



Anxiety & Stress in 2020

Mental & Emotional Maintenance for Children & Parents

A Place2Be & Allfarthing Primary School Talk

Anxiety: Anxiety is a feeling of uneasiness that we experience when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

Stress: There's no medical definition of stress, and health care professionals often disagree over whether stress is the cause of problems or the result of them. However, it relates to people, situations, or events that put pressure on us, and how we react to being put under pressure. Stress is also a natural human response, and aspects of it may even be useful and motivating.

Context

What's happened in the past year?

- **Uncertainty:** heightened emotions and experiences, fatigue
- **Change & transition:** impact of global changes is still ongoing
- **Loss & Grief:** loved ones, freedom of movement, jobs, connections, habits, routines
- **Boundaries:** overlapping roles
- **Survival:** prolonged shutdown of thriving mechanisms, trauma
- **Adaptability:** just because we've adapted, doesn't mean we haven't been impacted

Children's Wellbeing

The mental health landscape for children and young people in the pandemic is a complex one. The ripple effects of the initial lockdown period, combined with the staggered reintroduction of personal freedoms continue to present mental health challenges for the youth of today's world. Young people's experiences of government-imposed lockdowns have been varied. For some it has created more valuable time with family, whereas for others it has caused additional stress and taken away valuable time with other support networks.

(Anna Freud Centre)

A new report from NHS Digital looks at the mental health of children and young people in England in July 2020, and how this has changed since 2017. The report draws on a sample of 3,570 children and young people aged between 5 to 22 years old. It additionally looks at experiences of family life, education and services, and worries and anxieties during the coronavirus pandemic.

Key findings

- Rates of probable mental disorder have increased since 2017. In 2020, one in six (16.0%) children aged 5 to 16 years were identified as having a probable mental disorder, increasing from one in nine (10.8%) in 2017.
- Among children of primary school age (5 to 10 year olds), 14.4% had a probable mental disorder in 2020, an increase from 9.4% in 2017.
- Children aged 5 - 16 years with a probable mental health disorder were more than twice as likely to live in a household that had fallen behind with payments (16.3%).

Referral patterns: it is usual for referrals to Place2Be services to increase in the second half of the term, given that in the first half, children are getting used to new routines, teachers, learning, and peers. They are also mostly excited to be back at school, and emotional and mental health needs are not always apparent in the first weeks. This hasn't changed this year, and I believe Allfarthing's extraordinary efforts to get so many of its pupils into school in the Summer Term, greatly helped to mitigate more acute problems. However, there is certainly a pronounced increase in anxiety-related presentations, as well as family dynamics that will have been exacerbated by the pressures of 2020.

Things to look out for:

- Sudden changes in behaviour
- Negative thoughts and low self-esteem
- Arguing and fighting
- Sleep difficulties
- Avoiding school/over-attachment to parents
- Aches and pains

Disproportionally affected groups:

- Children and young people with preexisting health and education needs
- Children and young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and social care needs
- Children and young people of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic backgrounds
- Children and young people who identify as LGBTQI+
- Young carers

Points to remember:

- Children won't always tell you how they feel, but they will show you.
- They are resilient, but also more sensitive/intuitive. They mostly learn from example, rather than information.
- Celebrate child's strengths and differences: acknowledging these in challenging times, improves motivation and emotional wellbeing
- Have open conversations about feelings: by modelling how to share feelings, your child will be more likely to proactively ask for help.

- Collaborate with your child to come up with their own personal solutions: this gives them agency but also feels supportive.
- Let them experience their feelings fully: it's important to acknowledge that everyone has feelings and that's okay. Try not to rush to minimising, or rescuing.
- Make yourself available to listen: children often open up when they're relaxed, so try not to pressure them. You may want to create rituals where you have regular opportunities to share and connect.

Parental Wellbeing

The findings of a recent survey conducted by our Royal Patron The Duchess of Cambridge reveal some interesting statistics. This was conducted with parents/carers of under 5s in mind, but it's still very significant:

The reality of life makes it hard for parents to prioritise their wellbeing.

90% of people see parental mental health and wellbeing as being critical to a child's development, but in reality people do very little to prioritise themselves. Worryingly, over a third of all parents (37%) expect the COVID-19 pandemic to have a negative impact on their long-term mental wellbeing.

Feeling judged by others can make a bad situation worse.

70% of parents feel judged by others and among these parents, nearly half feel this negatively impacts their mental health.

Parental loneliness has dramatically increased.

Parental loneliness has dramatically increased during the pandemic from 38% before to 63% as parents have been cut off from friends and family. Parents in most deprived areas are more than twice as likely as those living in the least deprived areas to say they feel lonely often or always (13% compared with 5%). Compounding this, it seems there has been a rise in the proportion of parents who feel uncomfortable seeking help for how they are feeling from 18% before the pandemic to 34% during it.

What do we need to feel better?

- Self-nourishment: physical, mental, emotional health
- Acknowledging/accepting
- Boundaries/Structure
- Incremental change/steps
- Reaching out



Thank you.

And now for the Q&A...

ryan.campinho-valadas@place2be.org.uk