Guidance

Education, childcare and skills during coronavirus

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 having an impact on everybody's lives. It is vital that we do all we can to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Most children and young people's mental health is not affected by the pandemic. Some may need intermediate, some not at all, while others may show signs of difficulty. It is important to recognise the impact the pandemic has had and to respond to it as appropriate.

How a child or young person responds to their individual situation may vary in different ways and at different times, depending on their circumstances. Most will be able to cope, although a mental health disorder may first deal with stress, previous experiences or a preexisting mental or physical health condition.

During this time, it is important that you support your child's or young person's mental health and wellbeing. Although it is important that you support your child's or young person's mental health, there are also things that you can do, and related support is available if you need it.

Background

This advice is to help adults with caring responsibilities look after and support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, including those with additional needs and disabilities, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is more information on how to stay the spread of coronavirus.

Looking after your own mental health

It is easier to thinking about their children or young people's mental health, it is important to take care of your own mental health and wellbeing. This will keep you support yourself and your family. Children and young people will be more likely to do this if they see the adults around them. When parents and carers deal with adult issues and cope confidently, they can provide the best support for children and young people.

Promoting mental wellbeing and helping children and young people cope during the pandemic

Children and young people want to feel assured that their parents and carers can look after them and themselves. Being able to do this will help children and young people to cope with the pandemic. It is definitely all their concerns, so focus on listening and acknowledge their feelings to help them feel supported.

There are some actions you can consider to support a child or young person's mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic, including:

Look for changes

Children and young people may respond to stress in different ways. Signs may be behavioural, emotional, cognitive, educational or physical. Some may show changes in behaviour (for example, they may become more clingy, or more clingy than usual, or less difficult concentrating, or they may feel tired), or physical (for example, they may complain of headaches or stomach aches). Most children and young people are aware that these changes may not occur in all contexts (for example they might just happen at school or at home).

Making time to listen

Create a calm safe space where they can communicate how they are feeling without judgement. Let your child or young person know that you are available to talk when they want to, and that you are prepared to listen, ask questions and show empathy and activities. You can't always know the answer and it is often better to be honest and say I don't know or I don't know yet. Reassure children and young people that it is good to talk. Listen to them and acknowledge their concerns.

Remember to let them know you are there to help and give them extra love and attention if they need it. Children and young people who struggle to communicate how they feel may rely on you to interpret their feelings. For further advice you may contact Children's Mental Health Week. They also offer Parents Toolkit and Teachers Toolkit.

Already for teachers is a free online educational resource about children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, which can support parents and carers through these exceptional circumstances. Young Minds also has a useful resource about talking to coronavirus and anxiety.

Providing clear information about the situation

Be honest about what is happening, and be sensitive to worries about what is happening and providing honest answers to your children's questions. Children and young people need to know that they can understand. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe. Let them know that it is okay to feel scared, sad, confused, angry, or any other feeling.

There are resources available to help you do this, including the Children's Commissioner's Children's guide to coronavirus, or the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Coronavirus: what parents need to know, developed by the Children and Journalists Project.

There are you can visitor sources of information such as GOV.UK or the NHS website. Inaccurate or misleading information can create stress for the child or young person you care for.

Being aware of your own reactions

Children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important and significant people in their lives and are sensitive to the situation in our families. Try to manage your own anxieties and stress calm, speak kindly to them, and answer any questions they have honestly.

Support safe ways for children and young people to connect with their friends

Children and young people need to be with their friends and to have fun and be children or elder-care. Advice for parents and carers on how children and young people can cope during the COVID-19 pandemic, is available.

Creating a new routine

Changes to our lives caused by the pandemic might impact our routines. Routine gives children and young people a sense of security and helps them know what to expect, so if your routine has changed, think about how to develop some healthy routines where possible. Some ideas might include:

- make a plan for the day or week that includes time for learning, free time (including play, creativity or hobbies) and relaxing. A weekly timetable that can be visualised may be helpful
- if children are too big to have home school, set teachers what you can do to support continued learning at home. The Department for Education has a list of recommended online education resources to help children and young people at home
- add in positive activities that show the child or young person that you and your family discover new ideas for activities to do from home if needed. Encourage mentoring or volunteering if they are aged 10 to 16. The Children's Commissioner's volunteering opportunities can be helpful
- children and young people slowly need to be active for 60 minutes a day, which can be made up of different activities throughout the day. Being active at home or in your garden can be as simple as using Cosmic Kids for ideas for indoor games and exercise. Physical activity is good for our physical and mental health
- eating healthy is good for our physical and mental health. It is okay to eating healthy treats and enjoying nutritious. The NHS provides healthy eating ideas
- for young children and young people healthier alternatives to treats such as sweets or chocolate, See Change has the ideas

Limiting exposure to media and talking more about what they have seen and have heard Children and young people may be affected by what they see and hear in the media and online and may want to talk about it. Limit the extent to which they are exposed to the news or also worry helpful as they are likely to find information from other sources. Children and young people may also be exposed to misinformation and rumours circulating online and spread online. Encourage them to talk about what they have seen. Make sure they know that there are some very helpful things from them or could cause them to feel worried. Talk about what they have heard and discuss ways to stay safe online and how to media coverage. The British Psychological Society has produced some helpful advice for parents about coronavirus conversations.

Young people will also have their own ways, and get information from social media. Talk to them about what is happening and ask them what they have heard. Try to answer their questions honestly but reassure where you can.

How children and young people of different ages may react

Children and young people are different, but there are some common ways in which children and young people may react to stress at different ages. Most children and young people will be able to cope with the pandemic, but it is important to be aware of the situation and want to talk about it at the time, or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.

For pre-teens and teenagers

Some pre-teens and teenagers respond to worrying situations by acting out. This could include being disruptive at home or school, or being aggressive towards others. Some pre-teens and teenagers may feel that they cannot talk their friends. They may feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their friends may be experiencing the same or similar feelings and may find it difficult to talk to other adults. They may have concerns about how the school closure and exam cancellations will affect them.

Advice for groups with additional mental health needs or facing specific issues

Children and young people who are currently accessing mental health services

Children and young people with an existing mental health problem may find changes and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic particularly difficult. This is because stress may lead to a change in their behaviours and their mental health needs. If you are concerned about your child's or young person's mental health, you may want to consider taking these steps:

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

Contact the team to discuss any concerns you have and how we will continue to be accessed. Update any safety and care plans as agreed.

Identify how the support the child, young person or family normally receives will be maintained

As if appointments normally offered in person, will now be by phone, text or online as a minimum of these. Ask if there is extra support that the health professional can offer if the child or young person is feeling more anxious than usual. Let them know if you have concerns between appointments. Talk to the health professional about how to contact them in an emergency. Ask what other services are available for young person if you, the child or young person need to seek help and self-refer.

Plan how you will get the child or young person's medication

Ask if prescriptions can be sent to a local pharmacy, collection point, using an app or website if your local pharmacy offers this. Ask your pharmacy about getting medication delivered or drive about who you could ask to collect it for you. The NHS provides information on how to get medicines and healthcare during coronavirus. Medicines Help Hub is free for unavailable.

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

Your general practitioner (GP) might convert a repeat prescription to one that is dispensed by a community pharmacist. This means that the GP will send the order to the pharmacy for a certain number of weeks without having to get a new request from the practice.

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

You might also want to make arrangements for the child or young person if you normally unused or have to isolate—for example, making sure a partner, friend, family member or neighbour can do the shopping and medication including their care plan, education and emergency contact.

Identify how you will start or maintain contact with the child or young person if they are vulnerable or in significant mental health need

Talk to the staff about their policies on sending and access to digital technology and think about how you can use your own. Particularly if you have to be at home or work from home, it may be helpful to have a regular phone call or video call to check in on how with the child's or young person's mental health team. If the situation in your local area changes, or if you need to visit the child or young person, the team may need to be able and continuous before they happen and help them to plan and cope with situations such as finding a holiday or doing exercises to relax and cope with anxiety.

Resources to support you and the child or young person include:

- Internet Matters COVID is safe to explore offer your families and your kids—this provides information on how to keep children safe online during coronavirus
- Beyond Words has published a book that supports those who help people with a learning disability understand and cope with the COVID-19 pandemic
- Skills for Care provides information for Adults Working with Children
- Mencap provides information on COVID-19 for people with learning disabilities, including easy read materials
- Mind (the charity Promoting Mental Health Services) has published a collection of resources to support the mental health of people with learning disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Learning Disability England has some tips for people with a learning disability on staying safe during coronavirus
- Council for Disabled Children, which has advice with a focus on learning disability and autism.

Autistic children and young people

Autistic children and young people may have found disruption to routines and support services very difficult. Some may be anxious about the COVID-19 pandemic. It may be the child or young person becomes unwell with COVID-19. They may be anxious for the physical experience. You can help to manage these experiences using any strategies you have used in the past. Some may be anxious about the future and may need a listing to the child or young person's concerns.

Autistic children and young people may struggle to recognise the emotions they are feeling and to communicate them to others. For example anxiety in the form of fear, for changes in behaviour which may help you to identify their emotional state, for example increased repetitive physical behaviors of anxiety or change in sleeping and eating patterns.

It is important to be honest when communicating with the child or young person you care for about the pandemic. Use short, clear, factual statements to help with the uncertainty of the virus. Try to avoid using ambiguous statements about future. Which is a rapidly developing and changing situation and the child or young person may be more distressed if things change when they had been expecting something else.

Children and young people with autism often find change more difficult. Let the young person know what is happening and what will happen next in a way that is meaningful to them as they are prepared. You know the child or young person best, so consider what their own specific needs when deciding when and how to tell them know what the new routine is and what will happen if they need to self-isolate or if their school or college timetable is forced or setting has to operate in a different way to how they prepare for a long time.

Children and young people who are connected with the child or young person may also be vulnerable to the pandemic. Talk to the child or young person about how they can stay safe online and who they can talk to if they have concerns. This is a rapidly developing and changing situation and the child or young person may be more distressed if things change when they had been expecting something else.

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Children or young people with physical health issues

Although children or young people may have a long-term physical health issue only very rarely affect their mental health, the pandemic and related restrictions may be challenging, or where they are managing their health conditions more generally during the pandemic, there may be additional psychological needs to consider. This group of children and young people may be more concerned about the risk to their own health or risk of physical health difficulties (for example, more intense distress, worse or longer lasting physical symptoms).

Support children and young people to be listening to their concerns, providing open and honest explanations about the situation, and giving them information about what is being done to protect them.

Guidance on children and protective people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 is available. The Council for Disabled Children also has information and advice. GOV.UK has information available for children and young people living with long-term health conditions.

Children and young people who care for others

Some children and young people may have caring responsibilities for adults or siblings, and these may be increased or become more challenging during the pandemic. Young carers may be at risk of being overlooked, especially if their family becomes unwell, or what happens if their parents become unwell and are unable to care for their children. Young people who care for others may be at risk of being pulled into roles that they may become too big for them, or they may be exploited.

Part with the child or young person and what happens if you or the person they care for or may need to care for, becomes ill or is left by help to recover and recuperate. Include contact details for others who can step in and support them.

Further information about support for young carers is available at Barnardo's. You can call 0800 777 1074 to speak to one of our dedicated project workers, or call either Young Carers Helpline or Young Minds Helpline for mental health support.

Support for students in further or higher education

If they young person is a student, it is vital that, at university or college they are still probably feel very difficult to what they were expecting. The COVID-19 pandemic may have disrupted their education, and they may be experiencing uncertainty about their living situation, finances, or their future. They may be worried about accommodation, about finishing their studies, or current financial concerns might be causing stress. The Department for Education has guidance and information to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Encourage the young person to regularly communicate with friends and family whether they are at home or in their student accommodation. Ask them to let you know if they need their mental health and wellbeing, support is available. They can inform their learning, university or college, student union, student welfare or student support services, students, such as a wellbeing or counselling service, student advisers or other resources.

Talk to their mental health support, students can contact their GP or they can self-refer to the NHS therapies for anxiety and depression via NHS psychological wellbeing practitioners (IAPT). These services are free, and therapies can be delivered effectively remotely or online. Students can also access mental health support through their university or college, regardless of where they are registered with GP. Students that need help with anxiety or depression can contact their local service.

Experiencing grief or bereavement

Whenever it happens, experiencing the loss of a loved one can be an extremely difficult and challenging time. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people may be not able to participate in the way they would have wanted to. It may also be harder to find the support they need.

Grief affects children and young people in different ways depending on their age, their level of understanding, and the changes the death means for their daily life. They often will be affected by the death of someone they love, but may not show it in the way that adults may struggle to express. It is very common for bereaved children to be worried about who worry a lot about other people.

It can be challenging to support a child or young person when you are grieving yourself. Listening carefully, answering questions honestly in an age-appropriate way, continuing routines and providing reassurance are important ways to support children.

The NHS has advice about grief and how to support children, and the Bereavement Network has information and links to national and local support organisations.

Where to get further support

If you are concerned about a child or young person's mental health, you can get free, confidential advice and support, whatever is the issue from the Young Minds Parents Helpline.

Children's Mental Health Week has a list of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and how to access them. You can also find out about the Children's Commissioner's Group website—which reviews also have their own website with information and resources for children and young people, parents and professionals in details. Top parenting organisations such as CYPMHS or CAPHS (children and adolescent mental health services, or older been used for some CYPMHS). During the COVID-19 pandemic, services will be offered in the best way to meet the needs of the child.

Action for Children has lots of tips to help you start signs of mental health issues in children and young people, and how to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Barnardo's has also set up the Hub (Mind, Body and Spirit) hub. It aims to support children, young people and their families to cope with the pandemic caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Any professional that works with children and young people should also be able to help you get support. You could talk to a teacher, school nurse, social worker or GP.

Where to get urgent help

If a child or young person needs urgent mental help, then call 999 or take them to the nearest A&E (accident & emergency). Ask for some assessment is needed by a doctor and that's like, or a child. A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical health emergency.

If a child or young person needs urgent mental health support or advice, call the NHS 111 mental health crisis line for advice on your area—including 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Papyrus provides confidential support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide and anyone worried about a young person.

Helplines and websites for children and young people

If a child or young person would like further information or advice on their mental health or difficulties they are experiencing, they could try one of the following sites and organisations:

Shout 85258 provides free, confidential, 24/7 text message support in the UK for anyone who is struggling to cope. They can help with issues including suicide thoughts, self-harm, anxiety, panic attacks, abuse, bullying, relationships and exams.

Text 'Shout' to 85258 to speak to a trained volunteer who will listen and work with thoughts and feelings.

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- call 0800 068 41 41 for free – every day, 9am to 12am (midnight)
- you can also text 07860 039967 (charges may apply)
- you can email pat@papyrus-uk.org

ChildLine provides a confidential helpline for any child with a problem. It comforts, advises and protects. You can:

- call 0800 1111 for free, from 9am - 3.30am
- have an online chat with a counsellor, 9am – 10.30pm
- check out the message boards

The Mix provides a free confidential helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, whatever the problem. You can:

- call 0808 808 4994 for free – every day, 3pm to 12am (midnight)
- access the discussion boards
- email The Mix

Every Mind Matters (EMM) includes advice for young people on how to look after their mental health and wellbeing and deal with the issues that matter to them.

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1. Some of the links to guidance, resources and services are specific for England. For the devolved administrations, specific guidance can be found on the following pages for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. ↩

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