

## What is Flourishing?

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This section of the HandsOnScotland website is all about finding ways to promote flourishing in children and young people. Flourishing, in this context, is just another way of saying good mental health. We often use the term 'mental health' to talk about poor mental health, problems or illness. However, the word 'mental' just means 'relating to the mind' in the same way as 'physical' means 'relating to the body'.

We all have mental health in the same way that we all have physical health. Our state of mental health affects everything we do, every day. Our mental health is about the way we think and feel about ourselves and our world. It's about how we handle our everyday lives, like making and keeping friends, getting along with our family, coping with problems, and getting involved with our work, study or community activities.

We don't generally talk about wanting to improve our mental health in the same way as we talk about wanting to improve our physical health or fitness. But our mental health is just as important as our physical health for our overall wellbeing.

The following definition of mental health explains what good mental health is all about:

**Mental Health is the emotional and spiritual resilience that enables us to enjoy life and survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own and other's self worth.**

Health Education Authority

So, to flourish is to be able to enjoy life, to cope with life's difficulties, to believe in others, to feel you have a place in the world and to believe that you have something you can give to others.

Just like our physical health, our mental health can be good or not so good. This section of the website is to help you find ways to keep children's mental health good and make it even better, or in other words, to help children flourish. Helping children to flourish is not just about helping them to be happy, although that's a big part of it. It's also about helping them do something valuable with their days and with their lives.

Extensive research has shown the things that help someone flourish. If you are flourishing, on most days, you will:

- Feel generally happy and interested in your life.
- Feel satisfied with your life.
- Like most aspects of yourself.
- Have warm, trusting personal relationships.
- Be able and confident to express your own ideas.
- Feel that you have a sense of purpose.
- Be able to manage your daily life.
- Have experiences that help you to grow as a person.
- Feel you belong to a family or community.
- Feel that you have something to contribute to your family or community.
- Hold positive attitudes and respect for others.

## Why is flourishing important?

Flourishing is good for people, and for society.

Corey Keyes

Flourishing is good for us! It makes us feel happy and alive, which is a very good outcome in itself. But it also protects us from illness. Research has shown that people who are flourishing are less likely to suffer from chronic physical health problems like heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and chronic sleeping problems. They are also less likely to suffer from minor health problems and disability and they use healthcare services less frequently. They are more productive at work – they miss fewer days due to illness. And they are also more resilient to stressful life events and less likely to develop mental illness, like depression (Keyes, 2007).

## What's in this section of the website?

This section of the website tells you about many things you can do to help children and young people flourish.

There are lots of ideas, activities and videos, drawn from a wealth of research evidence (see references) and specialist opinion, to give you a whole toolbox of things you can have a look at. You may not agree with everything that we have written in this website. That's ok. Good mental health is a personal thing. So, things that make one person mentally healthy may not work for another person. You can try out the ideas and activities if they feel right for you and for the children in your life. Genuine smiles on children's faces are usually a good sign that something is having a positive effect on their mental health!

We have also put a strong emphasis on looking after your own mental health. You already know that it is important that you look after your own physical health to keep you strong and able to care for or work with children. The same goes for mental health. If you are emotionally strong and well, you will be able to help children flourish much more easily.

Flourishing is ... contagious. When we flourish, the students we work with are more likely to flourish and to achieve their own potential too.

Jenny Fox Eades

As parents and people working with children, our lives are often pretty hectic. The last thing you want is to be given even more things that you need to teach your child or children! That's not what this website is about. Most of the ideas and tools are just to do with your everyday life – they are about ways to think about yourself and the children in your life. There are also some helpful ideas for things to say and do as you go about your everyday activities. Many of you will be doing these things already - we hope that the website affirms what you are already doing to help children flourish.

## Helping children to flourish – key messages

Here's a summary of what this website suggests you can do to help children flourish:

- Look after and build up your own mental health.
- Believe that each child has the potential and the right to flourish.
- Listen, to understand how each child really feels.
- Help each child discover their own unique worth.
- Connect well with each child and you will help them connect well with others.
- Encourage each child to enjoy the present moment.

If we really care for someone, perhaps the best thing we can do is expose them to the toughest training, warmest encouragement and hardest hands-on experience, because it's these ingredients (rather than doing it for them or simply giving them things) that will help a young individual grow wonderfully capable and quietly confident.

Dr Nick Baylis  
Author of *The Rough Guide to Happiness: practical steps to all-round well-being*