



Growing Minds Therapy Responds to Record Rise in Children's Mental Health Referrals

October 09, 2026

CHICHESTER, UK - October 09, 2026 -

More than a million children had an active referral to mental health services in England during a single year for the first time on record, according to the fifth annual report from the Children's Commissioner published on 29 June 2026. The figure of 1,048,965 for 2024 to 2025 is almost double the number recorded in 2018 to 2019 and close to ten per cent higher than the previous year. The data has taken on renewed relevance as schools return for the autumn term, placing fresh attention on Children's mental health support across the country.

Demand is rising faster than services can respond. At the end of March 2025, 35 per cent of children referred were still waiting for treatment. The typical wait across all children was 128 days, while more than 60,000 had been waiting for over two years, up from more than 44,000 the year before. Analysis by the Centre for Mental Health found that anxiety remained the most common reason for referral, accounting for 16 per cent of the total. Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England, stated that the figures underline the scale of distress young people are experiencing, and that children waiting months or years are in effect unable to access the system at all.

Wider prevalence data points in the same direction. Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health analysis records that the proportion of eight to sixteen year olds assessed as having a probable mental health disorder rose from 12.5 per cent to 20.3 per cent by 2023, a change driven by more severe presentations rather than milder ones. Over a similar period the proportion of affected young people able to access support through their school fell from 59.8 per cent to 53.1 per cent.

Melissa Urwin, a cognitive behavioural therapist and founder of Growing Minds Therapy, stated that anxiety in children rarely announces itself as anxiety. She added that families more often describe stomach aches before school, difficulty getting to sleep, irritability or a child who has quietly stopped doing things they once enjoyed, and that recognising those patterns early tends to shorten the work required later.

Cognitive behavioural therapy is the intervention recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for anxiety disorders in children and young people, and is delivered through the health service, through school based mental health support teams and privately. Evidence syntheses published over the past two years have continued to support its use for childhood anxiety, including when delivered in school settings.

Mental health support teams, which place trained practitioners in schools and colleges to work with milder presentations, have been expanded in recent years but do not yet cover every area of the country. Referral routes and thresholds also differ between regions, which contributes to the variation in waiting times recorded across England. The Children's Commissioner has argued that earlier intervention, before a child reaches crisis point, would reduce both distress and the eventual demand placed on specialist services.

Growing Minds Therapy provides specialist cognitive behavioural therapy for children and young people experiencing anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, phobias, trauma and depression, working across West Sussex, South Hampshire and online. The company follows a structured approach that begins with an initial conversation about the reasons for accessing therapy, continues with an assessment of current symptoms, and progresses to intervention sessions built around collaboratively agreed goals.

###

For more information about Growing Minds Therapy, contact the company here:
Growing Minds Therapy
Melissa Urwin +44 (0)7913 129 188
melissa@growingmindstherapy.co.uk
The Pavilion, Connolly Way,
Graylingwell, Park, Chichester PO19 6WD

Growing Minds Therapy

Growing Minds Therapy provides specialist CBT for children and young people with anxiety, depression, OCD and PTSD. Founded by a BABCP-accredited psychotherapist with 20+ years in education and NHS CAMHS. Based in Chichester, West Sussex.

Website: <https://growingmindstherapy.co.uk/>

Email: melissa@growingmindstherapy.co.uk

Phone: +44 (0)7913 129 188

