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Analogue to digital

Improving school response for children who self-harm

ARC East of England

The challenge
Rates of self-harm among adolescents in the UK have risen significantly in recent years. Young people who self-harm are at a higher risk of poor mental health in adulthood and an increased risk of suicide. Schools are uniquely placed to notice early signs and offer timely support, but staff often need more guidance and confidence to respond effectively.

The approach
“To address this gap, researchers from the ARC East of England developed SORTS (SuppOrtive Response To Self-harm), an innovative, evidence-informed, scalable online training programme and toolkit designed to equip school staff with the knowledge and confidence to identify, understand, and support students who self-harm. The programme was co-produced with the Charlie Waller Trust, students, school staff, and mental health professionals.”

The outcomes and impact
Since going live, the SORTS e-learning module has reached over 3,000 staff members across 325 schools in England and Wales. Staff report increased awareness of self-harm and warning signs, as well as greater confidence in supporting students who self-harm.

The programme is now recommended by the Mayor of London’s Health Schools London programme and has been adopted by a London council as part of its self-harm prevention strategy in schools. At a time when waiting lists for children’s mental health services remain long, early intervention within schools is essential.

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