often display positive qualities including flexibility, sociability, determination and courage. Nevertheless there is strong evidence that shows that, whilst being part of an Armed Forces family may enhance resilience and resourcefulness, it involves significant challenges in addition to those experienced by children and young people in the general population. These can, and frequently do, have an impact on this cohort of children and young people and their mental health and wellbeing.



What challenges face children and young people from Armed Forces families?

Ofsted carried out a survey in 2011 which examined the quality of provision and outcomes for children and young people who are in families of currently serving Service personnel. It concluded that, although some Service families' children were more resilient than others, a key impact of Service life on children and young people was one of social and emotional disturbance.¹

The mobility associated with Service life can have a detrimental impact on children's emotional well-being, through a range of challenges including the disruption of friendships, family bonds and support networks in the wider community. It may also have a detrimental impact on their educational attainment. Children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) are particularly vulnerable during transitions between schools.

“Service children have unique needs. Whether living in the UK or overseas, they face challenges that often go beyond the experience of the majority of families and children living in the UK.” (Ofsted, 2011)

¹ Ofsted (2011). *Children in Service families*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-service-families>



The operational tempo for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines is undiminished since the withdrawal of UK Armed Forces from Afghanistan. The frequency, duration, and sometimes unpredictability, of operational deployments by a parent can have far-reaching consequences for Service families. Naval Service families are geographically dispersed across the UK and overseas, and may not be located near family or Service support.

Deployments may last for periods of up to 9 months, sometimes (as is the case for

submariners, for example) with no contact with home. Both deployment and 'weekending' lifestyles involve separation and disruption to family life, which have an effect on children and young people's emotional and mental well-being.

These types of separation may have a particular impact on babies and young children who are at a key stage of their development. The impact of being part of an Armed Forces family may change over time and as children grow and develop.

In extreme cases, a parent's service in the Armed Forces could result in bereavement, or to a family having to accept and live with physical or mental harm to a parent.

A small number of Service children and young people have lone parents serving in the Armed Forces who are deployed away from home. Such children may be cared for by other family members or carers.

Children from families of foreign and Commonwealth Service people may face huge change and upheaval on moving to the UK and face additional challenges including language, cultural and religious differences, forming friendships, and unfamiliar food and climate.

The Green Paper identifies young carers as a group of children and young people who may be especially vulnerable. Within this cohort are young carers from Armed Forces families, who are a 'hidden group within a hidden group', and may become young carers as a result of their connection to the Armed Forces.

The Children's Society was commissioned by NHS England to investigate the needs of children in Armed Forces Families with caring responsibilities for a family member with a disability or additional needs.² They might be caring for a serving parent who has returned from deployment and is injured physically or experiencing mental health

"It was hard when my dad went away for 6-9 months deployment. It was hard for me because my responsibilities had changed. When my Dad went away my mum relied on me to help care and look after my younger brother who has learning disabilities. This has had an impact on my life. I used to struggle at school and then I used to come home and I found it hard to get any homework done." (Young Carer, aged 10. Children's Society, 2017)

² The Children's Society (2017). *Young Carers in Armed Forces Families*. Available at: <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/youngcarer/our-work/armed-forces>

needs, a non-serving parent remaining at home who is affected by illness or disability, or sibling(s) or other family members affected by illness or disability.

Parental deployment is associated with an increased incidence of children and young people taking on caring responsibilities, for example for a younger sibling or parent with health needs (McCullouch and Hall, 2016).³



Children and young people from Armed Forces families may not self-identify to schools and colleges to access support, sometimes out of a desire to 'fit in' or where there is stigmatisation of their connection to the Armed Forces. This sometimes occurs where there is public dislike of military campaigns or activity.

One in ten Naval spouses have said that their family has experienced hostility from local people because they were identified as a Service family.⁴

This is not a niche issue. In 2017-18, 75,268 Service children in England attracted Service Pupil Premium⁵ for their schools, and there are many more Service children living in the devolved nations and overseas.

The Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The recently launched Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy identifies that combat exposure, the stress associated with deployment and the return home are known risk factors for Armed Forces personnel. These factors also impact on families, children and young people, and their mental health. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) strategy refers to the fact that the MOD and Department of Health have a Strategic Partnership to renew and strengthen the partnership between military and civil health services. It also states an aim to reach the extent of the Defence People, including Service families⁶. For this to happen, any future White Paper on children and young people's mental health and well-being needs to refer to children and young people from Armed Forces families as a potentially vulnerable group.

The mental health provision and support that has been funded through the Covenant Fund to date has been for adults, and mainly focuses on serving people and veterans. Children and young people access support through education settings and the NHS, which makes it essential that their needs are recognised and understood.

#CYPGreenPaper18

³ McCullouch, J. and Hall, M. (2016). *Further and higher progression for Service Children*. Available at: https://www.scipalliance.org/assets/files/UoW-research-paper_Further-and-Higher-Progression-for-Service-Children.pdf

⁴ Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund (2009). *The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict*. Available at: http://rnrchildrensfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/overlooked_casualties_of_conflict_report.pdf

⁵ Department for Education written question (2017). *Service Pupil Premium*. Available at: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2017-12-04.117252.h&s=%22service+children%22+number#g117252.ro>

⁶ Ministry of Defence (2017). *Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-people-mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy>