



The Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being of Young People - Vanessa Brown	
Slide No	Slide Commentary
Slide 1	<p>We all have mental health. Think of it as a continuum. We are all on this continuum, in other words, we all have 'mental health'. It's when we are at the wrong end of the continuum for an extended length of time, and when it starts interfering with our quality of life, that we need to be concerned.</p>
Slide 2	<p>Once upon a time, we were all adolescents. Spend a few moments taking a trip down memory lane, perhaps remembering some of the difficulties and challenges you experienced.</p> <p>Now let's try and tune in to our children's world by understanding that today's young people are constructing their world based on YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram as well as "the real world". To that end, their adolescent world is very different to ours.</p> <p>Here are some words a group of young adults used to describe their adolescence. Isolated, Crazy, Confused, A mess, Alone, Terrified, Wild, Out of Control, Lost, Seeking, Frightened.</p> <p>Adolescence starts around the time of puberty and goes on until mid-twenties.</p>
Slide 3	<p>Developing sexual maturity. Physical changes, some of which they have no control over. Developing and maturing self-image, including changes in self-identity and relationships. Uncertainties about the future Increase in novelty seeking Increase in social engagement Increased emotional intensity Creative exploration with an expanded sense of consciousness Reality kicks in - their dreams may not come true, they are sometimes just dreams. They need to develop a growing ability to deal with disappointment/failure. Pressure from parents/school/peers/society/ourselves. Cutting emotional dependence on parents. This can be frightening, they can turn to other people – are they stable? They can feel cut off – can lead to fear – can lead to anger. In order to negotiate the potential difficulties inherent in growing up, our young people need good levels of self-esteem, and good attachments (at the very minimum with one trustworthy adult) High self-esteem builds resilience, the ability to cope at times of difficulty. Low self-esteem can lead to fear, anger, anxiety, depression, self-harm, stress – the list goes on.</p>
Slide 4	<p>Evolutionary psychology explains how our brains and bodies have evolved for survival and reproduction, which as a race clearly we do very well, and it also sheds light on some of the reasons why many of us find modern life so difficult.</p> <p>Quick exploration of the brain. Dr Dan Siegel's Hand Model</p> <p>Brain stem – "reptilian brain", created 100s of millions of years ago. Closely associated with our fight or flight or freeze responses so necessary for survival. Also a fundamental part of our motivational systems to do with our basic needs for food, shelter, reproduction and safety.</p>

	<p>Limbic region - “mammalian brain”, evolved 200 million years ago, when small mammals first appeared. Closely associated with our emotions, which include fear, and our need for relationships and attachment.</p> <p>The amygdala - especially important in the fear response, the instantaneous survival mechanism.</p> <p>The pre frontal cortex – which gives us the ability to think about thinking, i.e. self-awareness. Where we can imagine, plan, make moral judgments, have a sense of self, be capable of insight and empathy. The burden is that we can think too much! This can create anxiety. As far as we know, no other animal is capable of self-awareness. Story of the difference between us and apes looking at our reflections!</p>
Slide 5	<p>The teenage brain</p> <p>So what is happening in the teenage brain?</p> <p>fMRI scans give us an enormous amount of information and thus understanding.</p> <p>There is a huge growth in the brain, from around the start of puberty to age 25. 100 trillion connections. The adolescent brain is in flux, being exposed to dramatic hormonal changes whilst undergoing “neural pruning sprees”, the removal of neural connections preserving those that are used and discarding the unused. Myelination also occurs; myelin is a protective sheath around the neurons and these help the brain to work more efficiently, faster, and helps integrate the different parts of the brain.</p> <p>The normal re-modelling of the brain is intensified by stress, and it can unmask or create problems during this vulnerable period. This makes it more difficult for an adolescent to regulate their emotions – they can be unpredictable and chaotic.</p> <p>Add to this the fact that their pre frontal cortex, the bit that helps with self-control and the ability to be reasonable and see other people’s point of view, is not well developed, and we can see why problems occur!</p>
Slide 6	<p>Eating disorders and self-harm are mental health issues which many people find particularly hard to understand. Many people react to these behaviours with impatience and even anger or disgust. I have often heard people describing a young person who is behaving in troubling ways such as these as “attention seeking” as if they are doing it deliberately and in a calculated way. My reaction is to ask, “What has happened, or not happened to them to make them feel they need attention, and what’s so wrong with wanting attention anyway.”</p> <p>If it is a cry for attention then give them good quality attention in the form of compassionate listening and doing your utmost to understand. They probably need this as much as anything.</p>
Slide 7	<p>This iceberg represents the human mind. We all know the term “the tip of the iceberg”. In psychological terms, the tip of the iceberg represents the parts of ourselves we are aware of, i.e. our conscious mind, and the other 90% of our selves is our subconscious. Therefore, there is a lot to explore and understand – our thinking styles, our feelings, our emotions, our physiology, our belief systems. Add to this the lack of experience adolescents have and for many of them the world is a puzzling place.</p> <p>We see the behaviour but look at all the stuff we don’t see, that internal world below water level.</p>
Slide 8	<p>This parent sounds angry and frustrated!</p> <p>But the young person on the receiving end could be feeling all sorts of things, and may react with anger, depression, anxiety. The relationship is certainly suffering.</p>
Slide 9	<p>This diagram explains how emotions build up and anger is the overflow of these feelings, the explosion. One teenaged client described himself to me as a nuclear bomb, with lots of little things adding to the bomb until it takes just one small thing to make him explode. The answer is to have a way of maintaining the bucket so that it doesn’t overflow. In essence, this can be as simple as having someone trustworthy and non-judgemental to talk to.</p>

Slide 10	<p>Anxiety</p> <p>Anxiety is the anticipation of fear. We all have anxiety, we all need anxiety – it helps us get things done – but when it becomes severe or carries on for a long time it can start impacting on daily life. When we feel anxious, it is because our body is releasing stress hormones because it perceives a threat. This is the fight or flight response.</p>
Slide 11	<p>Cheetah chasing an antelope</p> <p>The three main stress hormones are adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. This biological reaction works well in the face of short-term stress, but it's not good if we face an overwhelming situation in which we feel we cannot cope. Our limbic system can become over sensitive causing cortisol to spike making daily life more difficult. These high cortisol levels can be toxic to the growing brain.</p>
Slide 12	<p>Pressure from parents, school, peers, society, themselves</p> <p>Perfectionism</p> <p>High expectations</p> <p>Rise of technology</p> <p>Overly protective parenting/risk averse culture</p> <p>Too much choice - Tesco online sells 200 plus varieties of milk, the University of Durham offers half a dozen different archaeology degrees. Young people feel they must make the perfect choice because money is tight, debt will be huge, and there is a competitive job market.</p> <p>Not enough true 'down' time</p> <p>A lot of the above pressures are 'external' i.e. they come from outside the self. It is the 'internal' pressure that people put themselves under that is perhaps hardest to manage; it has become an inherent part of you.</p>
Slide 13	<p>Leading UK researcher Paul Gilbert, interested particularly in evolutionary biology and a clinical psychologist, describes the brain in terms of emotional regulation systems, and we have three:</p> <p>Drive and resource-seeking system – purpose is to motivate us towards resources. Feelings of wanting, pursuing, achieving, focus.</p> <p>Soothing and affiliation system – purpose is to manage distress and promote bonding. Feelings of contentment, safety, being cared-for, trust.</p> <p>Threat and self-protection system – purpose to detect threat and protection. “Better safe than sorry”. Feelings of anxiety, anger.</p> <p>We need to have a balance of these three systems for a healthy mental life.</p>
Slide 14	<p>Relaxation/Mindfulness meditation/Rhythmic Breathing</p> <p>This is a very good way to bring our inbuilt 'soothing system' into play, which helps calm down our stress reaction.</p>
Slide 15	<p>Depression</p> <p>Everyone feels low sometimes, we might say “I'm feeling a bit depressed” and that's ok. But there is a big difference between depression with a small 'd' and Depression with a capital 'D'. A way of understanding depression is to think of low mood on a scale, from 'feeling a bit morose' at one end to a feeling of utter hopelessness at the other end. Depression can be seen as the opposite of anger, and is often the result of bottling up feelings.</p>
Slide 16	<p>Warning signs of depression:</p> <p>Sleep problems</p> <p>Difficulty concentrating</p> <p>Feeling hopeless and helpless</p> <p>Dwell on negative thoughts</p> <p>Lost appetite or eating much more than usual</p>

	<p>Much more irritable, short tempered or aggressive than usual</p> <p>Withdrawn</p> <p>Using drugs or alcohol or other reckless behaviour (often used to escape the intense low feelings)</p> <p>When the low mood persists for two to three and/or starts to impact on daily routines, and you feel is becoming serious, please take your child to their GP, who may suggest some medication or some counselling.</p> <p><u>Do not ignore it</u></p>
Slide 17	<p>Anger</p> <p>So what is anger? Anger is often a secondary emotion – the result of another feeling such as embarrassment, fear, shame, or powerlessness. Often these uncomfortable feelings build-up and are expressed in the form of anger, with violence and energy. The build-up of anger can be likened to a volcano, and can be extremely destructive and frightening. The firework model: Once the fuse is lit, it will burn until it reaches the explosive, at which point it explodes. Anger is the same: light the fuse of anger, and if you don't "put the anger out" before it reaches the explosive, the anger will erupt.</p> <p>It's not just young people who are struggling with anger. Story –parent smashing up child's mobile phone with a hammer</p> <p>Anger is the most catching of emotions – it is natural to respond to anger with anger as it often feels like a personal attack. Unfortunately, this response (which worked so well for our distant ancestors) is usually the least effective response to a "stroppy" teenager. Try to remember that underlying their anger they may be feeling hurt, vulnerable, powerless, scared or frustrated.</p>
Slide 18	<p>If we as parents are behaving like this, what sort of role model are we?</p>
Slide 19	<p>To support our child when they are angry, do all you can to avoid being drawn in to their anger. Keep your voice low and firm. Remember there is no point in talking to your child logically when they are in the throes of anger. Give them space to calm down, make sure they are safe, and let them know you are happy to talk to them when they are ready. Be careful not to get drawn in again.</p>
Slide 20	<p>Our job is to acknowledge our emotion mind, engage our reasonable mind and thus create our wise mind. This is different to "repressing" our emotions which often leads to bottling up our feelings which is not good for us.</p> <p>If we are supporting our child, we can acknowledge their emotions by compassionate listening, talk with them about this to help them engage their reasonable mind, thus helping them create their own wisdom.</p>
Slide 21	<p>The difficulties for us as parents are often because we just aren't sure what to do. Some experts say to impose boundaries and limit time spent on phones, others say that for young people their phone is an extension of their body so to take it away is like cutting off their hand! Some children have more addictive personalities so are more prone to overuse. I know that phones can cause anger, frustration and even violence in the home. It is a fine balance for parents between setting healthy boundaries and maintaining a good relationship with their child.</p> <p>We do have to try very hard to understand this new world. Young people are constructing their world based on YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. There's nothing we can do about this, we have to accept it and do our best as parents to make it work for all of us. Most parents worry about their child spending too much time on their phones, and about the suitability of the content of what they are watching.</p>

	<p>It is still very early days, but according to Parent Zone “Supportive and enabling parenting has a more positive impact on digital resilience than parental strategies that restrict or monitor internet use.”</p> <p>There is more and more research coming out telling us about the dangers of overuse of technology.</p> <p>Parent zone is an excellent source of information and support.</p>
Slide 22	<p>Someone likened the emotions experienced when opening a Snapchat or text message as being similar to opening a small present.</p> <p>Seeing inappropriate images and information, e.g. Facebook suicide being live streamed.</p> <p>Comparing yourself to others, never feeling good enough, fit enough, thin enough, beautiful enough. What others think about you makes you self-conscious.</p> <p>Cyberbullying. “Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words may never hurt you.” Actually, this modern version is more accurate. “Sticks and stones may break your bones, and words may really hurt you”, and they often do. We can’t get away from the world – it follows us into our bedrooms.</p> <p>Selfie culture. Dannie Bowman, in 2014 tried to commit suicide because he couldn’t take the perfect selfie”. Spent 10 hours a day, took 200 selfies a day, dropped out of school and lost 30 pounds in weight.</p> <p>Lack of face-to-face communication.</p> <p>Difficulties between reality and fiction.</p> <p>Access to comments that may be extremist, offensive, hateful</p> <p>Not enough sleep!</p> <p>Don’t forget the positives</p> <p>“Teens turn to, and are obsessed with whichever environment allows them to connect to friends. Most teens aren’t addicted to social media; if anything, they’re addicted to each other.” Danah Boyd.</p>
Slide 23	<p>This model shows the integration of how we think, feel and behave.</p> <p>Example: An event/trigger/situation occurs.</p> <p>Our thoughts about this, and the meaning we give to it, affect how we feel, and often how we behave. By noticing and challenging negative or unhelpful thinking patterns, we can literally train ourselves to feel better.</p>
Slide 24	<p>The Worry Tree: This model can help us notice and then manage our worries.</p> <p>Another simple way of dealing with worries is to make yourself a ‘worry jar’. Write all your worries down on small pieces of paper and put them in the worry jar, then screw the lid on tightly. Your brain will see this happening and at some level will gain a sense of relief. Check your ;worries after a few days, and it is likely that some of them will no longer be worries, so throw them out. You may add more at any time, but by regularly checking the contents of the jar, you are teaching yourself that most worries come and go, and often resolve themselves.</p>
Slide 25	<p>This is a shocking statistic, and highlights the importance of an open and loving connection between parent and child. If your child feels understood and listened to, the chances are they will talk to you about their problems. If they feel like you don’t have time, or you don’t understand, or your version of listening is to give advice, then you are at risk of shutting them down, and increasing the likelihood of them turning to someone else for support.</p>
Slide 26	<p>Keep communicating – no matter how difficult they may be, they always need to know that you are on their side. Share some of your own childhood worries and fears.</p> <p>Validate their feelings, by listening, really listening.</p> <p>Try not to judge. Being judgemental is one of the most toxic behaviours. Try to see the world from their perspective, it might look very different.</p>

	<p>Respond vs React. “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” (Victor Frankl) Give them time, be emotionally available. Don’t bear grudges. Remind yourself that their emotional self is often much more active than their reasoning self. Help them find their wise self. Be aware that negative remarks have 3 times the impact of positive. If you have to make a critical remark, try to criticize the behaviour, not the person! i.e. if they do something wrong, don’t say ‘you were stupid’, say ‘that was a stupid thing to do.’</p>
Slide 27	<p>Maintain boundaries, but do try to be flexible. Try not to always have the last word! Remember, you’re the grown up, they’re the child. Use the “Random Gift” trick. Every so often, offer them a small gift for no obvious reason, it might be their favourite magazine, a packet of their favourite biscuits or some loose change from your pocket. Give a reason for the gift – “this is for you because you make me laugh” or “because I love you”. Children hear about 8 times as many negative comments as positive from their parents every day- buck the trend! Help them have healthy sleep patterns, eat healthily, take enough exercise, develop relaxation techniques.</p>
Slide 28	<p>Forgive and accept. “Love your child for who they are, not for who you want them to be”. Keep perspective. Remember, they will soon be grown up and no longer your responsibility. Sometimes things just get too difficult, so don’t be afraid to take your child to their GP for a chat. They may suggest medication or a “talking therapy”. Mental health can be a real problem and ignoring it normally makes it worse.</p>
Slide 29	<p>A People Place If this is not a place where tears are understood Where do I go to cry? If this is not a place where my spirits can take wing, Where do I go to fly? If this is not a place where my questions can be asked, Where do I go to seek? If this is not a place where my feelings can be heard, Where do I go to speak? If this is not a place where you’ll accept me as I am, Where can I go to be? If this is not a place where I can try to learn and grow, Where can I be just me? (William Crocker)</p>