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Evidence Based
Practice Unit

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Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

Early evidence:

Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health

Dr Melissa Cortina

#CORCforum2021

November 2021

*With thanks to Professor Jess Deighton
& the EE team*

Background

Concerns about the potential impact of the coronavirus pandemic on children's mental health.

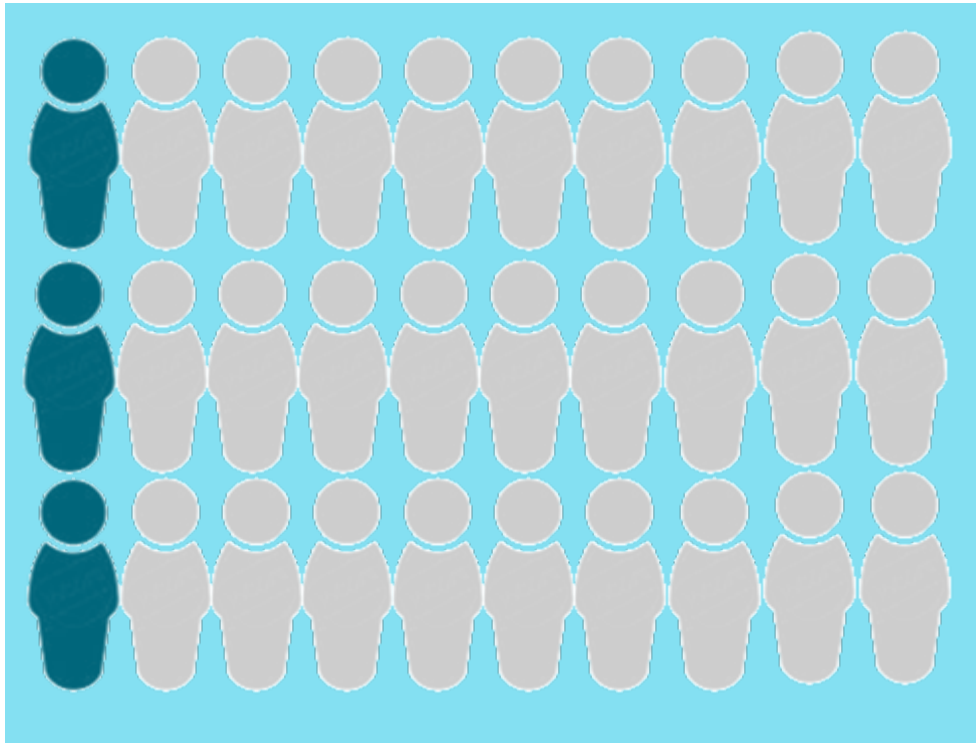
A lot of speculation on what this period means based on pre-existing research

A lot of rapid research emerging in the last 6-9 months

So what is the emerging picture?

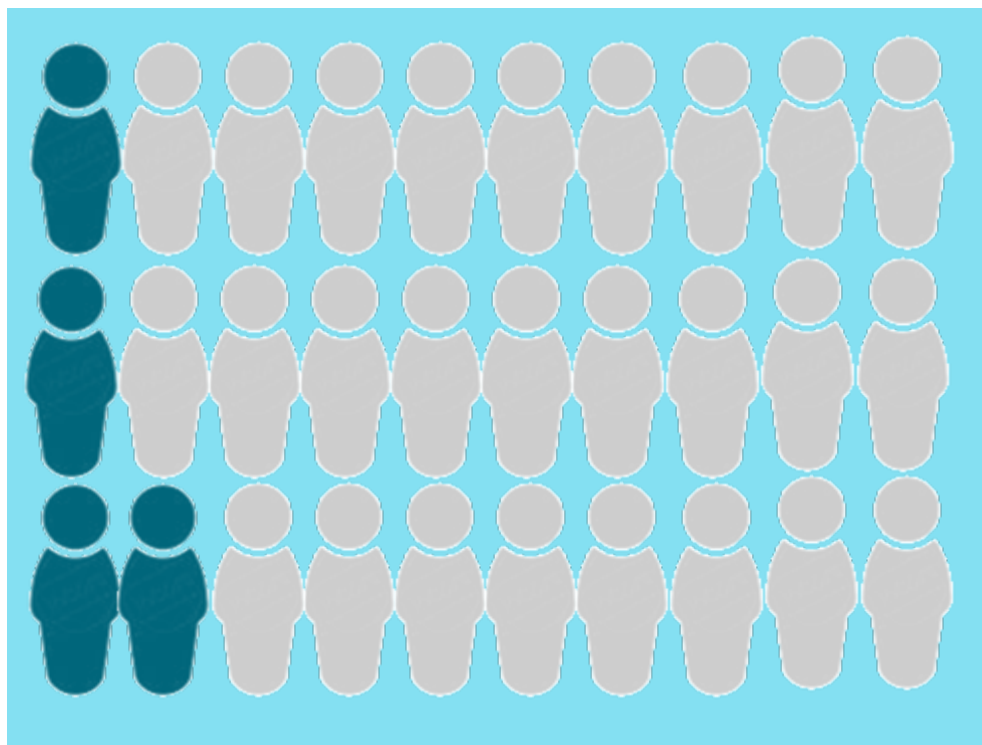


Recent trends: 2012



1 in 10

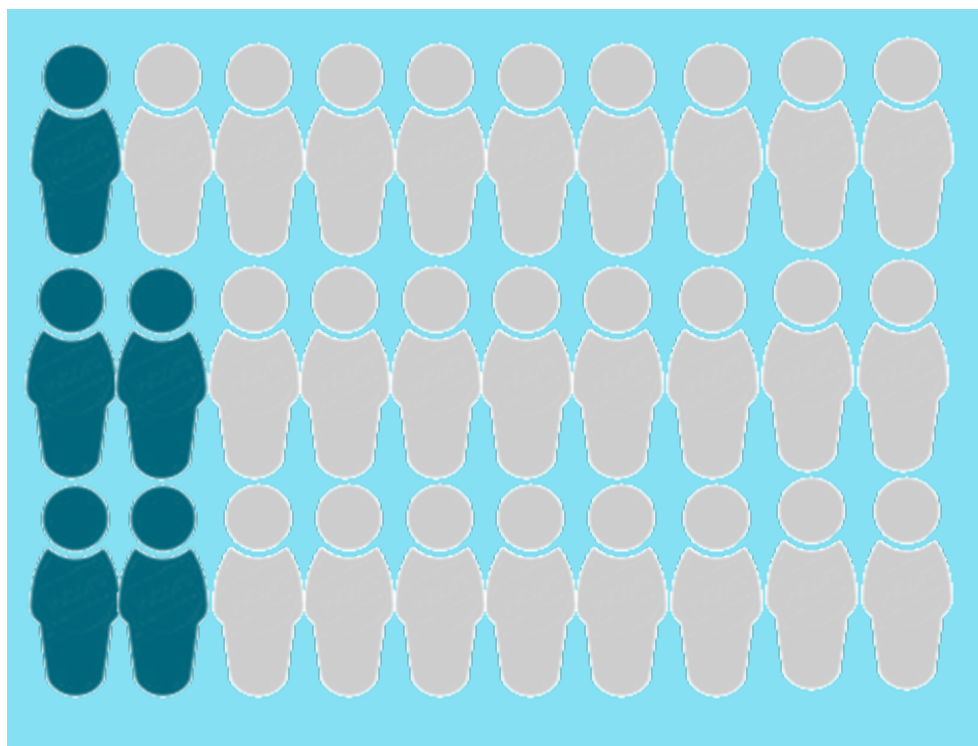
Recent trends: 2018



1 in 8

- Of those experiencing problems: 1 in 4 will have contact with a mental health specialist
- Just under half will seek support from teachers

Recent trends: 2020 (Covid sample)



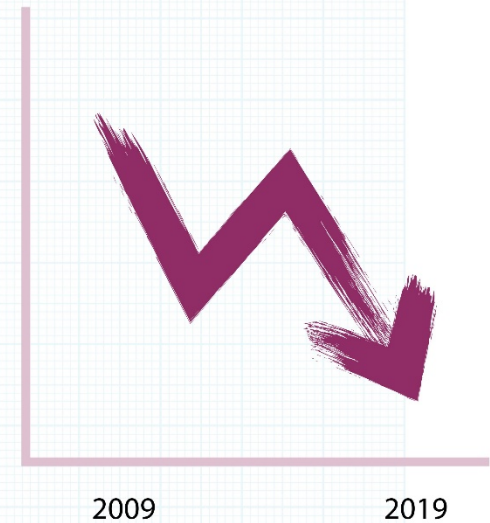
1 in 6

Recent trends: 2020 (Covid sample)



1 in 6

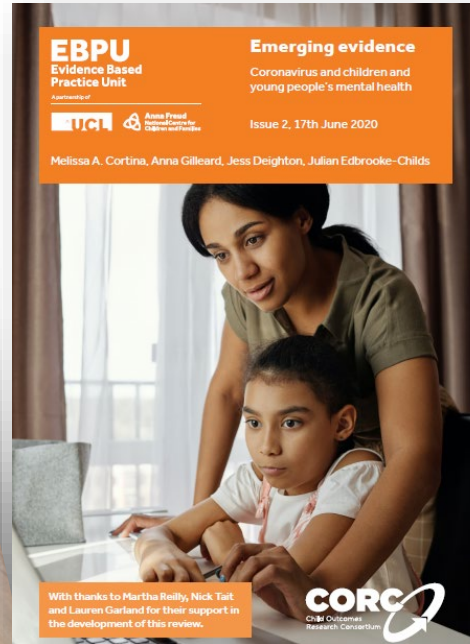
UK children's
happiness declines
over a decade



- What has changed in the last few years?

Coronavirus emerging evidence

<https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/our-research/>



11th December 2020
Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health
 Issue 5 Research Bulletin

The impacts of the coronavirus pandemic continue to be felt around the world. We have been conducting rapid reviews of the emerging evidence surrounding the mental health impacts of the pandemic on children and young people in detail Issues 1-4 of this series. This issue, and future issues, will briefly highlight key new findings from our rapid reviews in a condensed format to enable us to share learning in a timely manner.



1. What is the mental health impact on the general population?

The evidence that the coronavirus pandemic is having a negative impact on the mental health of children and young people continues to build.

Large studies found increases in the prevalence of anxiety and depression among young people during the pandemic.¹⁻³

16th February 2021
Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health
 Issue 6 Research Bulletin

The coronavirus pandemic continues to affect populations around the world. In issues 1-5 of this series, we presented evidence about the impact of the pandemic on children and young people's mental health emerging over the period January to August 2020. In the current issue, we summarised key findings from a rapid review of evidence emerging between September and November 2020.⁴

1. What is the mental health impact on the general population?

Evidence of considerable negative mental health impacts during the pandemic continues to emerge. However, impact varies across different populations and some positive impacts have also been seen during this period.

- Longitudinal studies are showing an increase in psychological distress, loneliness and probable mental disorders among children and young people (UK).¹⁻³
- One longitudinal study showed a parent-reported reduction in pre-school children's restlessness and attentional difficulties in a one-month period between April and June 2020, and for boys' (but not girls') behavioural difficulties. Parents and carers were also less likely to be distressed.

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21st April 2021
Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health
 Issue 7 Research Bulletin

The mental health implications of the coronavirus pandemic continue to emerge. In issues 1-6 of this series, we presented the evidence about the impact of the pandemic on children and young people's mental health emerging between January and November 2020. In the current issue, we summarise key findings from a rapid review of evidence emerging between November 2020 and January 2021.⁴ This review concludes our regular series for the time being. Our next issue will synthesise learning across all issues to date and will make recommendations based on our learning. Further issues of the Emerging Evidence series may be available later in the year.

Mairi Jeffery, Tanya Leraya, Julian Edbrooke-Childs, Jess Deighton, Nick Tait, Melissa A. Cortina

1. What is the mental health impact on the general population?

Research continues to unpack the mental health impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on children and young people in general.

- Among primary school children (age 4-10) there was an increase in behavioural and restless/attentional difficulties during the coronavirus lockdown between March and June 2020 (UK).¹
- During the pandemic, the prevalence of suicidal ideation among Bangladeshi students aged 18-28 was 12.8%, but it is not possible to ascertain whether this is an increase, as the prevalence of suicidal ideation pre-pandemic varies greatly by study. Significant risk factors include getting too much or too little sleep, past suicidal behaviour, depression, anxiety and

23rd June 2021
Emerging Evidence: Coronavirus and children and young people's mental health
 Issue 8 Research Overview

Mairi Jeffery, Tanya Leraya, Julian Edbrooke-Childs, Jess Deighton, Nick Tait, Melissa A. Cortina.

Introduction

When we published the first issue of the Emerging Evidence series in May 2020, the impact of the coronavirus on children and young people's mental health was only just starting to become apparent. Since then, across seven issues between May 2020 and March 2021, we have collated evidence on the varied mental health impacts of the pandemic. Through rapid reviews of the literature, this series originally set out to answer three main questions:

1. What are the key mental health challenges for children and young people during the coronavirus pandemic?
2. Are there any disproportionately affected

Over the course of this series, publications identified through literature searches have broadened from commentaries that were highlighting projected or anticipated impacts on mental health and preliminary research, to a greater number of large cross-sectional or longitudinal studies using empirical data. This final concluding issue aims to reiterate what we have learned, emphasising some of the key studies and setting out recommendations for supporting children and young people's mental health as the pandemic continues and beyond.



Aims of the Emerging Evidence Series

- What are the key mental health challenges for children and young people during the coronavirus pandemic?
- What are the key mental health challenges for disproportionately affected groups?
- What might help children and young people to manage these challenges?

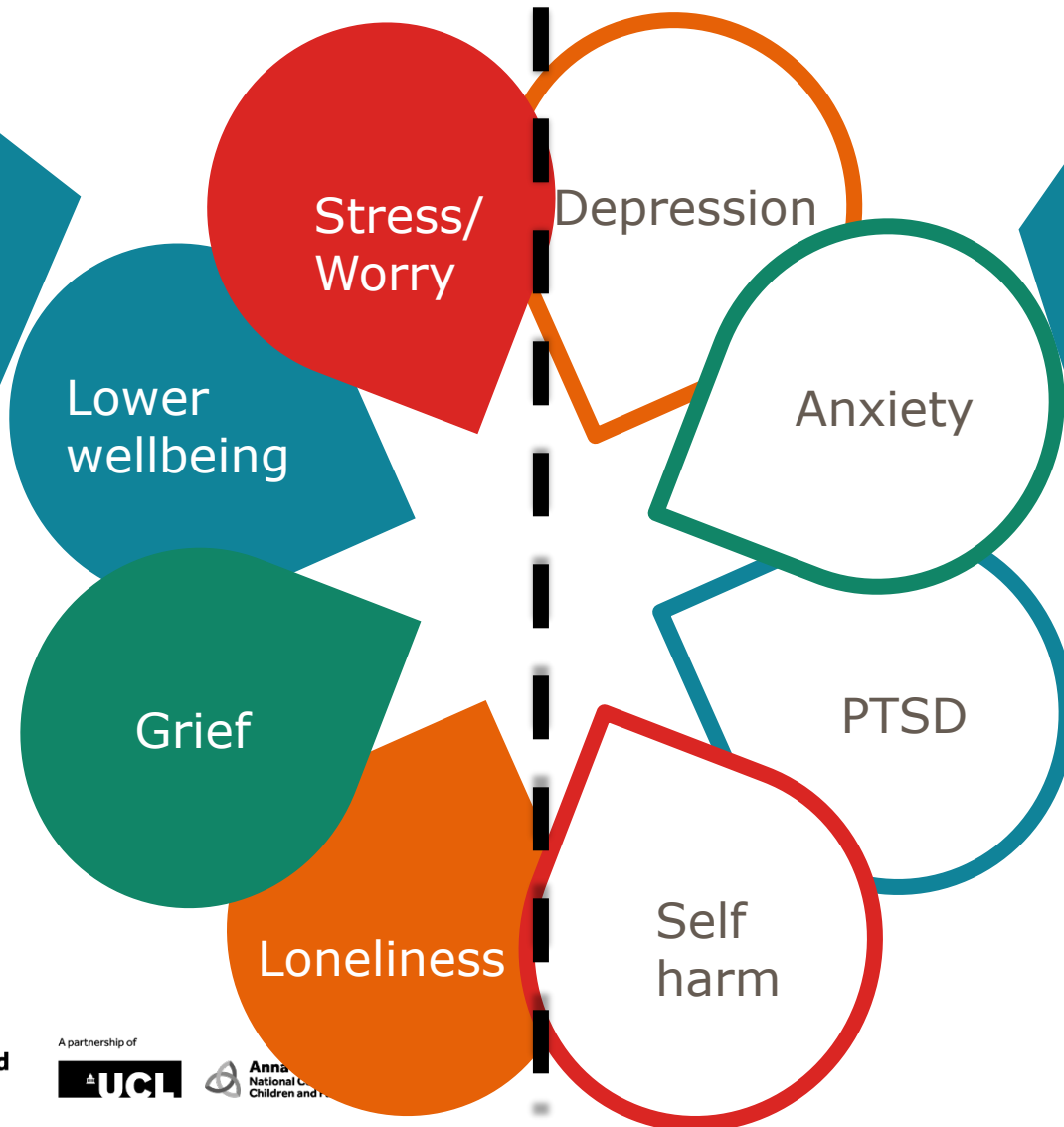
How has the pandemic affected this picture?

1. Increases in worry, low mood, grief, and feelings of hopelessness among children and young people
2. Increases in mental health problems



Key mental health challenges

Among the 13-24 year-olds surveyed, 40-50% reported feeling significantly more anxious than before the pandemic and 50-60% reported feeling worried about their parents or family.
Sheffield University study



In an April 2020 survey of 2,086 US undergraduate students, 80% reported that their mental health had been impacted negatively, with 1 in 5 reporting worsened mental health during the pandemic.

What contributes to these challenges?

General challenges:

- Media reporting
- Uncertainty
- Sense of threat

Media over-exposure can cause an increase in health anxiety to the extent that it may become disproportionate to actual need/threat



What contributes to these challenges?

Challenges associated with virus exposure

- Contracting the virus
- ICU and invasive procedures
- Loss of family member

A significant proportion of children who have contracted the coronavirus have subsequently experienced symptoms of PTSD.



What contributes to these challenges?

Challenges associated with lockdown measures:

- Removal of usual structures and routines
- Reduced social contact
- Financial difficulties
- Missed opportunities
- Increased pressures on parents
- Changes to family dynamics (increased proximity, increased conflict)
- Increased caring responsibilities

14-23 year olds in the US were asked what mattered most when the outbreak is reduced: *"if possible, getting back all/or most of my missed opportunities"*



Its not all bleak...

Some reports of:

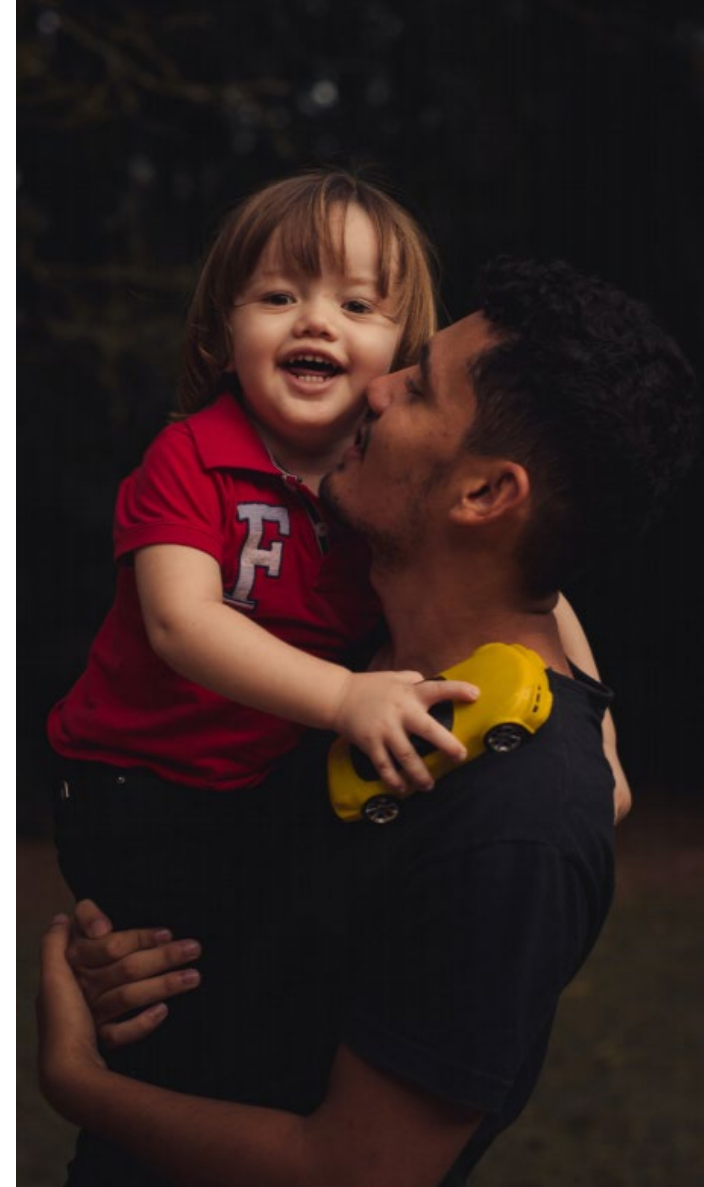
- Being able to resume or continue their hobbies
- Rebuilding or maintaining social networks while in lockdown
- Being able to enjoy fun activities and continue to learn in new ways
- Family and friends as support
- Reduced academic pressures
- Reduced anxiety in some CYP – particularly adolescents



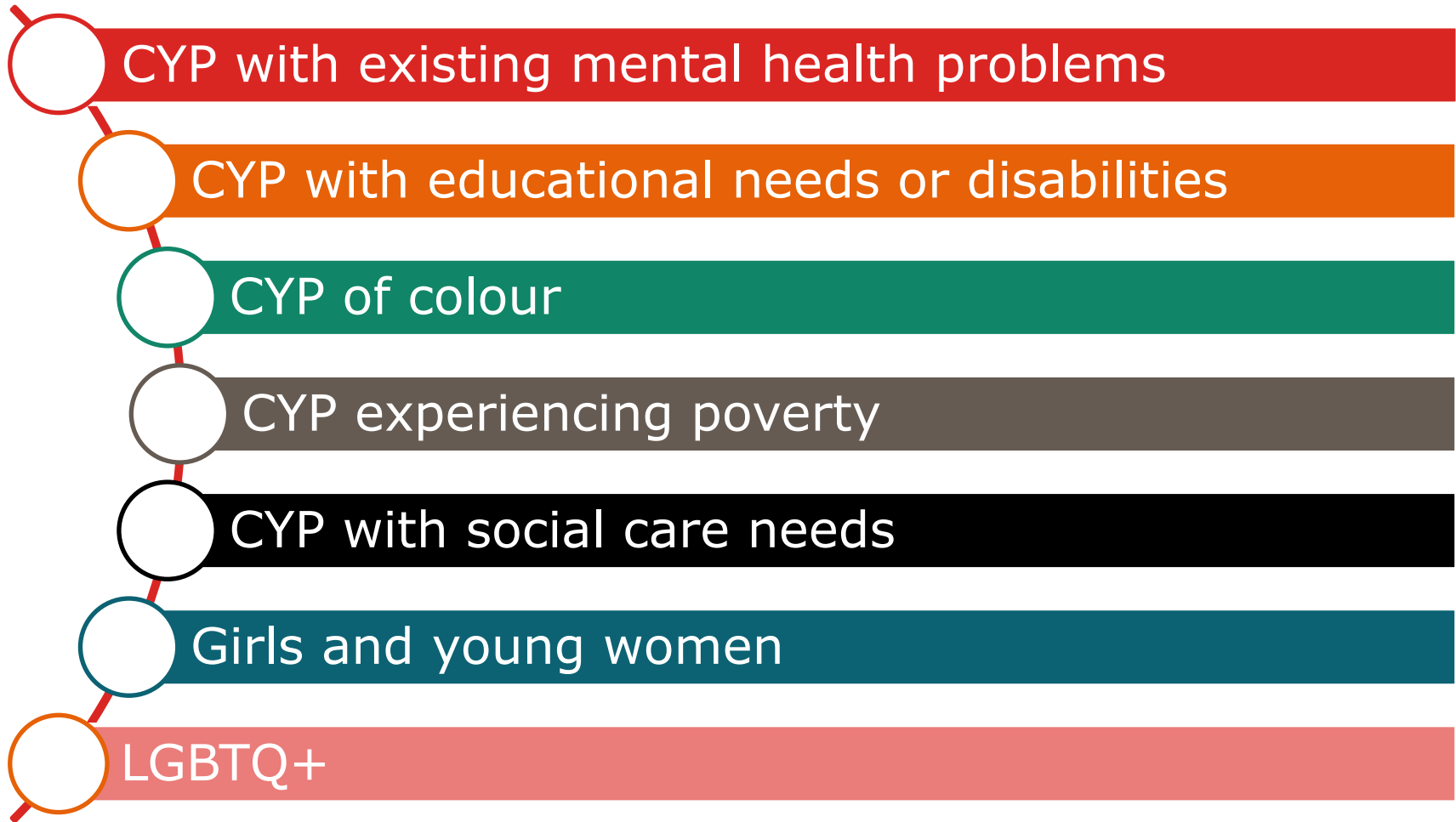
Differential impact

Mixed picture suggests different groups of children and young people have had very different experiences.

"Research continues to reveal how children, young people and their communities are not fighting the pandemic on an equal playing field."



Disproportionately affected groups



Disproportionately affected groups: Young people with pre-existing mental health problems

- Limited scope for normal routines
- Increased uncertainty
- Limited access to informal support
- Limited access to formal help
- Concerns about transitioning back

YoungMinds: 26% of YP surveyed reported that they were no longer accessing the mental health support they had used previously



Disproportionately affected groups: Young people with special educational needs

- Changes in routine
- Additional challenges to supporting education during lockdown
- Less direct school contact, or tailored learning content
- Access to therapies (speech, occupational, behavioural) limited
- Additional pressures on parents/carers



Disproportionately affected groups: Young people with disabilities or long terms health conditions

- May be subject to additional shielding/isolation
- Access to carers and additional support has been limited
- Additional pressures on parents/carers
- Sometimes more so than YP themselves



Disproportionately affected groups: Young people in families where there are social care needs

- Increased pressure on vulnerable families
- Pandemic fuelling home stress, economic stress, and drug and alcohol abuse
- Higher rates of domestic violence incidents
- Fewer social care visits/less supports
- Role of schools etc. in raising safeguarding alerts
- Lockdown giving limited opportunity to escape abuse

The UK National Domestic Abuse Helpline has seen a 25% increase in calls and online requests for help since the lockdown started and 16% of Barnardo's frontline staff reported an increase in issues around domestic abuse among the children and young people they support

Disproportionately affected groups: Young people in families where there are social care needs

- Children and young people in care
 - Health and financial implications of the pandemic + physical distancing measures have impacted the stability of some residential settings and fostering households
 - Wrap around supports limited
 - Limited contact with families



Disproportionately affected groups: Young people from minoritised ethnic groups

Amplification of existing inequalities: Institutional racism, discrimination and health and economic inequalities...

- Infection and mortality rates from the coronavirus are higher among people of Black and Asian ethnic groups
- Exposure to loss of income more likely
- Job roles, housing and access to healthcare



Disproportionately affected groups: Young people from minority ethnic groups

- Increase likelihood of poor health outcomes
- Create challenges likely to undermine mental health
- Also introduce barriers to accessing effective mental health support



Disproportionately affected groups: Young people living in poverty

- Limited ability to socially distance due to housing conditions
- Parents more likely to be in roles that include increased contact with the public
- Increased likelihood of poor health outcomes
- Increased financial pressures
- Increased education gap in lockdown



Disproportionately affected groups: Girls and young women

- Higher emotional difficulties scores and a higher prevalence of obsessive disorder (OCD) symptoms than boys during the school closure period
- Experienced a greater increase in anxiety symptoms and decrease in life satisfaction compared to pre-pandemic, than boys did.



Long terms picture?

- Too early to say but some hints:
 - Previous disasters or pandemics
 - Changes to drivers of mental health problems
 - Increases in social inequalities
 - Gaps in education



What might help?

How to support those experiencing worries, low mood and stress

- Keep up routines
- Maintain social contact
- Limit media exposure
- Have open conversations
- Look for early warning signs
- Draw on evidence-based resources
- Self-care strategies
- Remember some responses are normal in the circumstances



What might help?

How to support those who have a significant mental health problem

- In addition to previous...

- Be aware of early warning signs that problems might be escalating
- Become familiar with sources of support
- Maintain usual supports as much as possible
- Provide flexible support solutions



Self
harm

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What might help?

In schools

- Put wellbeing at the heart of the return to education
- Consider a wellbeing check-in or 'temperature check'
- Upskill school staff to recognise those who might be struggling
- Consider disproportionately affected groups
- Increase capacity for therapeutic support in schools



What might help?

In Mental health support services

- Increased need may increase demand
- Maintain contact as much as possible
- Including adapting services for online or physically distanced delivery
- Communication/joint working between health, community/youth groups and education
- Putting young people's voice at the centre of conversations



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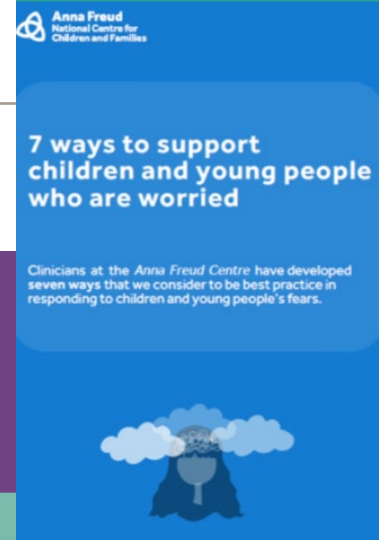
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Thank you!

Any questions?



Resources for schools and colleges



Advice for schools and colleges

School and colleges are having to work in new ways and develop new relationships in the lockdown. We have published a series of resources to help support staff and to provide them with information about how to work with children and young people, include those with SEN, and materials to share with parents and carers.



Download and share our advice for schools and colleges



- Advice for schools and colleges
- Schools in Mind booklets
- Running an Alternative Provision during lockdown
- Mental health and the coronavirus research bite #1
- Mentally Healthy Schools
- Additional support

<https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-schools-and-colleges/>

Resources for parents and carers

Support for parents and carers

Advice for parents and carers

It's too early to say what the full impact of coronavirus will be on children and young people's mental health, but the signs are that it will be significant.

We want to support children and young people and their families and to work together to minimise this impact. That's why we are sharing information and advice.



Download and share our advice for parents and carers



- Advice for parents and carers
- BBC Bitesize
- Top tips for parents and carers
- Returning to nursery
- Reflecting on the child in care
- Child in Mind podcasts
- Good days in unusual times
- Youth Wellbeing Directory
- Additional support

<https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/>