

Advice for professionals working with children and young people during the coronavirus outbreak



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Services working with children and young people are well aware of the uncertainty which communities are facing, and the impact this could have on mental health. There are ways in which you can provide key support in your own setting in the midst of changing times. When external events are creating a sense of anxiety, trusted professionals can be seen as vital sources of support for both children and their families – even if contact is digital or over the phone.

Adults have the opportunity to model positive behaviour which gives reassurance to children, enabling them to better understand the situation and what they can do to look after themselves. So, as a teacher or youth worker, staying calm and thoughtful is important. If you are sharing information about coronavirus - or indeed any other issue of wider concern – use materials from trusted sources and with sensitivity to the appropriate level of detail for the age of the child or young person.

If you're supporting a child who is already vulnerable, they could be experiencing unmanageable increases in their anxiety levels. In your role, you may be well placed to spot this. Be ready to talk about whom they can turn to within your service (e.g. a counsellor, or a pastoral lead within a school), and externally within your wider community, as well as which kinds of support can be accessed remotely. Openly sharing this information will make it available to all, not just those who come to you for help. Alongside this, do encourage young people to identify their own self-care strategies – see www.annafreud.org/onmymind for ideas from young people themselves.

If you're working with children who have existing mental health difficulties, they may find the current situation particularly difficult. Talk to them about what in particular they're worried about -

it may be different to adult concerns, and they need to know that's fine. Where they are expressing this to a greater degree and clearly need extra support, find new ways of working jointly with the child, their parents or carers, and those who are close to them to agree together how best to help them.



The young person may be concerned about any disruption to the treatment they are receiving from mental health professionals, or disruption may already have occurred. If so, be as clear as possible about how support will continue even if there are changes to it. If they are worried about what will happen if they or those close to them become ill, talk openly about this too. Reassure them that this is something we will manage together, exploring options and responding to the needs of those we care about.

For more information and advice about looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak, visit www.annafreud.org/coronavirus