



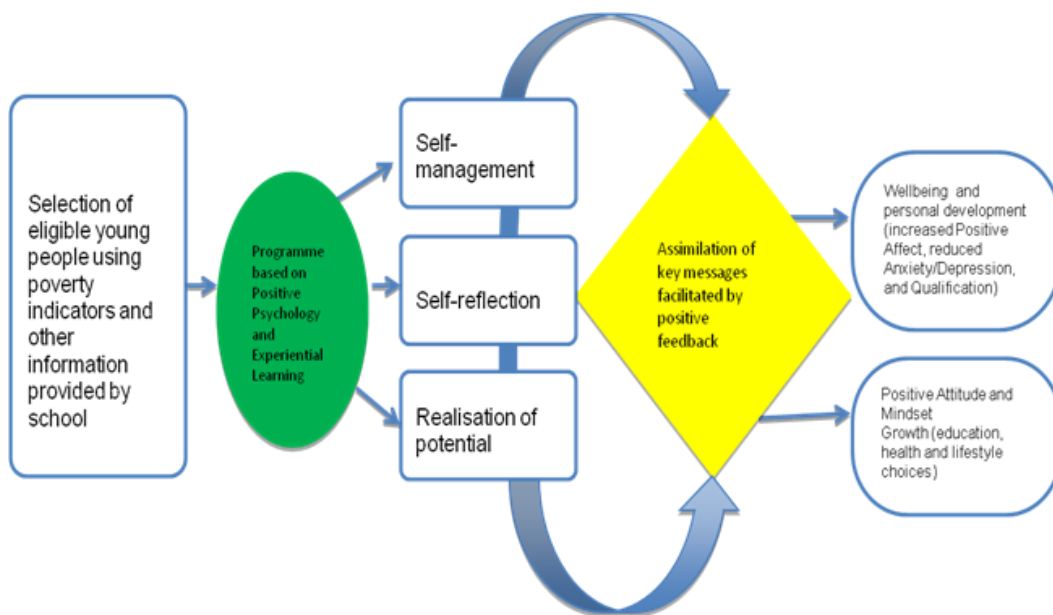
Overview of Growing2gether

Growing2gether is a youth-centred programme for 13-15 year-olds facing disadvantage, which seeks to re-engage them with their education by nurturing self-efficacy, self-regulation and emotional intelligence to succeed in school and beyond. Schools use eligibility criteria to select young people at risk of becoming disengaged, suffering poor mental health and dropping out of school. The programme coaches adolescents to mentor toddlers (aged 3-5) who need extra support, leading to an accredited SCQF Level 4 qualification. The 18-week intervention is delivered in nurseries by two facilitators trained/quality assured by the charity, to groups of 8-10 adolescents. Each week, every adolescent mentors their assigned toddler for 1.5 hours, followed by 1.5 hours of group coaching.

Through mentoring, the young people gain a sense of meaning and begin to experience what they are capable of achieving. This gives a strong sense of personal accomplishment. Group coaching uses psychosynthesis (an approach that focuses on personal growth and development) with experiential learning to promote autonomy, competence and connection. In many of the weekly nursery sessions, the adolescents are invited to observe and reflect on an issue related to their toddler (e.g. risky behaviour, aspirations). The mentoring session then provides a safe supportive space to collectively think about that issue in their own personal context, with 'lessons learned' that they are encouraged to try out in their daily life. Teenagers contribute to their curriculum so that it keeps pace with contemporary issues facing young people today (e.g. recent additions are cyberbullying and body image). Using a pre-post design, engagement with the intervention was associated with increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, growth mindset and more positive attitudes towards health and education.

Theory of Change Model

The model below illustrates Growing2gether's Theory of Change. The Growing2gether curriculum is underpinned by Positive Psychology which builds on individual strengths, rather than focusing on individual weaknesses or limitations (Seligman, 2011). The Growing2gether programme is a complex and multifaceted intervention that contains multiple interacting components and targets several organisational levels (e.g. children and facilitators), influences a number of theoretically informed outcomes (such as psychological wellbeing and educational engagement), and has flexibility to be tailored to individual needs.



Primary outcomes are positive mental health (a reduction on anxiety/depression) and positive mindset. Through experiential learning (mentoring a child needing additional support in a nursery), young people are able to self-reflect, self-manage and self-regulate, meanwhile enhancing relationships with others. Research suggests that stressful life events depression, substance use, and motivations for non-suicidal self-injury were weaker among those with more of a growth mindset relative to those with more of a fixed mindset (Schroder et al, 2017). These findings suggest that anxiety mindsets function in a similar way for mental health resilience as how mindsets of intelligence function for academic outcomes (Schroder et al, 2017).

Enhancing mental health and mindset is extremely valuable as it correlates with academic, behavioural, social-emotional and motivational outcomes. Research suggests that 75% of adults who experience poor mental health in adulthood first experience these difficulties before the age of age 18, (Kim-Cohen et al, 2013) resulting in subsequent issues with relationships, wellbeing, educational attainment (Brännlund, Strandh & Nilssotn, 2017) and employment (Sadler et al, 2018). The current policy in the UK emphasises the important role that schools have in promoting good mental health, despite there being little evidence on what aspects of schools influence mental health in pupils (Ford, et al 2021). Teaching staff are under increasing pressure to deliver the curriculum while managing children's wellbeing, hence, mental health-based programmes may offer a solution to fulfil the needs of young people with mental health issues. Our analysis (taken August 2022) reveals that anxiety and depression, measured by the Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) significantly improved (22% increase in mean scores) from baseline to the end of the programme, ($t = 10.06$ (392), $p = <0.01$). This is higher (31%) in young people with borderline scores for anxiety and depression, suggesting that Growing2gether has made a positive impact on young people's mental health.