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Measuring mental wellbeing to improve the lives of children and young people

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Measuring Mental Wellbeing to Improve the Lives of Children and Young People—learning Module by the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) and Anna Freud Learning Network, London, 2017. Free of Charge. Available from CORC at <https://www.corc.uk.net/eLearning>

There is a growing need for non-specialists, including school staff, to have practical understanding of mental wellbeing outcome measures. The introduction of the new relationships and health curriculum in England (Department for Education, 2019) places statutory responsibility on state-funded schools to support pupils' mental wellbeing; however, evidence suggests many staff feel ill-equipped to manage this role (Education Support, 2019). This e-learning module aims to increase awareness, understanding and confidence for those unfamiliar with the process of assessing the mental wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) and how this information can be applied to improve outcomes.

The core content is divided into six components, each given an estimated time for completion, ranging from three to 15 minutes. This totals 43 minutes, not including the brief **knowledge check** section at the end. Drag and drop exercises, image exploration and quizzes are used effectively to engage the learner with the content. Links at the end of every section invite deeper exploration of a theme according to individual preference. **Understanding mental wellbeing** and **Introduction to outcome measures** are well-pitched for a novice audience. Key concepts and terminology are explained succinctly and clearly. Considering the ambitious amount of ground covered, **The benefits of measuring mental wellbeing** could have been condensed and incorporated in an earlier section. This would have granted the learner more capacity for the content-rich **Selecting and using measures** component, which has greater practical value. This section identifies seven steps and uses a case study of an emotional wellbeing practitioner (easy for non-mental health professionals to relate to) in order to guide the learner through the decision-making process. Why? Who? When? Where? How? and What next? factors in the process are comprehensively considered, covering issues of purpose, choosing informants and when, where and how to administer measures from a child-focused perspective. Consent and data protection are mentioned but a sub-section dedicated to ethics and data protection would be a useful addition. Also, given that practical considerations regarding scoring and burden are paramount in selecting measures, more attention to the What? aspect would be beneficial. Several measures are presented on a spectrum ranging from usefulness for service evaluation to meaningfulness for the respondent. However, from a learner's perspective, incorporating a scoring task within the case study would facilitate a more practical understanding of selection.

Listening and attending to the voices of CYP is imperative with regard to issues that affect them, including mental wellbeing services and interventions (Dex and Hollingworth, 2012). Their contribution to this module's content is

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Training Update

Edited by
William Baginsky

'Aims to increase awareness, understanding and confidence for those unfamiliar with the process of assessing the mental wellbeing of children and young people'

Listening and attending to the voices of CYP is imperative'

Research suggests that CYP desire to be active agents and participate in decisions about interventions and services'

'There is definitely an appetite for this type of introductory course to mental wellbeing measurement'

embedded in several places. The **Best practice using measures** section gives examples of CYP's negative experiences of mental wellbeing assessments (e.g. no introduction/explanation of the purpose) and their feedback on how to improve service delivery. More real-world examples, including feed-forward suggestions from CYP about how they would like to engage with mental wellbeing assessment and support, would have been helpful here. Research suggests (Children's Commissioner, 2017) that CYP desire to be active agents and participate in decisions about interventions and services. Opportunities to increase this participation (including developing staff training materials) should be maximised.

The final component, **Using and interpreting data** is explored through different contexts. One example demonstrates how data collected from an instrument (Goal Based Outcomes questionnaire) can be interpreted and conclusions drawn to guide action. This measure was categorised on the spectrum introduced earlier in the module as high on meaningfulness for CYP and, used here, provides learners with an accessible working model to take away. This captures a scenario that learners would likely anticipate encountering in their own practice. It is pertinent to highlight that scales are just one ingredient of a good evaluation and perhaps a complementary module could consider how qualitative approaches can be utilised alongside standardised mental wellbeing instruments.

A **knowledge check** concludes the module and takes a few minutes to complete. This does not do justice to the extensive material covered; however, understanding is reviewed at regular intervals across the module. There is definitely an appetite for this type of introductory course to mental wellbeing measurement and in terms of raising awareness and increasing understanding of the key issues this is a valuable resource. Further information and support are signposted; nonetheless, for novices to feel confident in applying their learning, some follow-on training may be required.

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