

Last week the Prime Minister launched an initiative with the National Citizens Service (NCS) to provide mental health guidance to teenagers who take part in the NCS programme. This is an extremely important project which will not only serve to benefit the teenagers of today but the adults of tomorrow. For whatever reasons, and there are many, there is more pressure on our youngsters today than ever before. It is not just about exam stress, something that has affected generations of teenagers albeit in a way relevant to the era, but there is an underlying pressure from a non-stop intrusion of the world wide web which in itself creates a modern impact on mental health.

Mental health issues disproportionately affect young people with over half mental health problems starting at the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 18. The NCS course is only one part of the picture - although an important part. It will help break the stigma of talking about mental health issues for a start but it will also help build up resilience and develop coping mechanisms to help deal with stress. Many don't understand and are somewhat cynical about how coping mechanisms, such as good breathing techniques, can help reduce anxiety and depression. Teaching our youngsters how to step away, pause, relax, breathe plays a significant part and we are seeing more schools offering programmes, such as mindfulness, as a way of supporting their students.

Of course this is only one part and we must continue to invest in good mental health treatment programmes and improve children's mental health services as a priority. But bit by bit we are tackling mental health. It has been slow but now from the NCS initiative and other programmes a new generation will get the support it needs.