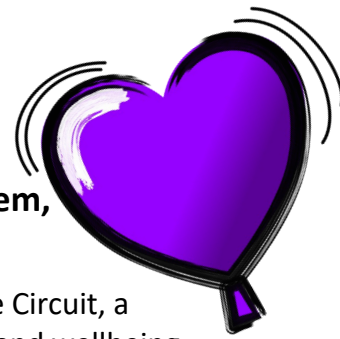


# Prayers for young minds



**Matthew ch 9 vs 36 : When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**

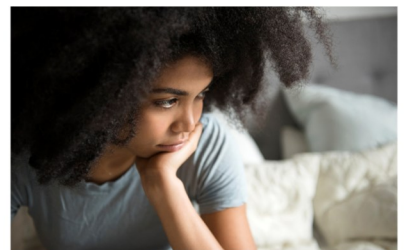
At the December Circuit meeting a proposal was accepted that 2025 would be for the Circuit, a year of prayer for children and young people, with particular focus on mental health and wellbeing. This is in light of the deeply concerning high level of mental illness in those age groups.

Preachers have been asked to include a special prayer in the intercessions each Sunday. These will have been prepared in advance and are to be used in all churches so we shall be united in prayer across the Circuit. In addition it is hoped to produce a prayer booklet, to provide information and prayers for home use.

Most of us I suspect have been quite unaware of how the incidence of mental illness in children and young people has increased over recent years. It has been a silent tsunami. Depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, addictions, and low self esteem, are some of its manifestations. The Covid pandemic certainly impacted very severely on children, but an academic study back in 2018 found a striking, six-fold increase in how many children and young people in England reported having a long-standing mental health condition between 1995 and 2014 (from 0.8% to 4.8%). And among young adults between 16 and 24, there was a 10-fold increase – from 0.6% to just under 6%. This study highlighted as possible drivers, increased school pressures, the effects of social media and cyberbullying, austerity-related cuts to youth workers and early intervention services, with an increasing proportion of children also growing up in poverty.

Recent NHS figures show that more than a fifth of 8 to 25-year-olds had a probable mental health disorder in 2023. In the 17-19 age group it was a quarter of them. A study of students at a London College showed in the period 2017- 2023 the proportion of students reporting mental health difficulties tripled. In 2023 more than one in five young women and 1 in 20 young men had an eating disorder. A GP journalist reported that the commonest form of mental health problem she comes across in young patients is self-harm by cutting. Their motives range from having a sense of control to changing emotional to physical pain to distract themselves from their overwhelming emotions. The latest figures show that a staggering 400,000 children were referred by their GP for specialist mental health services in a six-month period. At the same time resources for treatment are over- stretched, and waiting lists are long,

The Methodist Church has always had a heart for children and young people, and over the years has offered Junior Church, Youth Clubs, and other children's activities, but these days some of our churches have no contact with children routinely. Praying for children is something we can all do. It is a fresh expression of our love and concern, for the children and their families. Churches may well give thought to the justice issues reflected in these appalling statistics, and who knows what ideas for action may come into view as we turn to God in prayer.



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