

Preparing for Secondary School

Workshops for Parents/Carers
and Y6 children



We care
We respect
We are inclusive

About Me

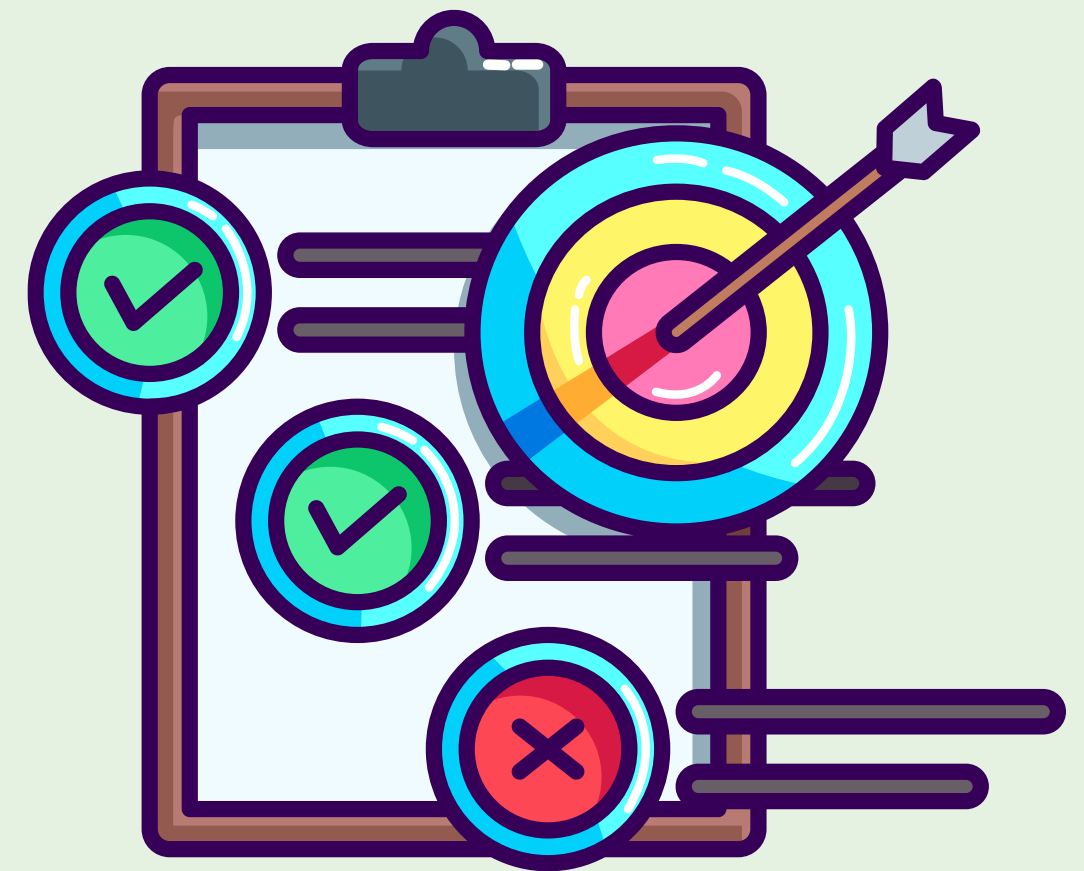
I work for **City & Hackney's MHST** (Mental Health in Schools Team).

My role is **Education Mental Health Practitioner**

I am based in different schools across Hackney but work at **Grasmere** on **Friday mornings**.

Aims

- Understand the emotional impact of transitioning to secondary school
- Learn how anxiety and worry can show up during times of change
- Explore strategies to manage worries and build confidence
- Identify ways parents and carers can support a positive transition





Put your hand up if you're excited about secondary school
Put your hand up if you're nervous about secondary school
Put your hand up if you're a bit of both



You can feel:

✓ Excited

✓ Curious

✓ Nervous

✓ Worried



At the same time.

Feelings can co-exist. Feeling nervous doesn't mean something is wrong, it just means something important is happening.

Transition

A transition is moving from one stage, place or situation to another.

Transitions can include:

- Starting school
- Moving house
 - New clubs
- New friendships

Transitions happen throughout life. Some are big and some are small. Secondary school is one of your biggest transitions.

Why does change feel difficult?

Brains like:

- Predictability
- Familiar routines
- Knowing what to expect



Change creates:

- Uncertainty
- New situations
- New challenges

Why does change feel difficult?

Our brains are like prediction machines. They like knowing what's coming next.

When something changes, the brain naturally starts asking questions.



Who will be in my class?

Will I get lost?

Will I make friends?

This is a normal brain response, not a sign that something is wrong.

Common Transition Worries

What worries might people have about secondary school?

Getting
lost

Homework

New
teachers

Friends

Being
late

Not
fitting in

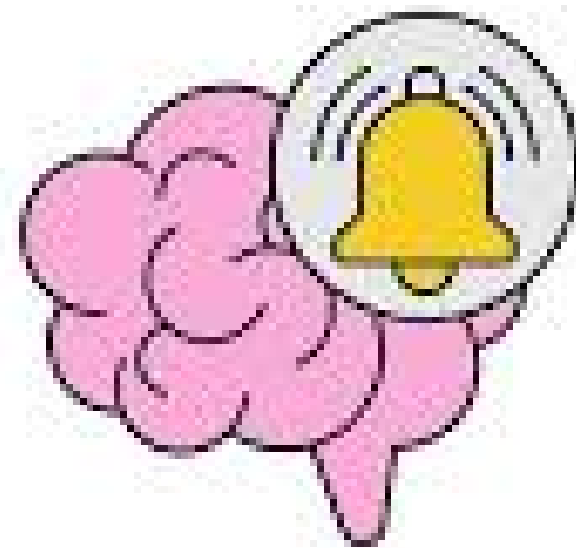
Work
will be
harder

Not
knowing
what to
do

The Worry Brain

Brains job:

- Keep us safe
- Spot possible problems



Sometimes:

- Helpful preparation
- Unhelpful
overestimating danger

Our brains would rather give us a false alarm than miss a real problem.
These thoughts can create feelings of worry and anxiety.

Anxiety

01

Bodily Sensations

Associated with
Adrenaline -
Heart beating faster,
sweating, etc.

02

Anxious Thoughts

Overestimating Threat

Underestimating Ability to
Cope

03

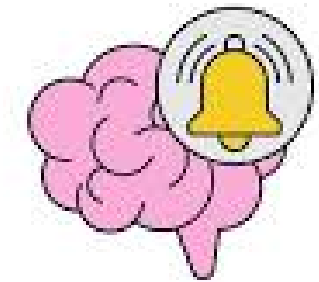
Anxious Behaviour

Avoid worrying situations,
so you don't get a chance to
see if it's as bad as you
think or if you can cope

Seeking reassurance

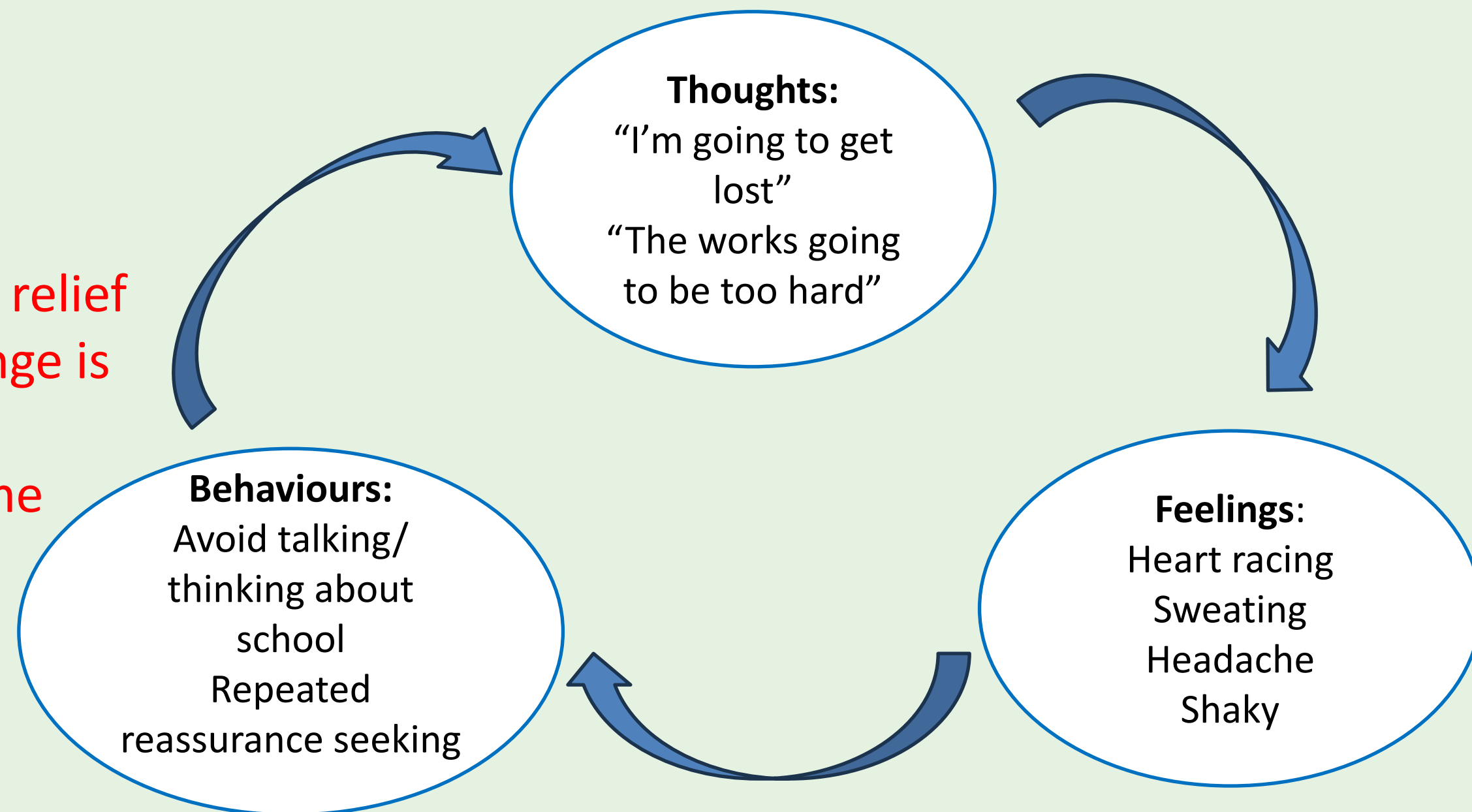
Anxiety is a normal emotion designed to keep us safe

The Worry Cycle



Example: Secondary school transition

Provides short-term relief
Reinforces that change is unsafe
More worry next time



Avoidance makes us feel better in the moment, but often keeps worries going

Unhelpful Vs Helpful thoughts



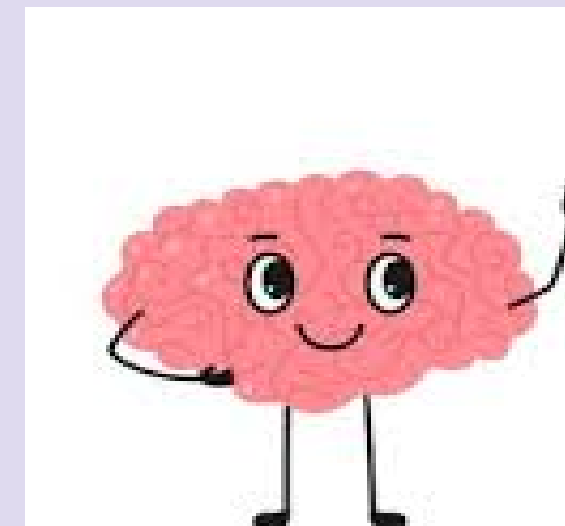
We can't always control whether a worry pops into our mind. But we can learn to question whether that worry is helping us.



Not because it's negative

But:

- Makes us feel stuck
- Makes us feel worse
- Doesn't consider all the evidence



Balanced and realistic

Helps:

- Reduces intensity of worry
- Increases confidence to cope
- Looks at the whole picture

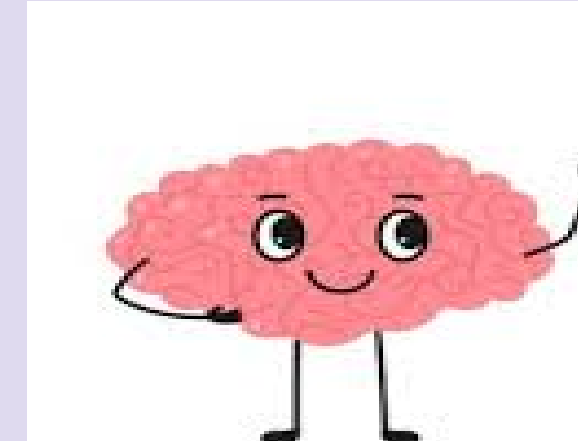
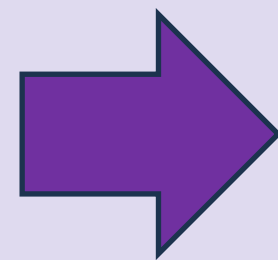
Unhelpful Vs Helpful thoughts



I'll get lost

Nobody will like me

I won't cope



I might get lost at first, but lots of people do and there will be adults to help

Making friends can take time, but there will be lots of opportunities to meet people

Secondary school will be different, but I've managed new situations before

What helps?



If someone was worried about starting secondary school, what might help?

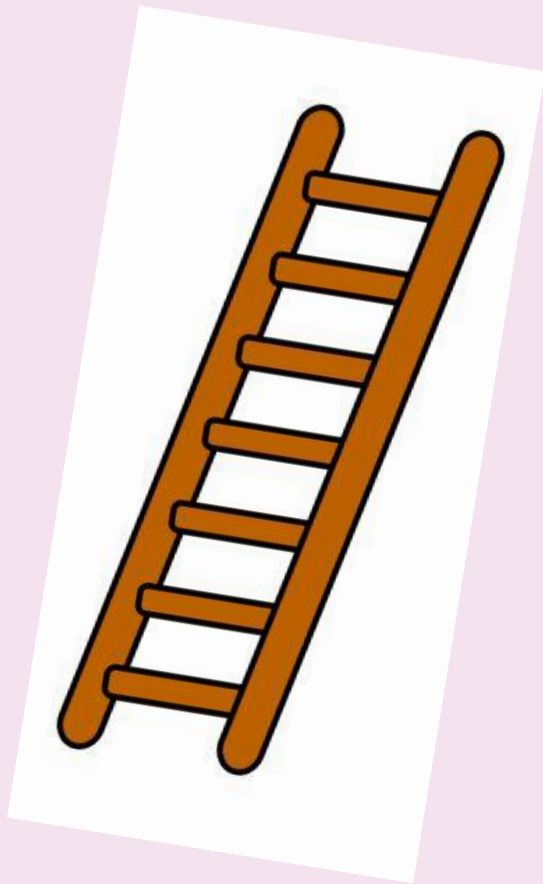
There are lots of things that can help, but today we're going to focus on four that research tells us make a real difference:

- Face it in small steps
- Use helpful thoughts
 - Coping toolbox
- Look back to move forward

Face it in small steps

When we're anxious, one of the things we often want to do is avoid the thing we're worried about.

The problem is that avoidance can make worries bigger.



- Talking about secondary school
- Going to transition day
- Looking at the school website e.g. pictures
- Practising route to school

Confidence comes from doing, not waiting until you feel ready.

Use helpful thoughts

Helpful thoughts aren't about pretending everything will be perfect. They're about reminding ourselves that we can cope.

Unhelpful Thought	Helpful Thought
"The work is going to be too hard."	"The work will be different, but my teachers will help me learn and adjust."
"Everyone else will know what they're doing except me."	"Lots of people will be figuring things out at the same time."
"If I feel nervous, it means I can't do it."	"Feeling nervous is normal when trying something new."
"I won't fit in."	"It can take time to find your place and build new friendships."

Confidence isn't the absence of worry. Confidence is doing something even when you feel a bit worried.

Coping Toolbox

Sometimes when we're worried, we forget all the things that already help us.



Talking to someone

Breathing techniques

Grounding techniques

Doing things you enjoy

Asking questions

Taking a break

Problem solving

Getting enough sleep

Looking back to move forward

Can you think of a time when you were nervous about something but managed it anyway?

Examples:

- Starting primary school
- Learning to ride a bike / play an instrument
- Joining a new club
- Sleeping away from home

Sometimes our best evidence comes from our own experiences. It shows you already have coping skills.

What children need from you

Children don't need you to:

- X Remove all worries
- X Have all the answers
- X Make everything perfect

Children do need you to:

- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Validate feelings
- ✓ Encourage coping
- ✓ Remind them of their strengths

The goal is not to remove every worry before September but to help children feel confident that they can cope with challenges when they arise.

CHECK IN EXAMPLES

What are you looking forward to?

What are you worried/nervous about?

What could help you feel more confident?

What do you already know about what's changing?

How are you feeling about.....?



What do you think will happen if...?

What do you think you should do?

Listen first, solve second. Understanding a child's experience often reduces anxiety before any solution is needed.

Helpful Language

Try to see it through their eyes! Validating and empathising can help them to open up and feel understood.

"It's okay to find change tricky"

"We can do hard things together"

"Let's think about what stays the same"

"We'll take it step by step"



Language to Avoid

These phrases seem reassuring, but often they accidentally shut down conversation. Whereas validation first is key as it recognises that the worry feels real to them.

“Don’t worry”

“You’ll be fine”

“There’s nothing to worry about”





What stays the same?

When we're anxious, our brains focus on what is changing.

A useful strategy is helping children notice **what isn't changing**.

Instead of “everything will be different”, help them identify what’s staying the same. Such as:

- Familiar adults
- Existing friends
- Home environment/ family routines

Build confidence not certainty

Children build confidence when they:

- ✓ Try new things
- ✓ Solve problems
- ✓ Experience success
- ✓ Learn they can cope

Confidence grows through experience.

You can't guarantee certainty, but what you can do is help children believe that if something difficult happens, they can manage it.

Building resilience (not removing discomfort)

We don't want to remove all discomfort for children. If we do that, we accidentally teach them that change is dangerous.

Instead, we help them tolerate small amounts of uncertainty with support

Examples:

Discuss worries and problem-solve together

Talking through changes in advance

Practising new routines at home

Preparing for Transition

We want enough preparation to reduce uncertainty, but not so much that it becomes overwhelming or anxiety-provoking in itself.

Helpful

Talking about change early but not repeatedly

Breaking information into steps

Using visuals, where possible

Practising routines

Naming what will stay the same

Unhelpful

Overloading with too much detail

Constant reassurance loops

Last minute preparation

Final Reflection



Children:

- One thing you are looking forward to
- One strength you'll take with you

Parents

- One thing your child already does well
- One way you'll support them this summer

Often when we're focused on worries, we forget to notice strengths.

Any
Questions?



Feedback



Please complete our survey 😊

<https://forms.gle/f4iEJXQezMfMnb7T9>





Signposting - Parent Support

Family Action

Charity that provides practical, emotional and financial support to those who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social isolation across the country:

www.family-action.org.uk



Hackney SENDiags

Provides impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents and carers of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and children and young people (up to 25 years old) with SEND:

020 7275 6036
<http://www.hackneysendiags.co.uk/>



St. Joseph's Hospice

Offers support to children, young people and families who have lost a family member, care giver or other significant person due to a bereavement of any kind):

<https://www.stjh.org.uk/our-care/counselling-and-advice/bereavement-service/>



Family Coach Service

Works with families that have SEND children (no formal diagnosis or EHCP required) 1-1, empowerment groups and drop-in coaching sessions:

familycoach@hackney.gov.uk 0208 356 7344



African and Caribbean Services



Father to Father offers a programme for parents whose children (12-15) experience emotional wellbeing or behavioural challenges : 07930 699 970

Mental Health Support Team



MHST is an NHS school based early intervention and prevention service that focuses on delivering direct input to children, YP, parents and caregivers to help improve young people's emotional wellbeing

<https://www.eft.nhs.uk/camhs/where-we-work/city-hackney-camhs/city-hackney-mhst-schools>

Young Minds: Parent helpline

Free helpline that can support with practical advice on how to support your children's mental health:

www.youngminds.org.uk/parents-helpline
0800 802 5544



Early Help Support

Family assessment and development of a support plan: MASH@hackney.gov.uk
020 8356 5500



CHSCP

Crisis Service

East London CAMHS Extended Crisis Service is a service for children and young people in mental health crisis and their families across City & Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham:

Tel. 111 Option 2

