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Education and childcare during coronavirus

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Children, young people and families

Guidance

Guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

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What you need to know

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is going to affect daily life, as the government and the NHS take necessary steps to manage the pandemic, reduce transmission and provide effective mental healthcare.

Regardless of their age, this may be a difficult time for children and young people. Some may be worried about themselves or family members and friends.

Many children and young people rely on and are accepting of the fact that they may not understand information and communication, their previous experiences, and how they feel. Some children and young people may be worried about the future, the economy, loss of loved ones and friends, their education and future employment, and issues such as climate change.

During this time, it's important that you support and take care of your family's mental health - there are lots of things you can do, and additional support is available if you need it.

Adults who live alone with dependent children may need to make extra support arrangements with other household. All those in a support bubble will be able to spend time together without the need to maintain social distancing, including sleeping overnight if they wish to do so. You should not form a support bubble with one other household if you are shielding, but should take the decision to join a support bubble with a household you are comfortable with.

Background

This advice is for keep adults with caring responsibilities (we refer the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, including those with special educational disabilities, during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

For wider information on how to protect yourself and others, please see Coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do.

This guidance will be updated in line with the changing situation.

Looking after your own mental health

As well as thinking about the children in young people in your care, it is important to look after your own mental health. Being able to cope with the pressures you are under will put, to what you have the adults around them. When parents and carers are coping with a situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children and young people. Children and young people will pick up on their parents' and carers' concern and give them extra care and attention if they need it.

Take guidance on how to look after your mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic or visit Every Mind Matter for clear advice and actions to take care of your mental health and wellbeing.

Helping children and young people cope with stress

There are many simple ways you can consider about how to support your child or young person's mental health.

Listen and acknowledge: Children and young people may respond to stress in different ways. Signs may be emotional (for example, they may be upset, distressed, worried, angry or agitated), behavioural (for example, they may become more clingy or more aggressive), or they may be bodily, or physical (for example, they may have stomach aches).

Look out for any changes in their behaviour. Children and young people may feel less anxious if they are able to express and communicate their feelings in a safe, supportive environment. Children and young people who communicate differently to others may need extra support. Let your child talk about their feelings, express their concern and give them extra love and attention if they need it.

FRIDA is a free online educational resource on children and young people's mental health for parents, which can support parents and carers through this difficult period of time.

Provide clear information about the situation: Children and young people need to feel assured that their parents and carers can keep them safe. Give them age-appropriate, accurate information, and talk about what is happening and providing honest answers to their questions. Children and young people may want to know how their family is safe, including who comes into their home, such as workers coming into your home or more often than usual. Use words and explanations that they can understand. There are some resources available to do this, such as Coronavirus (COVID-19): Support for children's books to Coronavirus, or the Anna Kagway Clinically Clinical Psychologist's children's resources developed by and for children around the world affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Make sure you are aware of information such as Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advice for parents – there is a lot of misleading information from other sources that can create stress for children. Use the Coronavirus (COVID-19): Support for children's books to answer questions that children and young people may ask, or to address any misunderstandings. Focus on listening and acknowledge their feelings to help them feel supported.

Be aware of your own reactions: Remember that children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how you respond to the situation matters. Children and young people may be concerned about their parents' health, their ability to continue to provide for them and their ability to continue to protect them, and answer any questions they have honestly. For further information on how to talk about your own mental health, see Every Mind Matter's advice, Coronavirus (COVID-19): Look after your mental health and wellbeing and NHS Every Mind Matter.

Connect regularly: It is necessary for you and your children to be in different contexts, including being in the home, at school, or at work. Children and young people's connections with peers are still their regular and frequent contacts, but also in video calls with them. To help your child or young person feel connected, especially if they are not physically active or in a school, see Childline's Online Safety for ideas for keeping safe.

Limit exposure to media and talk more about what they have seen and heard: Like adults, children and young people may want to limit their exposure to media and information. Understandably there may be some support your family. The amount of information and distress will take over time for most children and young people, though could return if they see or hear reminders of what happened.

For infants to 2-year olds

Infants may become more clingy, disturbed. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

For 3 to 5-year olds

Preschool and nursery children may return to behaviours they have outgrown. For example, toilets accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents or carers. They may also have tantrums or difficult crossing.

For 7 to 10-year olds

Older children may feel sad, angry, or afraid. Parents may share false information but parents or carers can correct the misinformation. Older children may have heard about the situation and want to talk about it all the time, or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.

For preteens and teenagers

Some preteens and teenagers respond to worrying situations by acting out. This could include reckless driving, and alcohol or drug use. Others may withdraw to be on their own, or may want to be with their friends and not their family. Parents or carers can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Preteens and teenagers may underestimate the risks to their own health and wellbeing, carers or others safety. They may have concerns about how the school closures and exam cancellations will affect them.

Children and young people who are accessing mental health services

Children and young people with an existing mental health condition may find the current uncertainty around the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic particularly difficult. Their parents and carers may also be worried about how their child will cope with the current situation. If you are concerned about how to support if they need to stay at home, you may want to think about the following actions.

Speak to your child or young person's mental health team

Contact your child or young person's mental healthcare team to discuss any concerns and ask for advice about what to do around actions you are at home. Update any safety and care plans as agreed.

Identify how the support your child or young person normally receives can be maintained

Ask about having appointments by phone, text or online, and how their healthcare professionals can refer support if your child or young person needs it.

If you could have support in your home, check with your local authority or care provider. Ask about how to access emergency care. Make sure it is clear what support is still needed for your child or young person.

If your child or young person has been admitted to an inpatient mental health unit, talk to their healthcare professionals about when they may be able to come home. Ask if you can stay in contact, particularly if you have to stay at home. Be the end of your child participate in a virtual ward trained to keep in touch with your child or young person's care team. Ask if your child or young person can be cared for in a local hospital, if your child or young person or carers have to leave, so that it is easier for you to keep talking about what might happen so they are fully informed.

If your child or young person has become ill with the coronavirus (COVID-19) they will need to be cared for appropriately, so talk to the unit about what plans are in place should this happen and how to communicate these to your child or young person.

Plan how you will access medication

You might be able to order repeat prescriptions by phone. Or you may be able to this online using an app or website that your doctor's surgery offers.

Ask your pharmacy about getting medication delivered or think about who you could ask to pick up your child's or young person's medicine. Pharmacies can also give prescriptions for pharmacy use (PGD) (Opens in a new tab/window) to pharmacists.

Continue to order repeat prescriptions in your usual timeframe. There is no need to order for a longer duration or stockpile medicines.

Your GP might convert your child or young person's repeat prescription to one that is suitable for a pharmacy dispensing arrangement. This means you can go to a local pharmacy for a certain number of repeats without having to get a repeat prescription from your GP.

Be careful about bulgarian medication online. You should only buy medicines from pharmacies. You can check if a pharmacy is registered on the General Pharmaceutical Council website.

You might also want to make arrangements for your child or young person if you are hospitalised. Ask your healthcare professional if your child or young person is vulnerable if aware of important information including their care plan, medication and emergency contact details.

Eating disorders

Children and young people with an eating disorder may find parents of the current situation difficult to understand. Their eating disorder may focus on specific foods, exercise routine, and could cause significant damage to routine.

If your child or young person has an eating disorder, you can seek support and advice from your local specialist eating disorder team. Most community eating disorder teams support direct access that is not reliant on a referral from your GP.

Your healthcare professional and eating disorder team will advise how medication and GP appointments can be kept up to date.

- reduced availability of specific foods. This may mean your child or young person who is on a controlled diet could find foods they eat. Plans will need to be made to have something else but with risk of weight loss or further nutritional deficiency
- reduced access to exercise. Your child or young person who is on a fitness regime can be extremely distressing and challenging to manage. This is because they can reduce the distress and risk of further reduction of their food intake
- increased anxiety around food. Your child or young person may experience anxiety behaviours that are unrelated to distress and how this is manifesting at home.

The eating disorder charity BEAT provides a helpline and have developed guidance with clinicians on how to support and manage eating disorders during the difficult time.

Children and young people with learning disabilities

Children and young people with learning disabilities can feel a loss of control in times of uncertainty such as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. They may need extra support or adapted explanations about the outbreak. See the social care guidance for more information about how to support children and young people.

A good way to help them could be to provide them with information about what is happening visually through written words, pictures, symbols systems or objects. Practical information, such as how to wash hands properly, can be given in a variety of ways. Where listening, lip-reading, hearing aids and British Sign Language (BSL) are used, feel anxious about big changes, such as the possibility of having to stay at home for a long period of time. Some children and young people with learning disabilities may find it difficult and complicated to understand why they happen and how they to wash and cover up with solutions, such as finding a hobby or learning how to relax and cope with anxiety.

Put useful tips for children and young people, see Mencap's tips for coping with the coronavirus (COVID-19) for those with learning disabilities please see the Royal Society for Public Health's guidance on how to support children and young people with learning disabilities. Mencap's Easy Read version of the guidance, Coronavirus: Tips for people with learning disabilities, may be helpful.

If your child or young person is in a residential setting, you can seek support and advice from your local commissioning provider team. Most commissioning provider teams support direct access that is not reliant on a referral from your GP.

Your healthcare professional and eating disorder team will advise how medication and GP appointments can be kept up to date.

- reduced availability of specific foods. This may mean your child or young person who is on a controlled diet could find foods they eat. Plans will need to be made to have something else but with risk of weight loss or further nutritional deficiency
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Autistic children and young people

Autistic children and young people may struggle to identify any physical symptoms of illness, including pain. They may also find it difficult to understand the risks of the situation and crowds. Keep an eye out for changes in behaviour which may show they are identify their emotional state, as well as physical symptoms.

There is going to be disruption for all of us during this pandemic, for example, it will not be possible to follow normal routines, or visit extra family members. Your child or young person may need to be kept in the loop about what is happening and what might be coming next. Let them know that changes, such as a hospital that you know well, may be temporarily, or even assume further advice and support at the bottom of this section.

Be responsive to their needs and communicate clearly with your child or young person. Use visual aids, such as pictures, to help them understand what is happening and what they can do. Try to avoid giving definitive statements about the future - this is a scientific and medical matter which is developing and changing. Be ready to deal with changes and challenges when they need that reassurance and support. Be ready to deal with the consequences of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

You should continue to access support of social autism groups online or via phone. The National Autistic Society guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) is helpful - you can call the helpline on 0808 800 4104 for further advice.

If your child or young person has a mental health condition that requires their to access services, such as CAMHS, or a learning disability, contact their healthcare provider – they can offer help to do. For example, if your child or young person requires a hospital admission, ask if they can be kept in a ward with a single room, or with a peer-to-peer support and a medical professional. Even in such cases, in order to reduce the spread of infection and protect those exercising, it are suitable if the home environment is not suitable for your child or young person to be cared for, or if there is 2 metres apart from anyone who is not a member of your household or a carer at all times.

Children or young people with physical health issues

Children or young people with long term physical health issues, such as those who need to shield because they are clinically extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus (COVID-19), stronger reactions to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. They might have long-term distress, worry or anger than children without these issues because they have to deal with the consequences of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, such as their treatment plan concerns, grieving and heard explanations about their condition and giving them information about what is being done to protect them.

This may also be concerned about how you will continue their care if you have to stay at home, or who to be worried about if they feel ill. If you usually have support in your home, ask if this can be provided by the same people, or if you need to make other arrangements in place. Make sure it is clear if support is still needed for your child or young person.

For further information about the conditions that put children and young people at increased risk from the coronavirus (COVID-19), please see guidance for children and young people with a long-term condition.

Children and young people who care for others

Some children and young people may also have existing caring responsibilities for adults or siblings. They may be anxious about what will happen if the person they care for becomes unwell, or what will happen if they themselves become unwell and cannot care for their family member. Children and young people who care for others is a possible that they may become ill they are in a household with a family member.

Planning with your child or young person what will happen if you or another member of the family they care for may need to care for becomes unwell, including contact details for others who can step in and support them, will help to reduce anxiety.

Bullying

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may lead to some individuals experiencing increased bullying behaviour, including on the grounds of race, disability and sexuality. Children and young people, it is important to check that your children and young people are not experiencing bullying or bullying others.

Bullying can have a long-lasting impact, so it is critical that everyone deserves to be safe whenever they – including online and at home. Bullying is always wrong, and children should do our part to spread kindness and support each other. If they have been called names, or bullied, they should feel confident telling an adult about their feelings.

For more help and advice resources, please see the Anti-Bullying Alliance website.

Experiencing grief or bereavement

Whenever it happens, experiencing the loss of a friend or loved one can be an extremely difficult experience for children and young people. Bereavement is the sad feeling or goodbye of the way that would have wanted and it may be harder to cope with most usual support networks.

Grief affects children and young people in different ways depending on their age, their level of understanding, and the changes that death means for their daily life. They often feel sad, but may also be angry, confused, or even guilty. Children and young people may also struggle to express it, it is very common for their behaviour to change and for them to worry a lot about other people.

It can be challenging to support a child when you are grieving yourself. Listening, being honest, and being open and reassuring are important. Talking about feelings where possible, and providing lots of love and support will help. The NHS has advice on how to support children and young people who are grieving and bereaved. See information and links to national and local support organisations.

Where to get further support

If you are worried about your or your child's young person's symptoms, see the NHS website for information about mental health conditions and treatments.

If you are worried about your child or young person's mental health, talk to healthcare professionals. You may have services attached to your child or young person's school or college, such as a school nurse, or a GP practice. Ask your GP practice if your child or young person's mental health services are open or if they are working remotely on the NHS website.

In a medical emergency call 999. This phone line should be used when someone is seriously ill or injured and there is life at risk. A mental health emergency should be taken to mean a life-threatening situation, for example, where someone is at immediate risk of harm or a person requires immediate protection. For more advice or where to get support for a mental health crisis please see NHS 111 advice.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has a number of support available to you and your family. They have produced a number of leaflets on a variety of mental health issues and may want to leave your home to escape domestic abuse.

Abuse is unacceptable in any situation, no matter what stresses you or others are under. If you or others are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for police – the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.

The Home Office has produced guidance on further support regarding domestic abuse. Victims of domestic abuse, or those who feel at risk of abuse, and to help perpetrators to change their behaviour.

For support as a parent or carer

Young Minds for Parents and Carers

Young Minds provides advice about mental health and behaviour problems in children and young people. Their parents helpline is open 9:30-16:00 Monday-Friday on 0808 802 5544. Please be aware Young Minds do not provide crisis or psychological services and cannot make referrals to the NHS or Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS).

Helpline and websites for your child and or young person

If your child or young person would like to speak to someone anonymously, they could try calling a helpline or visiting a website such as Childline and The Mix.

Childline provides free, confidential support, 24/7 hours for anyone at crisis anything, anywhere.

You can:

- text 50470 to 85258 in the UK for text with a trained Crisis Volunteer
- text with someone who is trained and will provide active listening and collaborative problem-solving

Childline provides a helpline for any child with a problem. It comforts, advices and protects.

You can:

- call 0800 1111 any time for free
- have a chat online with a counsellor
- check out the message boards

The Mix provides a free confidential helpline and online service that aims to find young people the right support.

You can:

- call 0808 808 4994 for free – lines are open from 11am to 11pm every day
- access the online counselling
- email The Mix

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