


Supporting Children  
Young People  
and Families



# **From Increasing Awareness to Improving Outcomes:** Raising Expectations in Children's (Mental Health) Services

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**It's time to raise our  
expectations.**

Let's support what's good,  
challenge what's not,  
and keep children, young  
people and families  
at the centre of it all.



## “From Increasing Awareness to Improving Outcomes:

## Raising Expectations in Children's (Mental Health) Services”

**Briefing:** Supporting Children Young People and Families

**Author:** Liam Laughton

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### Introduction

This isn't criticism of those trying to help. It's a call to be more thoughtful and informed.

Children's mental health is starting to get the attention it deserves, but that surge in awareness has opened the door to a wide range of new services offering solutions or help:

- Some are excellent.
- Some are well-intentioned but lack the necessary expertise or experience to help drive improvements.
- And some... may know they aren't really delivering value, but enjoy making profit and benefiting from the current demand.

When it comes to the wellbeing of children, young people and families, or the accuracy and quality of the information available to those who are working with them, we can't afford to confuse visibility with credibility.

It's time to ask better questions, and expect better answers.

### Context

We're living in a time of:

- **Increased awareness** of children's mental health
- **Rising demand** for emotional wellbeing and support services
- **More organisations** offering training, interventions, and advice
- **A greater need for clarity**, evidence, and accountability



At the same time, the lines between expertise and popularity are blurring.

A strong social media presence can mask a lack of depth. Well-branded content can outshine better-informed but less visible voices. Some content is created to attract likes, not to lead lasting change. And when appearances are prioritised over outcomes, there's a risk that style begins to outweigh substance.

This isn't just a children's mental health issue; it reflects wider patterns in public services. Research shows that in many sectors:

- Performance is increasingly judged by **engagement metrics**, not real-world outcomes<sup>34</sup>
- Public bodies may rely on **virtue signalling\*** to appear responsive, even when impact is limited<sup>56</sup>
- There is a culture of **"looking busy"** through endless meetings, events or workshops which replace the time to achieve or create meaningful change<sup>789</sup>

\*Performing highly visible but low-impact acts to appear value-driven or because [despite being truly well meaning] they lack the necessary time, knowledge, skill or experience to communicate something 'deeper'

## **The Problems**

- Professionals and families are navigating a crowded, confusing landscape with little clear guidance about how to access high-quality, impactful support
- Private organisations and companies have a vested interest in raising awareness about their services or brand and the market enables low-accountability services to thrive, without any regulation on what's shared
- And public services (NHS Trusts and local councils) which have often been trusted sources of information now at times lean heavily into virtue signalling or performative gestures rather than delivering in depth, evidence-based information
- Superficial content often outperforms expert-led advice online<sup>2</sup> due to 'the algorithm'



## The Risks

Research shows that pressure to be visible (online, in the media, and at events) can lead organisations to prioritise PR over performance. This can result in misallocated resources and missed opportunities for real service improvement<sup>1011</sup>. Likely risks are:

- Children, Young People and Families receive ineffective or inappropriate information or support
- Staff trying to support Children, Young People and Families receive ineffective or inappropriate information, training and help
- Public money (or charitable donations) is mis-spent on training or resources that don't improve outcomes
- Time (as valuable as funding) that could be used effectively, being wasted
- Decline in trust and confidence in the quality of services that can be provided

## Recommendations

When seeking services, training, or support — whether you're a commissioner, practitioner or advocate:

### 1. Look for substance, not just visibility

*Ask:*

Is the content insightful, or just popular?

Are they adding to your understanding — or just saying what's trending?

*Remember:* A flashy online presence doesn't equal credibility.

### 2. Examine who's behind the work

*Ask:*

Who created this?

What's their experience — and is it relevant?

*Remember:* True expertise is more than enthusiasm.  
It's about understanding, ethics, and accountability.

### 3. Prioritise real outcomes

*Ask:*

Can they show evidence of impact?

Do they evaluate their work, and act on what they learn?

*Remember:* People will want to talk about the outcomes they've achieved.



#### **4. Stay independent — don't confuse popularity with quality**

*Ask* hard questions.

*Remember:* Just because something is widely liked or shared doesn't mean it's effective.

#### **5. Be confident asking "why this, and why now?"**

*Ask:*

What gap does this fill?

Why is it needed, and who benefits?

*Remember:* Great services welcome scrutiny, and wouldn't want to duplicate offers, or leave gaps, they want what's best for Children, Young People and Families, not their own brand or interests.

### **Conclusion**

This isn't about being cynical. It's about being careful, clever, and hopeful. There are outstanding services and people supporting children's mental health — we champion, work alongside, and learn from many of them. But in a fast-moving culture where we all turn to social media we need to help each other stay focused on what works, not just what's visible.

Raising awareness isn't enough. It's time to raise our expectations.

Let's support what's good, challenge what's not, and keep children, young people and families at the centre of it all.

# From Increasing Awareness to Improving Outcomes: Raising Expectations in Children's (Mental Health) Services



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