



ISLINGTON MHARS

A framework for mental health
and resilience in schools

'Life is not about how fast you run or how high you climb but how well you bounce.'

Vivian Komori



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MHARS**

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iMHARS has been developed with Islington Community of Schools.

With special thanks to the pilot schools:

- The Bridge
- Drayton Park
- St Jude and St Paul's
- Samuel Rhodes
- Elizabeth Garrett Anderson

Why does mental health and resilience matter in schools?

A child's mental health will affect them for the rest of their life; it influences their overall health, happiness and productivity into adulthood. Promoting and protecting mental health in school pupils is therefore one of the most important things we can do for them.

Half of all lifetime mental health problems develop by the age of 14, affecting approximately three children in every classroom. Untreated problems in early life lead to adult mental illness.

As well as lifetime wellbeing there are immediate benefits to positive emotional health. Children are happier, make friends and sustain relationships, are aware of and understand others, face problems and setbacks and learn from them, enjoy their play and leisure time and, most importantly for schools, they LEARN BETTER.

The factors that influence whether or not a child develops an emotional or behavioural problem are complex but broadly fall into two categories: risk and resilience. We cannot always protect children from risks (for example parental substance misuse, bereavement or refugee experience), but we know that individuals respond differently to difficult life events, as well as to experiences of failure and mistakes. Building resilience is about supporting and enabling children to cope better with what life throws at them. Risks don't in themselves cause illness, but they are cumulative, whereas resilience is developmental.

What is resilience and how does it contribute to mental health and school achievement?

Some of the factors that help children to develop resilience are supportive families, positive expectations, a sense of self-worth and belonging, participation, positive friendships and relationships with adults, problem-solving and communication skills. These are already important in schools because they are all factors that also support effective learning. They

are experiences that can be supported or attributes that can be taught, demonstrated and developed in young minds.

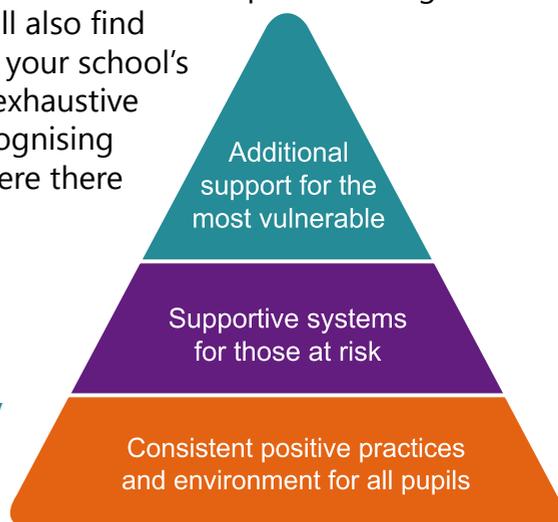
Children can get better at managing problems and coping well despite difficult circumstances, and the protective effect of such skills and experiences can be immense. Individuals who can bounce back from adversity, are strengthened by life's challenges. This is the quality that we call resilience. **Resilience protects against mental health problems and enables effective life-long learning.**

What is the iMHARS framework? How should my school use it?

The Islington MHARS framework sets out the components of school practice and ethos that effectively develop resilience, promote positive mental health and support children at risk of, or experiencing, mental health problems. The seven components have been distilled from a wide body of evidence and, alongside the supporting practices, have been developed and tested in Islington schools. You can read more about the evidence on page 22.

On each page of this booklet you will find a component alongside its supporting practices. You will also find ideas about how you can audit your school's work; the suggestions are not exhaustive but will enable you to start recognising effective practice and areas where there are gaps.

While reflecting on how the framework is embodied in your school you will need to consider how it meets pupils' differing needs through a 'stepped approach'.



A whole school, inclusive approach

The framework will be most effective when it is embedded in school culture and applied consistently across the whole school community.

Children and adults learn new ways of interacting, thinking and behaving when they observe and experience these consistently - from the classroom to the playground, at staff meetings, events and after-school clubs.

Everyone will benefit from this approach, and resilience breeds resilience: a resilient community enhances the resilience of its individuals and vice versa.

'Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities but from the everyday magic of ordinary human resources in the minds, brains and bodies of ordinary children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.'

Ann Masten, University of Minnesota



A school that effectively supports pupils' mental health and resilience has...



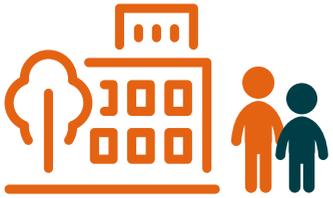
A clear vision, and values that are understood and consistently communicated

Schools can achieve this through:

- A culture of mutual respect, recognition and affirmation, modelled by staff behaviour
- Leadership and school development plans that support health and wellbeing
- Whole school policies and their consistent implementation
- Ensuring everyone feels safe within the school
- Creating opportunities for fun, laughter and relaxation
- Involving pupils, parents, staff and governors in decision making

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Comparing** senior leaders', staff and pupils' understanding of the school's vision and values
- **Conducting** a learning walk to observe staff-staff, staff-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions
- **Observing** behaviour management strategies in the playground, dining hall and during lessons
- **Conducting** a survey to see how safe pupils feel in the school
- **Interviewing** a parent governor to understand how parents influence whole-school practices
- **Comparing** school councillors' and other pupils' perceptions of their involvement in school decision making



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Support networks that enable pupils to develop social relationships

Schools can achieve this through:

- Teaching social skills, listening and empathy
- Well organised peer support programmes
- Planned opportunities to socialise with different pupils and different people
- Teaching pupils to be able to ask for help
- Encouraging kindness, and understanding of the consequences of actions
- Supporting positive communication, including when using social media

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Observing** lessons to identify how teaching encourages social skills
- **Running** a focus group with pupils involved in peer support schemes, such as playground friends or peer mentoring
- **Asking** pupils to confidentially list three of their trusted peers, and analysing this to identify isolated pupils
- **Asking** pupils to draw and write who they would go to for help
- **Analysing** bullying data



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Teaching and learning that develops resilient learners

Schools can achieve this through:

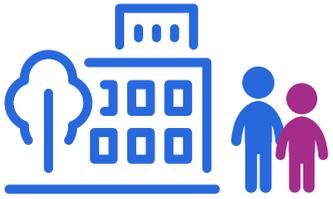
- Encouraging perseverance, risk taking and learning through mistakes
- Providing formative and meaningful feedback
- A variety of interactive teaching methods that engage all pupils
- Opportunities for collaboration and team work
- Providing all pupils with appropriate levels of challenge
- Teaching creative and systematic problem solving strategies

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Speaking** to a variety of staff to explore how their teaching supports pupils to make mistakes and be resilient
- **Looking** at marking and feedback in books
- **Observing** lessons to see how pupils respond when they find a task difficult
- **Asking** pupils to draw and describe the process they went through to learn a new skill
- **Analysing** the variety of questions teachers use in different lessons

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A curriculum that teaches life skills, including social and emotional skills

Schools can achieve this through:

- A planned comprehensive PSHE education curriculum
- Nurturing self-belief and positive qualities such as optimism and forgiveness
- Developing pupils' critical thinking skills and encouraging reflection and self-awareness
- Providing high quality enrichment activities
- Opportunities for pupils to volunteer within the school and the local community

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Analysing** pupil progress in PSHE
- **Asking** pupils to list the personal qualities that are valued by the school
- **Observing** lessons to see how they encourage critical thinking skills
- **Mapping** all pupils' involvement in enrichment activities
- **Interviewing** pupils about how the school prepares them for adult life



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Specific help for vulnerable pupils

Schools can achieve this through:

- All staff, pupils and parents understanding risk factors for mental health problems; and the identification, referral and support system
- Early identification of pupils with emotional and mental health needs
- Careful joint planning to meet individual pupils' needs
- Effective recording and monitoring of pupil progress
- Established school systems, practices and interventions
- Partnership working with a range of specialist agencies to support whole school practice and pupils with complex concerns

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Talking** to individual staff to ascertain their understanding of particular vulnerable pupils' needs
- **Running** a focus group with pupils that attend a support group
- **Reviewing** exclusion, attendance, free school meal, equalities, special educational needs and pupil premium data
- **Critiquing** the 'journey' of a particular pupil through the school's pastoral care system
- **Interviewing** external agencies to understand how the school works in partnership



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Effective partnerships with parents

Schools can achieve this through:

- Joint planning and decision making with each child's parent
- Providing appropriate support to parents who need additional help
- Regular, meaningful communication
- A range of inclusive activities that support all parents to feel welcome and part of the school community
- Working in partnership with parents and carers to promote pupils' social and emotional wellbeing

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Hosting** an event with parents to raise awareness of mental health, and use this as an opportunity to gather parent perspectives on partnerships with the school
- **Conducting** a parent survey
- **Analysing** attendance at school events
- **Interviewing** individual parents about how the school has supported them and their child
- **Using** a graffiti wall with a variety of staff (administrative staff, support staff, teachers) to understand their involvement with parents



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Support and training for all staff to build skills, capacity and own resilience

Schools can achieve this through:

- Enabling all staff to respond appropriately to pupils' emotional needs
- Promoting and supporting staff wellbeing
- Training staff to increase understanding of mental health
- Effective staff professional development
- Consistent, positive and effective management
- Building supportive and trusting relationships amongst staff

Find out what's happening in your school by:

- **Running** a staff focus group to gather perspectives on staff support, wellbeing and training. Ensure the focus group includes a broad range of staff (e.g. administrative staff, support staff, teachers and the caretaker)
- **Conducting** a staff survey to explore levels of morale and staff wellbeing
- **Analysing** staff attendance on a monthly basis
- **Looking** at which members of staff have accessed training
- **Interviewing** a member of the senior leadership team to explore staff management and decision making

Further reading

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Next steps

Once you have explored practice within your school against the iMHARS framework, you may want additional advice or have further questions on how to develop your initial findings.

Islington are developing further tools and resources for school staff to reflect on their practice and develop their work further.

(See <https://www.islingtoncs.org/imhars>)

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EBPU Evidence Based
Practice Unit

A partnership of



Whittington Health 