

THE CARIBBEAN CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH STUDY REPORT



**A YOUTH-FRIENDLY VERSION WITH AN ADVOCACY GUIDE
CREATED BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Caribbean Child and Youth Mental Health Research Study Report has been published by The CARICOM and UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area in October 2025.

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PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

An electronic version of this report is available for download at:
www.youngcaribbeanminds.com/researchreport

THE MENTAL HEALTH STORY OF CARIBBEAN CHILDREN & YOUTH

WELL-BEING

In the Caribbean, far too many of our children and youth do not feel optimistic about the future (58%)

01



ANXIETY

A large number of young people are constantly worried (56%)

02



DEPRESSION

More than half of our children and youth are feeling down, depressed and hopeless (54%)

03



04

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Far too many young people do not think they have a trusted person to reach out to when in need of mental health support (54%)



CONNECT

Help yourself or others by visiting youngcaribbeanminds.com for mental health support resources



05

06

BE AN ADVOCATE

Use the information in this report to start conversations with your friends, family and decision makers. Share online!



**THE CARIBBEAN CHILD AND YOUTH
MENTAL HEALTH
RESEARCH STUDY REPORT**

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“ I know I am sad, yes. But, if I am being told by my peers and my family members that it is not significant, I will bottle it up, and I will continue to live as if everything is normal...”

- Daniel, Youth Mental Health Focal Point, Trinidad and Tobago

A Snapshot

A CARICOM and UNICEF study was advertised and distributed to children and young people across the Caribbean in 2024. The main purpose of the survey was to further understand the issues related to the mental health and well-being of children and young people, to develop solutions. A total of 1,500 children and young people from 17 countries and territories responded. Approximately half of the young respondents were employed, while the other half were either students or unemployed. Analysis of the survey responses provided insights and highlights related to:

- Mental Well-Being
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Support Systems



WHAT IS THE REPORT ABOUT?

Written in a youth-friendly manner, the report briefly covers the background and motivations for doing this important study. The report describes the steps taken to understand the issues related to the mental health and well-being of children and young people across the Caribbean. The quantitative findings are reported and graphically presented. The voices of children and young people are also featured. An advocacy plan and recommendations for current and future best practice are included, along with a list of key messages and resources.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

There are increasing concerns about the mental health and well-being of children and young people. According to statistics, One in five young people in the Caribbean may be experiencing symptoms of mental health problems¹. This results in large numbers of children and young people needing additional support to cope with everyday activities at home, school and within their community. Services offered may not always have the capacity to provide immediate support. Therefore, more information is needed to inform mental health resources and programmes to support children and young people. By doing this we can build on some of the helpful resilience and coping strategies that children and young people currently practice.

HOW DID WE DO IT?

A 50-question online survey captured valuable insights into the prevalence of mental health issues, potential risk factors, and the availability of support systems. The survey was informed by widely used mental health measurements for anxiety (i.e., Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 [GAD-7]), depression (i.e., Patient Health Questionnaire-9 [PHQ-9]), well-being, and accessing support. It also captured demographic data (e.g. age, gender socioeconomic status etc). To make sure the study included many different views and experiences, The CARICOM and UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area, together with other key stakeholders*, worked together to hear from as many children and young people as possible.

The study adhered to ethical principles to safeguard the rights and privacy of everyone who responded. All participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and the voluntary nature of their participation. For those under the age of 18, informed consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians. For those 18 and older, informed consent was obtained under the terms of anonymity and confidentiality, ensuring that individual responses could not be linked back to them.

*Stakeholders included: The Caribbean Coalition of Adolescent Health, The Let's Unpack It and UNICEF Caribbean National Youth Mental Health Focal Point Network and departments/ministries of youth and education across the region.

“ Besides the social stigma around mental health conditions, there is also a lack of mental health professionals. We need new and creative ways of delivering mental health care...this can reduce or eliminate the risk of suicide, which remains a serious issue in our region. ”

– Nianna, Youth Mental Health Focal Point, Montserrat

WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY?

Participants from 17 Caribbean countries and territories responded to the survey. Most were between 15 and 30 years old (Female - 72%; Male 26%; Other 2%). Most respondents lived within a nuclear-type family arrangement, while close to one-third lived with friends and/or relatives. In terms of relationship status, most respondents identified as single (71%). Just under half (45%) were educated to secondary level, while 37% had an undergraduate degree. At the time of the survey, 63% of respondents were in an educational institution.

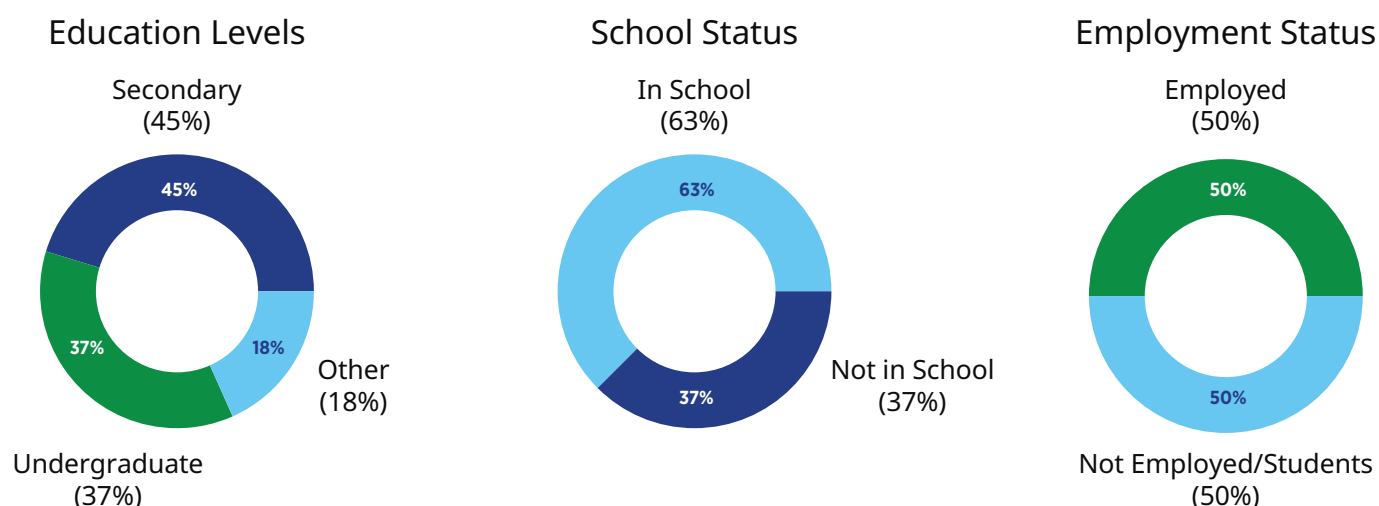


Figure 1. Education Levels, School Status and Employment Levels

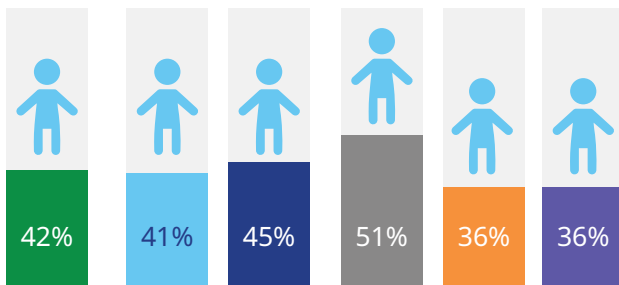


WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY DATA?

Mental Well-Being

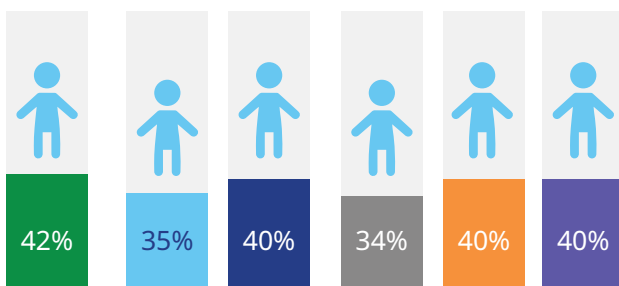


From the respondents, the data revealed that around FOUR in ten felt loved (39%), while less than half of the respondents were able to make up their own mind about things in their life (42%) and were interested in new things (42%).



Most respondents did not feel interested in other people (42%), close to other people (41%), relaxed (45%) or as if they frequently had energy to spare (51%). Notably, an equal number of participants reported that they either did not feel cheerful frequently (36%) or only felt cheerful sometimes (36%).

Figure 2. Well-being Summary Part 1

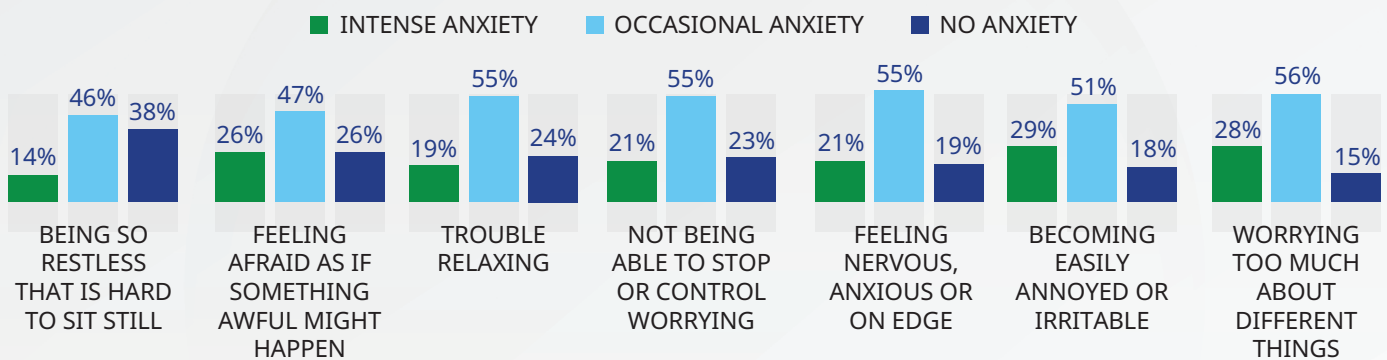


A large numbers of respondents reported that they only sometimes felt optimistic about the future (42%), good about themselves (35%), useful (40%), confident (34%), that they dealt with problems well (40%) or could think clearly (40%).

Figure 3. Well-being Summary Part 2

Anxiety

The majority of participants experienced occasional symptoms of anxiety in the previous two weeks. Most reported being so restless that it was hard to sit still (46%), feeling afraid as if something awful might happen (47%), having trouble relaxing (55%), not being able to stop or control their worrying (55%), sometimes feeling nervous, anxious or on edge (55%), becoming easily annoyed or irritable (51%), or worrying too much about different things (56%). Although the majority reported experiencing occasional anxiety, in some cases nearly 25% of young people reported experiencing intense anxiety.



Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding or missing data.

Figure 4: Anxiety Summary

SEVEN out of ten respondents indicated that it is either somewhat difficult (55%) or very/extremely difficult (22%) to cope with or manage work, take care of things at home or get along with other people.

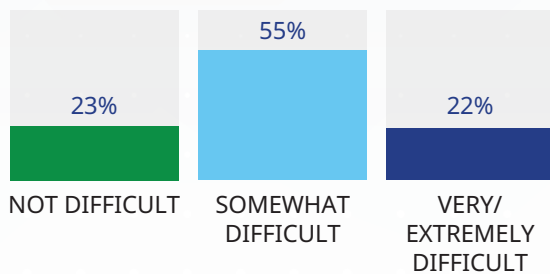


Figure 5: Difficulty Faced with Coping or Managing Work/Home and Getting Along With Others



Depression

The majority of participants frequently experienced symptoms of depression in the previous two weeks. Most reported often feeling tired or having little energy (57%), trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or sleeping too much (44%), poor appetite or overeating (46%), feeling down, depressed or hopeless (54%), little interest or pleasure in doing things (56%), feeling bad about themselves or have let themselves or family down, feeling down (46%), and trouble concentrating on things such as reading the newspaper or watching television (46%). Sadly, a worrying 29% of young people frequently thought they would be better off dead or hurting themselves in some way.

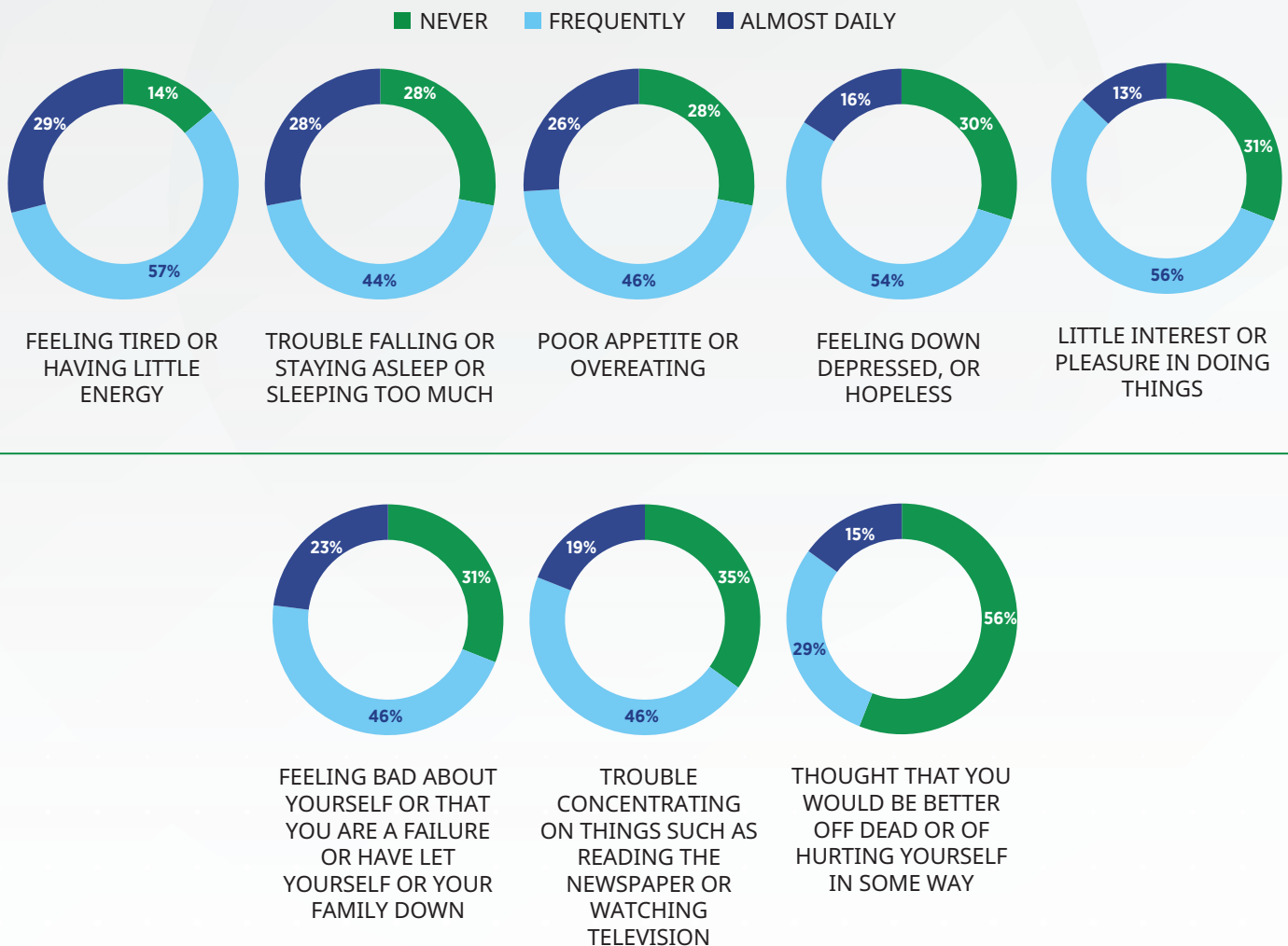
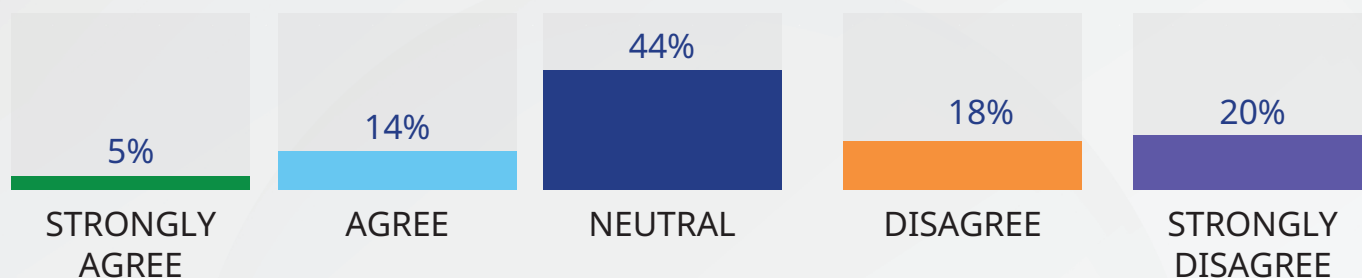


Figure 6: Depression Summary

Support Systems

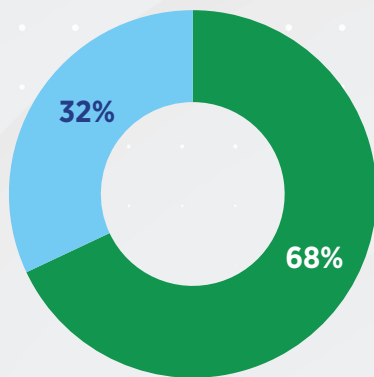
The majority of respondents (44%) felt the support offered by schools/employers to help them cope with issues was neutral (i.e., neither agreeing nor disagreeing that support was available).



Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding or missing data.

Figure 7: Support Available for COVID-19 Protocols from School/Employer





Sixty-eight percent of young people did not visit a counsellor when needing support to cope or deal with issues.

■ YES ■ NO

Figure 8: Visited a Counsellor to Assist with Life Decisions

However, seven in ten respondents either agree (35%) or strongly agree (a further 35%) that counsellors can help children and young people regulate their moods.

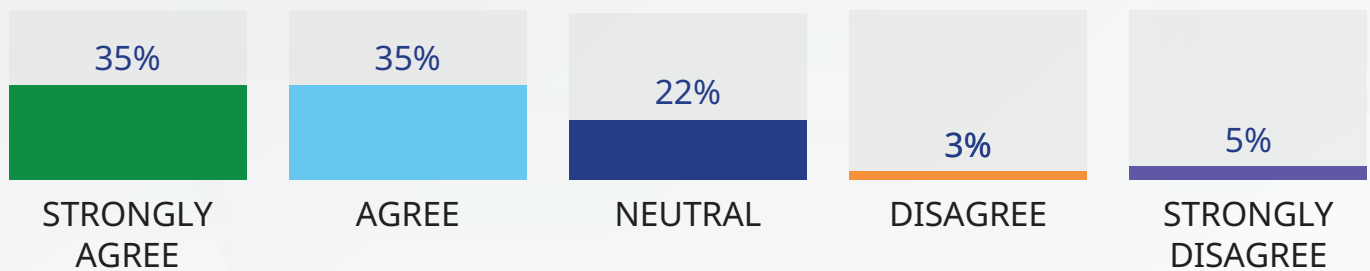


Figure 9: Think a Mental Health Care Practitioner or Counsellor Can Assist Children and Young People



In the absence of counsellors, participants indicated that they have someone to reach out to when feeling low or uncertain about what to do (46%). However, it is concerning that more than half did not agree that they had someone to turn to for support (54%). Among these, children and young people were unsure whether they had someone to reach out to (30%), while others reported that they did not have anyone to reach out to (24%).

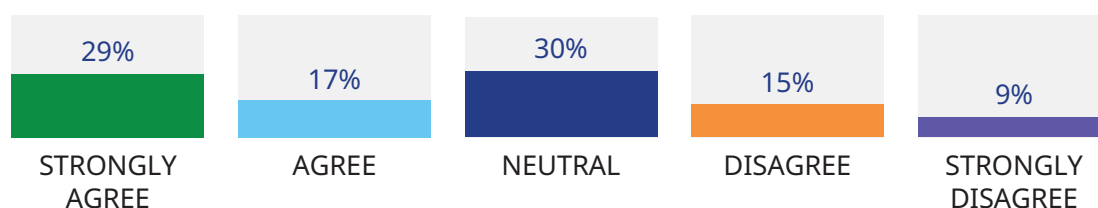


Figure 10: Have Someone to Reach Out to When in a Low Mood

Nonetheless, respondents reported that they either had contact information for a counsellor or believed such information could be easily obtained if or when needed (60%). However, it remains concerning that some children and young people did not have this contact information or did not know where to obtain details about counselling services (40%).

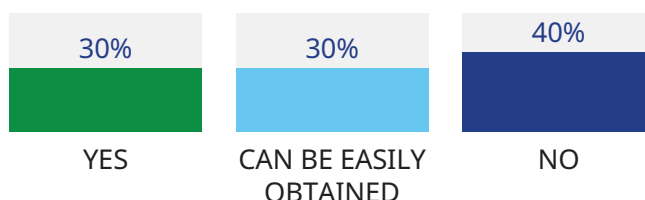


Figure 11: Have the Contact for a Counsellor if Needed

“ I believe that what is stopping a lot of young people from speaking out is the stigma attached to mental health. [Some] young people feel like they cannot approach their parents or other persons, because they feel that they would be [ridiculed] or that they would be looked at in a strange way for having mental health concerns. ”

-Kasinda, Youth Mental Health Focal Point, Dominica

“As a proud daughter of Caribbean soil, I’ve wrestled with the taboos that still surround mental health in our region. However, standing in solidarity with others through shared stories strengthens my advocacy as I speak truth to power, even while balancing school, work and life.”

Zaria, Climate Change and Mental Health Advocate, Turks and Caicos Islands

Reflections and Recommendations

This study, while not providing a definitive measure of overall mental well-being, effectively identifies specific areas of concern within the child and youth population surveyed. The targeted identification of challenges is crucial for developing effective mental health interventions and is aligned with the findings of numerous other research studies on child and youth mental health. For instance, many studies¹⁻⁴ highlight the rising prevalence of anxiety and depression among young people, often linked to factors such as academic pressure, social media usage and socioeconomic disparities⁵. Similarly, many experts have emphasized the importance of early intervention and readily available support systems, which the findings of this study can help to inform. In light of these findings, the following recommendations can be considered:

- ✔ Continue to raise awareness about mental well-being, mental health, anxiety and depression.
- ✔ Increase strategies to nurture positive coping strategies and protective factors. This could include establishing structured social support systems, promoting youth engagement activities and enhancing opportunities for engaging well-being (physical, mental, emotional, and social) activities.
- ✔ Offer, strengthen, and promote multi-layered and multi-sectoral mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) that meets the needs of all children and young people. This support can range from basic services that promote positive mental health and well-being to specialized services that address and treat severe mental health conditions. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Intervention Pyramid is an evidence-based model used to organize and deliver MHPSS services in four complementary areas. It serves as a globally recognized guide to tailor interventions to the specific needs of different populations for maximum impact.
- ✔ Promote psychosocial support skills that encourage open communication between children, young people, and their support systems, such as active listening and behaviour observation for basic support or referral. Programmes such as Psychological First Aid (PFA) and UNICEF’s I Support My Friends (ISMF) help build these skills. The focus should, therefore, be on providing emotional support that increases resilience and develops healthy coping mechanisms.

- ✔ Parents, alongside schools, employers, governments and other organizations serving children and young people should continue to increase awareness of mental health and psychosocial support resources and services, offering appropriate mental health support. These organizations should also connect children and young people to suitable resources and services. Some useful resources are available on www.youngcaribbeanminds.com.
- ✔ Services should involve children and young people in decision-making processes so they can co-create, inform and identify appropriate interventions that work for them. A guide on how to do this can be found here: www.unicef.org/reports/young-peoples-participation-and-mental-health
- ✔ Children, young people and their support systems, including friends and family members, should be given basic knowledge of the types of issues that are likely to be challenging so they can respond accordingly. Some useful words and youth-guided definitions to start conversations can be found in the glossary section of this report.
- ✔ Increase awareness of mental health severity levels by fostering understanding of the difference between mild and severe mental health challenges, and by strengthening knowledge of when to seek professional help. It is particularly important that parents, teachers, and caregivers know how and when to connect children and young people to appropriate mental health services.
- ✔ Ensure that a monitoring and evaluation strategy is in place, and continue research in collaboration with child, youth and family-related government sectors such as education, health, youth, child protection, juvenile justice, social development, and emergency and disaster management, as well as with non-governmental partners. These efforts will help inform policy reform and guide evidence-based interventions.

CASE STUDY: *From Research to Action: Young people from 23 Caribbean countries helped to combat some of the challenges highlighted by this research study in their respective countries. Using the findings, they developed youth-friendly workbooks to address key issues such as depression, anxiety, and the need for stronger support systems. The young people also led mental health education sessions in schools, participated in media interviews, and advocated with government officials for the inclusion of the workbooks and related resources in schools. Their efforts enabled over 100,000 adolescents across the Caribbean to access tools that support their mental well-being. The workbooks are available at www.youngcaribbeanminds.com.*

“ We need to have a more holistic approach and a realistic approach to make our school environments safer...not just academically, but offering effective [mental health support], beyond just having a counsellor on site. ”

Adia, Youth Mental Health Focal Point, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

The Advocacy Guide: How children, youth and adults can use this report.

This document isn't just a collection of facts and statistics; it's a tool for action. We can use it to start conversations, advocate for change, and make mental health a priority across the Caribbean. Whether you're a child or adult, a student or teacher, a policymaker or parent, a mental health professional or advocate, or simply someone who cares about child and youth mental health, here are some ways you can use this report:

1. STRENGTHEN YOUR MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

If you're passionate about mental health, this report provides real data and examples to strengthen your advocacy. Whether you're speaking at a panel discussion, contributing to a policy, or taking part in a student council or youth parliament, you can use the key findings to show why mental health matters and make clear recommendations for positive change.



2. SHARE INSIGHTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

By sharing these insights online, you can help challenge stigma and start meaningful conversations about mental health. Share the images on pages 3 and 4 of this report on social media to tell your story. Love poetry, music, video creation, or art? Use what you learn from this report to create artistic pieces that reflect child and youth mental health experiences and share them online. Tag us and use the hashtag #YoungCaribbeanMinds so we can help amplify your voice.

3. START CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR FAMILY, PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, FRIENDS, PEERS, COLLEAGUES, GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AND OTHER RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS.

Sometimes, change begins with a simple conversation. Share this report with your friends, classmates, colleagues, and networks. Talk about how mental health affects children and young people in your community, and discuss the solutions you'd like to see to strengthen child and youth mental well-being. You can also organize a small discussion group at your school, club, workplace, or online to explore ways to improve mental health policies and programmes.

4. USE IT FOR SCHOOL OR WORK PROJECTS & PRESENTATIONS

Writing an essay, preparing for a debate, or working on a research project? This report is full of insights that can help strengthen your ideas and arguments. It's a valuable resource for school assignments, presentations, and projects on mental health and human rights advocacy.

5. ADVOCATE FOR MORE SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Do you think your school, workplace, or community could do more to support mental health? Use the findings from this report to make a case for solutions such as peer support programmes, accessible counselling services, and mental health and well-being initiatives. Whether you're speaking with teachers, student leaders, employers, or policymakers, real data can help make your message stronger. You can also get involved with youth-led organizations working to improve mental health, or even start your own campaign or initiative.

6. POLICY FORMULATION AND SUPPORT

Is there a need to strengthen or develop policies on child and youth mental health in your country? Use the findings from this report to support the creation of referral systems between schools and health or social services. The data can also help

inform policy development within ministries of youth, health and education, and guide training for teachers and mental health professionals.

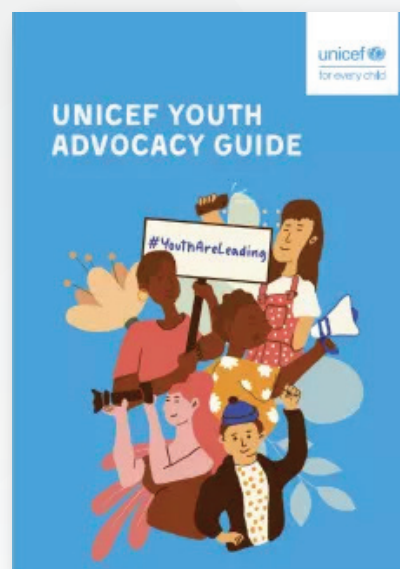
Let's Keep the Momentum Going!

The CARICOM and UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area thank all the children and young people across the Caribbean who participated in this research study. This report is only as powerful as the actions we take. By using it in your own way, big or small, you're helping to shape a future where the mental health of children and young people is valued and protected. Together, let's turn awareness into action.

For more insights on how you can kick off your advocacy journey, download the UNICEF Youth Advocacy Guide (YAG).



Scan the QR Code to download the Advocacy Guide



GLOSSARY

Advocacy

Speaking up and recommending actions around a cause you care about. Advocacy can bring about changes in behaviours, policy, programmes and systems (YAG.)

Anxiety

A group of sensations that are unpleasant and are linked with thoughts that make a person feel really worried or nervous, or think that bad things will happen, sometimes for no clear reason. Anxiety can make your heart race, your stomach hurt, or your mind feel overwhelmed.

Awareness

Learning, talking, and sharing stories about a topic, like mental health, so more people understand its importance.

Community-based Support

This is programmes and services that help people do well in their local neighbourhoods and communities. This support focuses on things like social connections, money, and the environment that affect a person's well-being.

Counselling

Talking with a trained professional who helps you understand your feelings and find ways to cope with challenges.

Counsellor

A trained professional who gives guidance on personal problems and other challenges people may have. Sometimes counsellors can help people make life choices and decisions to improve their lives.

Crisis

A really tough moment when someone may feel hopeless, overwhelmed, or even have thoughts of harming themselves or others.

Depression

More than just feeling sad; it's a long-lasting struggle with low energy, loss of interest, and negative thoughts that make daily life hard.

Ethical Principles

These are basic rules that help us decide what is right or wrong. These basic rules guide our choices and actions, and help us to focus on values like respect, fairness, and responsibility.

GAD-7: Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7

A brief, self-report questionnaire used to assess the severity of anxiety symptoms, particularly those related to generalized anxiety disorder.

IASC MHPSS Pyramid

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) intervention pyramid is a framework for organizing mental health and psychosocial support services in emergencies.

MHPSS

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Mental Health

A state of well-being where a person can realize their abilities, think clearly, cope with life's ups and downs, work well, and contribute to their community.

Mental Health Care

Services and support that help people improve their mental health, including therapy, medication, and community programmes.

Mental Health Interventions

Actions or strategies that are used to improve or support someone's mental health.

Mental Health Resources

Tools like helplines, websites and support groups that can help people take care of their mental health.

Nuclear-Type Family Arrangement

A family consisting of parents and their children, typically living in one home or residence.

Peer Support

Getting help from people your age who have faced similar mental health struggles.

PHQ-9: Patient Health Questionnaire-9

A questionnaire used to screen for and assess the severity of depression symptoms.

Policy

A set of principles, ideas, or plans that guide decisions to achieve a particular outcome.

Protective Factors

These are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that help people deal with stressful events or risks in healthy ways. They reduce the chances of negative outcomes (like mental illness, substance abuse, or violence) and increase the chances of positive development and well-being.

Psychosocial Support

Activities that address the psychological and social needs of individuals, families, and communities.

Risk Factors

Things that make it more likely for someone to face mental health challenges. These can include stress, bullying, family problems, or not having access to good health care. Knowing risk factors helps us find ways to prevent problems and offer support early.

Stigma

Negative attitudes and misunderstandings about mental health that stop people from getting the help they need.

Stress

The feeling of being overwhelmed or under pressure, like when you have too much homework or big life changes. Some stress can be motivating, but too much can be harmful to mental and physical health.

Support Systems

The people and resources that help someone feel safe and cared for, like family, friends, teachers, counsellors, or community groups. A strong support system can improve mental well-being.

Symptom

A sign that something might be wrong with your body or mind. For example, feeling really tired, sad, or anxious for a long time could be symptoms of a mental health challenge.

Therapy

Talking to a trained professional who helps you work through emotions, challenges, and mental health struggles.

Well-Being

The positive state (happy and healthy) when we are able to do well, and our rights are present in the social, economic and environmental areas of our lives.

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