

# Brain Buddies

**A Whole School Approach to raising  
Emotional Awareness and Skills Development**

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# Hounslow MHST

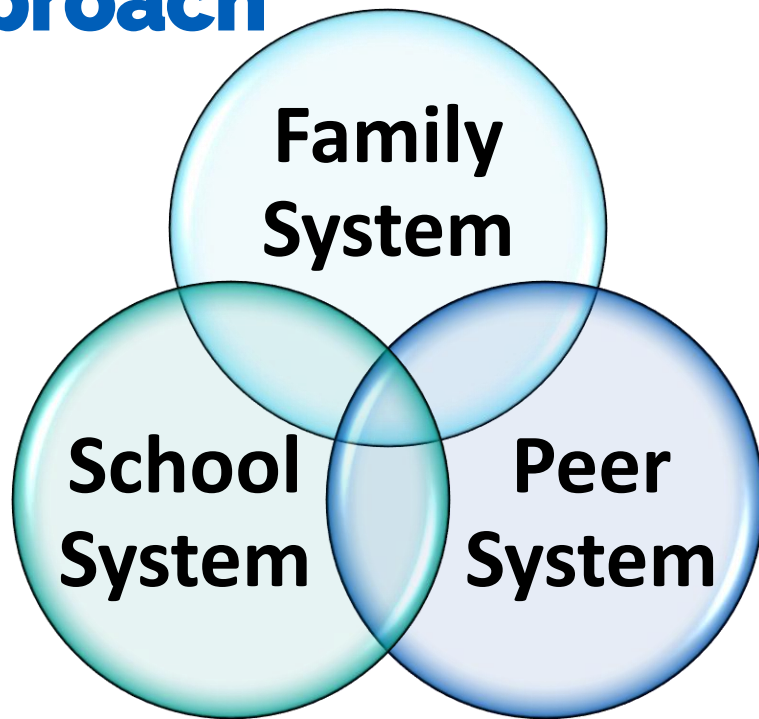
Hounslow MHST is one of the Trailblazer sites established in 2019. It has one of the most diverse communities and more than 70 mainstream schools. The MHST has staff from diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

During the pandemic the team provided support to children and young people from all mainstream schools. At present we are moving back to a cluster model which would inevitably limit accessibility.

The team consists of Education Mental Health Practitioners and Child Wellbeing Practitioners who deliver Guided Self-help interventions to manage anxiety, low mood and challenging behaviour; higher intensity CBT therapists, Clinical Leads and Team managers.



# The Whole School Approach



Some of the risk and protective factors that affect child and young people's mental health and wellbeing include

1. Family harmony and support
2. Supportive friendship and peer relationships
3. Learning and educational attainment alongside the opportunity to socialise



# What is Brain Buddies?

Brain Buddies is a psychoeducation program developed by Dr Helen Aspland, Clinical Psychologist to help children understand their emotions and develop strategies to help them be the best buddies to their brain and emotional system.

Within Hounslow MHST the program has been used both as universal support where entire year groups of children have been taught the skills and as targeted intervention for children who find emotion regulation challenges



# Workshop structure

The workshops are facilitated by 2 practitioners and supported within the classroom by a teacher.

We encourage 2 practitioners to facilitate the group:

- to minimise the pressure on a lone practitioner
- To allow one of the practitioners to observe the group and pick up any issues that might require addressing
- to allow one of the practitioners to deal with situations that might arise during delivery while allowing the other to focus on delivery
- It fosters skills development and confidence among practitioners



# Workshop Structure

We actively encourage the homeroom teacher to be part of the workshops:

- They support the facilitators with behaviour management during delivery
- They administer the Routine Outcome Measures before the start of the workshops and at the end of the workshops and gather the weekly feedback monitoring
- Developing their knowledge and awareness of the content and the skills the children are learning helps to extend application of learning beyond the workshop and embed strategies as life skill



# Workshop Structure

The content is delivered over 6 weeks of 1 lesson period, preferably 1 hour a week:

- Before the start of the workshops the whole class or year group will complete a Time 1 CORS (Child Outcome Rating Scales) and after the 6th workshop is completed they will complete the Time 2 CORS
- Practitioners have delivered the intervention in-person to a classroom and online to two or more classes in a year group
- There is a workbook that comes with the program and children are supported to complete the tasks in the workbook in each session:
  - If in-person delivery the facilitators will lead on discussions and getting workbook activities completed
  - If online delivery the teacher facilitates discussion and get the workbook tasks completed

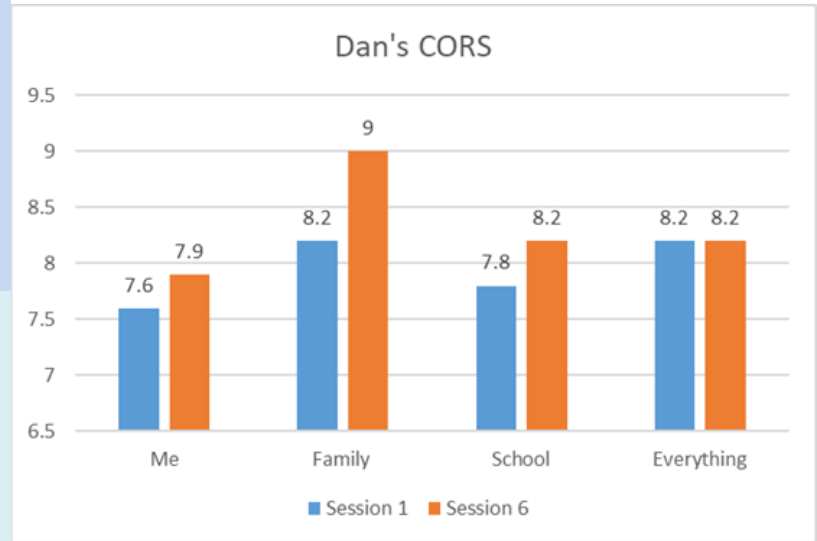


# Measuring Change

The Child Outcome Rating Scale is a simple 4 item measure designed to assess areas of life known to change as a result of an intervention.

1. Individual wellbeing/ symptom relief (Me)
2. Interpersonal wellbeing (Family)
3. Social role wellbeing (School)
4. Overall sense of wellbeing (Everything)

So far the Brain Buddies has been delivered in 8 primary and the results have consistently been positive – small but significant improvement in overall wellbeing.



# How have we used BB so far?

The Brain Buddies program has been offered so far to 8 of schools, supporting more than 500 KS2 students.

The feedback from schools on all levels of intervention has been very positive.

*“This pupil has an EHCP and has a hearing impairment, language disorder and emotional regulation difficulties. She sees a HI Specialist Speech and Language Therapist each Friday and she reported to her that the workshop was the best part of her week. Due to the language disorder, this pupil has difficulty recalling events that have taken place more than 1 hour ago, so it was a huge deal that she was able to recall the workshop from three days prior. This week she has spoken positively about the ‘yoga’ session and has discussed ways that she is going to be monitoring her feelings. I’ll continue to keep you updated! “ (AB, Assistant Head Teacher)*



# Pilot Targeted Intervention

In one school we run a pilot of targeted intervention for 8 students aged 10-11 who at the time were displaying significant interpersonal problems and disruptive behaviour at school and in the neighbourhood with positive outcomes.

The Deputy Head of the school shared that there was a significant reduction in the incidence of disruptive behaviour and peer relationship difficulties within school.

In the future we plan to get data on incident recording from school and reports from parents before and after intervention to gain insight into impact on emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness.



# Future plans

As Brain Buddies is a short-term intervention, the outcome measured by CORS at the end of the six weeks though positive is limited. Change takes time and application of emotional awareness and self-regulation skills in different contexts is the only way the impact of Brain Buddies could be embedded.

The involvement of teachers from administering the outcome measures to facilitating the group discussion and use of the workbooks enabled them to help students remember and apply the strategies they learnt after the intervention.

*“Staff that were present during the sessions have been reminding students of strategies when having difficulties managing emotions or with friendships in class/the playground, not only with their year group but also other year groups.”*

*(AS, Deputy Head)*



# Staff training initiative

Based on the positive feedback received from all schools that participated in the pilot last academic year, in collaboration with the developer Dr Helen Aspland we are planning to train school staff to deliver the Brain Buddies for their school.

This initiative addresses the following Whole School Approach principles:

- Prevention: as a universal, pastoral support BB raises awareness and teach pupils skills to build resilience and support social emotional learning.
  - It also develops staff competence to support student wellbeing
- Identification: it allows staff to identify those pupils struggling with managing emotions and interpersonal difficulties. As has been shown staff could remind and encourage the use of strategies in class and playground and where necessary refer to appropriate support services.



# Staff training initiative

First stage: staff from participating schools will co-facilitate the workshops with an MHST practitioner twice to enable them build their competence

Second stage: The staff member will deliver the session preferably with a Teaching Assistant observed by the MHST practitioner to build confidence.

*For quality control purposes the workshops are pre-recorded and the workbooks are already prepared to maintain consistency of delivery*

Third stage: school staff will deliver the workshops and the MHST practitioner offer reflective space to embed learning and address issues that might arise.



# Conclusion

Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people requires the concerted effort of parents/carers, schools and mental health services.

The Whole School Approach endeavours to promote systemic changes that protect and promote the mental health and wellbeing of both the children and young people and the adults that look after them.

Universal initiatives like the Brain Buddies play a significant role in raising emotional awareness and self-management skills in children and young people that promote mental wellbeing and improve interpersonal relationships within the family and at school. Training staff, we believe allows a wider reach and embed awareness and skills within the school system.

