



ssat

Children's Charter

A pledge for children



ssatuk.co.uk/childrenscharter

Children's Charter - A pledge for children

“We talk about the economic crisis, the crisis in the cost of living; when will we talk about the crisis in childhood?”

The answer is now and during a SSAT seminar in December 2022, Professor Barry Carpenter led roundtable discussions with leaders from across SSAT networks, academics and leading third sector organisations to consider what principles should underpin our response to a reshaped, redefined 21st century childhood. SSAT is committed to working with all stakeholders to provide all children and young people with the principles outlined in the Children's Charter and we now call upon you to join us in making a pledge for children.

We all bring our own expertise and experience, but together we are stronger. Collectively, we can assure children that they are being listened to and that we are recognising their lived reality, whatever that might be, and seek to influence the design and development of truly responsive services and practices which meet their needs now and in the future.

Sue Williamson

Sue Williamson,
Chief Executive, SSAT



Before the pandemic hit in 2020, the then Head of the NHS, Sir Simon Stevens, talked of the “crisis in childhood”, fuelled by the amount of access children had to the Internet. Then, with the pandemic, came the online lessons via zoom, and children were wedded to the technology for many hours per week, through three lockdowns; or as one 9 year old defined lockdown to me “Locked in!”, which is not a natural state for childhood.

None of this was anyone's fault. It was the best we could do to maintain some sort of learning for our children while covid-19 rampaged. But there are consequences, and we deny these at our peril, or children, who are our future generation, will pay the price.

- *What does the profile of childhood look like now?*
- *What is the daily lived reality of children and young people now?*
- *What are the needs of our children now, in this moment?*
- *Is Society addressing these needs?*
- *Is the Government acknowledging them?*
- *Are systems being enabled to be responsive?*



ssat

Children's Charter

A pledge for children

We began by looking at the values expressed in the Recovery Curriculum (Carpenter and Carpenter, 2020), around the potential losses children experience during times of natural disaster. All agreed that there was evidence from the children around them of bereavement, anxiety, attachment issues, and trauma.

These were, however, presenting in different ways to their traditional presentations or patterns of behaviour (“the likes of which we had never seen before”). Grief was presenting as a form of prolonged mourning for the loss of friendship, as well as the actual grief for the loss of a close relative due to covid-19. Attachment was often presenting as trust issues; the bond of attachment with their class teacher (who for some they left in March 2020 and never returned to when school opened in September 2020). Some children felt rejection when teachers announced to the children that their school was closing indefinitely, they were being alienated by a place and people that they actually loved, enjoyed being around and trusted.

At the very time of the seminar, NHS digital published the latest figures for Child and Adolescent Mental Health in 2022. They confirmed the steep rises in self harm, eating disorders and trauma in children. They also charted new phenomena; the increased number of children

with sleep issues, the number of children reporting loneliness since their friendship groups were dismantled by the pandemic, a pervasive sense of low mood in children, and the disturbing rise in online gambling. Again, with no blame, what did we expect? We encouraged children to spend more time online, but their explorations were not limited to school studies, and other things, more troubling, were discovered.

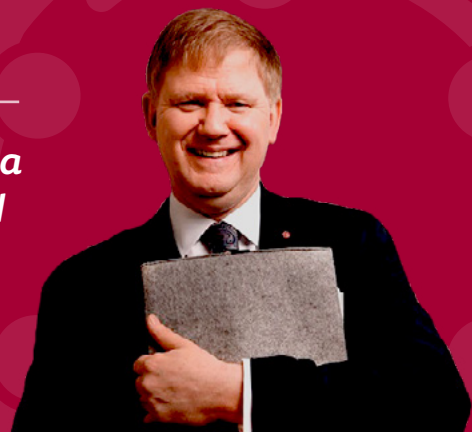
What was truly alarming was the overall decline in mental health across all age ranges. From 1 in 10 children having a mental health issue in 2017, there has been a dramatic increase in 2022 to 1 in 4 children. Particularly noticeable was the 17 - 21 age group, who in the previous pandemic years had had GCSEs cancelled, A levels reconfigured; university places deferred or a Higher Education experience that did not match their expectations. This group felt that their life chances had been blighted; that they would be forever labelled the ‘Covid generation’.

Such information gave impetus to the Seminar discussions around the principles that should inform our responses to a reshaped, redefined, 21st Century Childhood.

“

The sense of uncertainty and the transition to a new and insecure reality and ways of living will continue to impact upon all of us – adults and children alike.

Professor Barry Carpenter CBE, OBE, PhD



Our 6 Principles

[Download full size printed poster](#)



Children and young people should be central in developing a shared understanding of what they need at any point in time “nothing about us without us”.

This means: That all stakeholders will seek, listen to and respect the opinions of all children and young people to develop a shared understanding of their lived experience in order to co-develop a coordinated and appropriate response. Leaders need to be courageous and advocate for children whilst providing authentic opportunities for them to exercise agency.



Children and young people have the right to be well and provided with an environment where they can thrive.

This means: That all children should have a range of joyful experiences which build robust resilience, health and develop physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing in the world in which they live.



Children should experience the joy of life, living and childhood.

This means: That all children should be exposed to a range of rich and diverse experiences that go beyond the traditional academic diet and support their vision for their future as an adult.



ssat

Children's Charter

A pledge for children

ssatuk.co.uk/childrenscharter



Children should have skilled and trusted support to understand and become socially and digitally aware in order that they remain safe.

This means: That children need to be explicitly taught about how to keep safe in a modern and digital world. Children should have easy access to trusted people around them where they can go for advice, support, and help.



Children should experience a sense of belonging and community where they are treated with respect and authenticity

This means: That equality and inclusion are championed: every child should have a place where they can feel safe and comfortable to be themselves. A place where they are loved not judged, where they are understood, valued, listened to and where they can grow and flourish into empathetic and compassionate adults who contribute as citizens within society.



Children's behaviour should be viewed as a form of communication and as such be viewed with curiosity.

This means: That behaviour should be viewed as a way of expressing an unmet need and as such activities need to be adapted and approaches developed to promote positive behavioural change. Teaching needs to support needs in a culture which seeks to understand rather than blame.



Acknowledgement of contributors

Name	Organisation/School
Adrian McLean	Severn Academies Educational Trust
Andrew Hodgkinson	West Oaks School
Barry Carpenter CBE	Professor of Mental Health in Education, Oxford Brookes University
Deb Rattley	Chadsgrove Educational Trust Specialist College
Graham Quinn	New Bridge MAT
Julia James	Bedelsford School
Laura Burton	SSAT
Laura Purser	University of Reading
Matthew Carpenter	Baxter College
Nick Robinson	Trinity Academy Halifax
Nicola Anderson	Leicester City Primary AP
Pauline Holbrook	SSAT
Ruth Acton	Aston University Engineering Academy
Steve Moir	The Olympus Academy Trust
Sue Williamson	SSAT
Trystan Williams	Venturers Trust
Vicci Wells	Youth Sport Trust

Special thanks are extended to Matthew Carpenter, Principal, for hosting the seminar in December 2022 at Baxter College.

Signatories



Ali Oliver MBE
Youth Sport Trust



Dame Alison Peacock
Chartered College of
Teaching



Beatrice Merrick
Early Education



Bill Watkin
Sixth Form Colleges
Association



Ed Kirwan
Empathy Week



Graham Moore
Humanutopia



Jonny Benjamin MBE
Beyond



Louisa Rose
Now and Beyond



Nick Chambers
Education and Employers



Nick Mort
ARC The Attachment
Research Community



Kay Batkin
Youth Sport Trust



Samantha Butters
Fair Education Alliance




Join our pledge for children



It's now your opportunity to:

- **adapt** and **embed** the six principles into your setting
- **review** and **refine** your practice to meet the unique needs of your learners
- **share** your **support** of the children's charter and pledge for children with your networks and on social media using **#ChildrensCharter**



Don't forget to follow us on our socials using
#ChildrensCharter

ssatuk

@ssat

ssatuk_

ssat-the-schools-network

ssat the schools, students
and teachers network

www.ssatuk.co.uk

Email: info@ssatuk.co.uk

Tel: 020 7802 2300

SSAT (The Schools Network) Ltd, a private company limited by shares.
Registered in England and Wales. Company number: 08073410. VAT number: GB 135 221 255.
Registered office: Office 11, 295 Chiswick High Road, London, W4 4HH.