

Spring 2024

Spurgeons 

# Together



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### Children's mental health in crisis:

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Thank you for all you do in  
support of children and families!

Some readers might find this topic distressing as we refer to unresolved children's mental health issues. If you have been affected, please seek help.

"I do not think it is an overstatement to speak of a crisis in children's mental health and the services needed to support them." Children's Commissioner, 2024

# From Spurgeons CEO

**1 in 5 children and young people are struggling with mental health issues, and simply not getting the help they need, when they need it. You probably know children and young people in your church or community that are affected.**

For years, state provision for children and young people has been drastically underfunded. Care Commissioning Group areas spend less than 1% of their budgets on children's mental health. It's not enough.

It means that only those children and young people with the most serious, critical issues get referred to CAMHS for support (CAMHS is essentially A&E for children's mental health).

Even so, they have to wait 5 months on average to be seen. That's too long.

What of the rest? Without support their mental health often deteriorates, creating huge problems for them, their families and for charities like Spurgeons who have to help them pick up the pieces. It's inhumane, and it's unacceptable.

That's why we decided that this edition of Together magazine should focus on children and young people's mental health. Why have cases risen? What's gone wrong and do we think there is a simple, sustainable solution?

You'll be glad to know that the answer is "yes" (more on page 4). And, through volunteering, praying and donating, you are already playing a key part in that solution, enabling 30,000 children and families a year to get support. Thank you!

But our vision is to do far, far more. Through partnering with the church and with your continued support, our heart is to transform the nation, one child at a time, so no cry goes unanswered.



**Ian Soars**  
Chief Executive,  
Spurgeons

## Pray with us

Lord God, thank you for giving us the amazing gift of life. We pray for those children and families whose circumstances make it hard for them to flourish – particularly those who are struggling with mental health challenges right now. We ask that you help us to do all we can with all you have blessed us with so that we might support them to be able to live their best lives. Amen.

If you'd like to receive our prayer news and pray regularly for children and families in need, please email [prayernews@spurgeons.org](mailto:prayernews@spurgeons.org).

## Make a gift of love!

You can help even more families get the support that they so desperately need in these challenging times by making a monthly gift to Spurgeons! You can make your gift online at [spurgeons.org/donate](https://spurgeons.org/donate), or by phone on **01933 417059** (Monday–Friday 9am–4pm)

**Thank you for your kindness!**

We have changed names and some identifying details where necessary to protect our contributors.

## The state of children's mental health support

### Why have numbers risen?

The usual issues – family breakdown, bereavement, problems at school, neurodiversity challenges – have been heightened by wider societal challenges. Successive Covid lockdowns brought huge changes to daily life and isolated young people from their friends and wider family. The cost of living crisis led to the highest increase in absolute poverty in 30 years<sup>4</sup>. Social media can fuel feelings of inadequacy<sup>5</sup>, and act as a channel for bullying<sup>6</sup>.

### State support – slow and limited to critical cases.

In 2022-23, 1 million children with the most serious mental health issues have been referred to CAMHS (the NHS's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). However, only 305,000 have been seen. 372,800 were rejected and 270,000 are still waiting to be seen. 32,200 of them have been waiting over 2 years which is a significant portion of their young lives.

The mental health of those not getting support often deteriorates further<sup>7</sup>, which can impact their education, social development, health – and ultimately their future.

### If children don't meet the criteria for CAMHS, what help do they get?

Very little is being done by the state by way of prevention and early intervention, meaning more children and young people are on a path towards crisis.

But it's a crisis that needn't happen, with the right support, as you'll read overleaf.

### If your child is struggling with mental health issues, we can help – see page 7.

<sup>1</sup>NHS England Digital: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023

<sup>2</sup>Children's Commissioner: Children's mental health services 2022-23 (March 2024)

<sup>3</sup>Local Government Association: Children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health – facts and figures (Sept 2023)

<sup>4</sup>Department of Work and Pensions (March 2024)

<sup>5</sup>Education Policy Institute, 2021

<sup>6</sup>Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2022

<sup>7</sup>Royal College of Psychiatrists, February 2024



# Let no child's cry go unanswered

Without better prevention and early intervention, the current crisis in children's mental health will continue.

What is needed to bring that crisis to an end is a national safety net of easily accessible, grassroots family support. Below, we outline Spurgeons' vision for this, and what the incoming Government needs to do so every family gets that vital early help.



## 1. A national network of Family Hubs

We partner with churches to establish Family Hubs in the heart of the communities they serve. Family Hubs offer wraparound "universal" support to families, such as playgroups, parenting classes, health education to help every family with children in their locality.

As families access those services, they build strong relationships with the people delivering them. That makes it easier to share any problems they are facing, including children's mental health issues, and for the Family Hub personnel to assist them.

If specialist, targeted support is needed, the Family Hub connects that family into the right professionals (statutory support, Spurgeons or other organisations).

**The Government needs to ensure the rollout of Hubs is not delayed, and that they are sufficiently funded.**

## 2. More mental health support in schools

Schools are another good place to provide children and young people with early mental health support. Spurgeons delivers counselling in schools and wherever possible expands that into being a school-based Family Hub with whole family care.

However, schools are not obliged to provide counselling and, with school staff and budgets under pressure, provision is patchy.

**The Government must provide adequate, ringfenced funding, so that schools can buy in services rather than ask yet more of existing staff and budgets.**

## 3. More support for parents

If their child has an unidentified mental health problem, parents may simply not know how best to help them. Equipping them to offer the right support can really benefit their child's recovery.

That's why Spurgeons provides free parenting courses and resources online and trains volunteers to offer our Real Parenting course through Family Hubs. We also provide professional parent counselling both online and face to face (see page 7).

**The Government offers little help to parents. We urge them to work with us to ensure every parent has easy access to support.**

## 4. Free and easily accessible resources and training

Every family, volunteer and professional involved with children and young people needs to be trained and equipped to support them effectively. So, Spurgeons is developing an online hub of free resources and training for a comprehensive range of needs including children's mental health.

**The Government should fund the development and promotion of such resources.**

**We call on the new Government to help put an end to the suffering that children and young person with mental health issues are enduring, and which can disadvantage them for life.**

# “I can just be myself.”



Counselling can be so incredibly valuable in helping young people to cope with even the most challenging of situations. Spurgeons Counsellor Amelia Curtis relates the story of “Jessie”, a young lady she has been working with for the past 3 years.

Jessie was referred to me when she was 15. There had been lots of serious issues within the dynamics of Jessie’s family including drug addiction and attempted suicides. As Jessie had grown up around this, she had been greatly affected by the massive ups and downs of it all.

She had also recently been diagnosed with ADHD; she found it really hard to self-regulate in her family situation so she had become very anxious. Counselling seemed to create a safe, steady and reassuring space for her.

Jessie liked to talk a lot during our sessions to help her process what was going on at the time.

I listened to her intently, with empathy, reassurance and love and without judgement – our therapeutic relationship gradually became completely open. Jessie says it’s been so very helpful, having a counsellor who has always been there for her through thick and thin - and especially when she was at rock bottom.

I have watched her change tremendously over the past three years – I have told her how proud I am, and how far she has come. She tells me she hasn’t really ever felt anyone being proud of her before.

Jessie now able to love her family and understand why they are the way they are while not being impacted by the chaos, like an outsider looking in. ‘When I recently asked Jessie in her own words what counselling has done for her, she said:

“It’s a place where you can say whatever you want and are not judged...just talking things through safely...it’s really different from speaking to your family.

Some people are against counselling because they think you’ll be reported but Amelia just looks out for me and keeps everything safe. If something really bad happened I know she has my back.

“I feel calmer and more at ease and, when I’m hacked off, I can just be myself and completely offload in the sessions, with no filters.

“When I first started counselling I had massive emotional meltdowns and anger issues, but now I can control them a lot better and they don’t happen so often.”

Jessie and I continue to work together. She is now considering working in counselling and psychology, or with vulnerable children, as she has learnt so much about her family - and about herself.

**“I feel calmer and more at ease and, when I’m hacked off, I can just be myself and completely offload in the sessions, with no filters.”**



## Our distinctive approach to counselling

**Quality:** Our Counsellors are fully qualified, with a variety of training and experience.

**Bespoke:** The therapeutic intervention we offer is tailored to each child following an assessment of their needs. No fixed number of sessions but the average needed is 12.

**Flexible:** We get referrals from schools and professionals, and self-referrals from parents. Counselling can take place face to face, in specific locations (e.g. schools, Family Hubs) and online.

**Wraparound support:** We can integrate counselling with other family support services that we operate, such as providing parenting support alongside child counselling so parents can support their child at home between sessions.

## Our Mental Health Services

Spurgeons offers counselling to any child or young person with mental health issues – those waiting to be seen by CAMHS, those referred by schools and GPs, or through self-referrals by parents.



## Counselling for Children and Teenagers

We give children and teenagers the emotional tools and training so they can navigate life’s difficulties and create a more positive future for themselves. Our counsellors work in an integrative way using a range of approaches and models.



**Schools Counselling (England wide):** We can provide counselling in schools for primary and secondary children and school staff.



**Face to Face Counselling (Kent and Sussex):** 1-1 counselling sessions with a fully qualified BACP counsellor in schools and Spurgeons’ centres.



**Online Counselling (UK wide):** Mental health support for children aged 11+ and parents via secure and confidential online conferencing for convenience and flexibility.

## Support for parents



**Parent Support Service (in person in Kent, Surrey and Sussex, or UK wide via online conferencing):**

1-1 tailored sessions with a Spurgeons counsellor to help parents and children who are finding family life challenging to find ways to improve their situation.



**Parenting after Separation Course (UK wide, online):** To help parents recover and avoid ongoing parental conflict to improve their child’s chances of happiness following separation. Self-paced.



**Support for dads (UK wide):** Our website dad.info has a forum for dads to discuss and support each other with parenting issues.

## Other support



You can access details of parent and children support offered by other organisations to.

# Mental Health Tip



Make a Self-Soothe Box to help calm when overwhelm hits. Here are some ideas of what that could contain: Scan the QR code to access more free mental health resources on our Digital Hub.

## Do you need an emergency box?

When overwhelm hits, it can be handy to have a physical toolkit to turn to. Here are some ideas of what that could contain.



Photos of places that are important to you



Transitional objects, such as a pebble from a special place



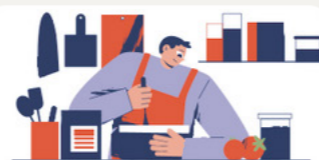
Letters or cards of encouragement and positivity



List of phone contacts and a script of ways to reach out for help



Activity idea cards, like go for a walk/treat yourself to a coffee



Recipe cards for foods to make that soothe you



A reminder of your favourite film or music



A book to read



A gratitude list, a list of things you are grateful for



A scent that comforts you



Something soft or warm to hold - a blanket or a hot water bottle.



[spurgeons.org/digital-family-hub](https://spurgeons.org/digital-family-hub)

# Summer holiday fun on a budget!

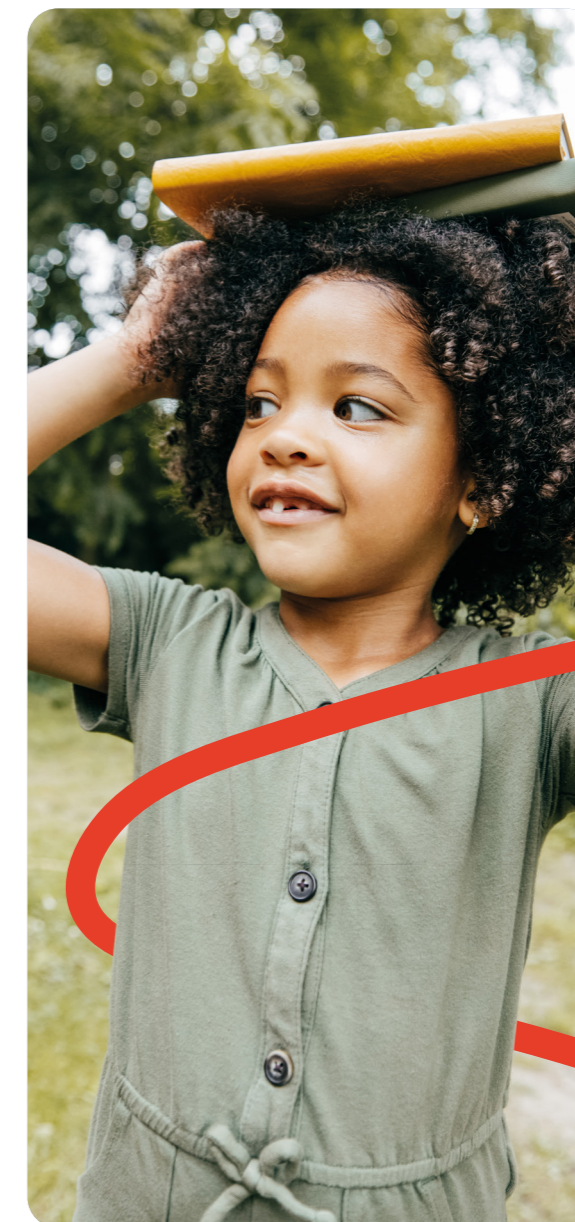
School holidays are here - many children are really looking forward to summer! But at some point boredom may set in. So here are some inexpensive, creative and fun ways for parents to keep the kids entertained and give them a healthy break from screentime.

## Out in nature

- **Colour walk:** Print out a sheet with the colours of the rainbow - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Look for plants and flowers that match the colours. You could take a photo of each too!
- **Tree bark rubbings:** Place some paper on the bark of a tree and rub the crayon up and down. You don't need to stick to one colour - try several and make a beautiful pattern!
- **Make a miniature garden:** Fill a saucer or other small shallow container with damp soil or sand. Let the children 'plant' it with tiny flowerheads, leafy twigs for trees, small stones for a path and small sticks glued or tied together to make a bench.
- **Chalk drawings:** Let the kids use chalk to draw on your paving slabs or brickwork. Take a few souvenir photos before the rain washes the artwork away!

## Rainy day indoors

- **Bubble painting:** Mix a little washing up liquid and a drop of craft paint with water in a cup. Get the kids to blow bubbles in the cup using a straw until the bubbles reach the top of the cup. Lay a piece of plain paper over the bubbles to create a colourful imprint. Make up several cups with different colours, lay paper over each in turn to create a kaleidoscope of colour!
- **Reading:** Sign up your kids to free membership of your local library. It's lots of fun choosing what books to borrow, from stories to travel books to activities - there will be loads of choice. Reading is the cornerstone of learning and helps them to develop vivid imaginations! There may be free activities as well, and the kids could earn a medal by joining the national Summer Reading Challenge ([summerreadingchallenge.org.uk](https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk) - starts 6 July).



Download our **FREE 12-page activity book for 5-9 year olds**

Spurgeons transforms the nation, one child at a time by ensuring every family has the support needed to flourish.

# News Roundup



## Family fun at HMP Winchester

Making fun memories is so important to help families who have a dad in prison to bond with him. At our Family Days in April at HMP Winchester, families and prison dads had a great time together playing games, doing arts and crafts, eating a delicious lunch and having a heartwarming singalong!

One dad said, "It made me realise how important being a dad and a family man is to me." A grandparent said, "The visit was made very pleasurable by the Spurgeons staff who spent time with us and were excellent with both children and adults alike, the staff were very empathetic".



## Ofsted success at Buttons

We're delighted that Ofsted rated our Buttons ABC Preschool in Maidstone as GOOD, saying "All children are confident and very happy during their time in the friendly and welcoming nursery." The staff and children celebrated by creating some joyful, vibrant artwork featuring some of the key words in the Ofsted report.



You can read the full Ofsted report here



## Thanks for the Easter Eggs!

Children who would otherwise not have received Easter eggs were able to, thanks to the generosity of two companies. Eggs donated by staff at Kier Group in Rushden were given out at Newton Road Primary school via Spurgeons chaplain Peter Eyre. And eggs from employees of Milestone went to children connected to Spurgeons in Wiltshire. Thank you to both companies for your generosity!

## "Ask a Counsellor" campaign



To mark Mental Health Awareness Week in May, we invited parents to "Ask a Counsellor" questions around their child's mental health. Parents that applied were given a 20-minute session with one of our experienced and qualified counsellors through our live chat messaging service.



Although this round of "Ask a Counsellor" is over, you can sign up to be notified by email next time we offer this service.

## Easter adventure for Young Carers



As part of our Easter Extravaganza, Young Carers aged 11-14 reached for the stars (or at least the ceiling) while laughing, cheering, and high-fiving their way to the top!



## Prison dad's poem

Jason, who is at HMP Winchester, wrote this beautiful poem about how we helped him stay connected with his family. Thank you, Jason – it's lovely!

To be a dad in jail  
Doesn't have to mean you have failed.  
Don't be afraid to show your feelings,  
Time in jail is time for healing.  
Spurgeons are great, they really do care  
All they want to do is help you repair

Relationships come and go  
But the one with your family,  
Spurgeons help grow.

A poem by Jason,  
HMP Winchester

# Thank you to our volunteers



Our volunteers give their time and skills so generously - to be a friendly face for families of dads in prison, to look after children with special educational needs at our preschool, or to help parents to discover new ways to support their children. We're very grateful to all of you!

And we're glad that our volunteers enjoy it too! One says, "The best thing about volunteering with Spurgeons is that you're there to help people at a time which can be very traumatic and difficult for them. It's very satisfying when you have been able to just point them in the right direction or listen when they want to confide."



We need volunteers to help children and families in Birmingham, Wiltshire, Kent and Winchester. Scan the QR code to find out more.

## Spurgeons - Together with Families

Families of all shapes and sizes face the challenges of trying to balance relationships, work, money, childcare and parenting, education, mental health. It's a lot - sometimes too much!

But we're always there to turn to, in good times and bad. Inspired by our Christian faith and our founder Charles Spurgeon, we bring hope and help, making family life better. Our Family Hubs, located in children and family centres, schools, churches, prisons, provide a welcoming one-stop place where families can access wraparound support. We can do this. Together.

### We provide children and families with:

- Family support
- Parenting advice and support
- Early years health and wellbeing
- Domestic abuse care and recovery
- Young Carers
- Counselling
- Preschools with onsite early support in areas of intense need

## Connect with us online for more stories!



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