



Supporting schools & colleges

A guide to supporting the mental health and wellbeing
of pupils and students during periods of disruption



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

Introduction

The [Anna Freud Centre](#) aims to support all settings to have a whole-school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing. We believe that all staff have a role to play in promoting mental health and we aim to support them to achieve this.

The Coronavirus outbreak means that communities are facing uncertainty and this can have an impact on children and young people's mental health. We have put together some general tips to support staff throughout this challenging period.

We know schools are on the front line and are playing a hugely important role in keeping communities going in these challenging times. We want to support you in your work, and, because this is an ever changing picture, we will send updates from time to time as advice evolves and we learn more about the situation. We also want to thank all schools and colleges for the amazing work you have already done in supporting children and families.

If you would like to share any concerns and identify any examples of good practice, please let us know at schoolsinmind@annafreud.org so that we can share good practice throughout our network.

Model positive behaviour

If we want to encourage children and young people to engage in support, it is important to stay as calm and thoughtful as possible. Modelling positive reactions in times of uncertainty can help children and young people feel more confident and provide reassurance.

Some staff may also need additional support. Leadership teams should use existing HR and



Links to more info:

Schools in Mind

www.annafreud.org/schoolsinmind

Child in Mind podcasts

www.annafreud.org/childinmind

On My Mind

www.onmymind.info

Wellbeing policies to identify appropriate levels of support

Communicate clearly and consistently

When external events lead to feelings of uncertainty, schools can often be seen as a safe space for children and young people and their families. During these periods, providing clear and consistent messages can be reassuring. Let pupils, parents and carers know that you are following official guidance and that any actions you take are based on expert advice. Share the steps that you are taking to support children, young people and their families and let them know which staff members are available for support each day. Make sure that your communications are age-appropriate and are repeated regularly – for example by having an assembly at the beginning and the end of the day.

Let staff, pupils and students know when you will share updates with them. Decide how you will communicate to your audiences – through email, or newsletters, posters or assemblies, and outline how you will help build a consistent routine.

Offer a range of support

Always encourage children and young people to ask for support if they are worried or would like to talk to someone. It's useful for schools to identify staff members who are available to listen to children and young people or who can signpost them to help. Members of staff who can help may include the mental health lead, heads of years, school counsellors, pastoral leads, sencos, or you may want to refer children and young people to drop-in services, lunch time clubs or peer support. If children prefer to talk to someone outside the school or college they can be referred to

organisations like [Childline](#), [The Mix](#) and the [Youth Wellbeing Directory](#) as well as local services. This information can be clearly displayed and can be referred to in tutor time and assemblies.

Encourage self-care

Young people can be a great source of help to each other, and they often turn to friends for support before talking to an adult. Looking after each other, being kind to those friends, can help us all to feel better in an unknown situation. It's important though, to be mindful that some people may speak in a way which alarms others unnecessarily, so encourage peer support but emphasize the importance of being positive.

There are other ways that children and young people can be encouraged to take care of themselves. For example, through exercise, practicing breathing or mindfulness techniques, healthy eating, talking to someone, writing a journal and getting enough sleep. Encourage pupils to identify their own self-care strategies. For ideas you can have a look at the [On My Mind](#) website

Support the wider school community

As well as supporting children and young people, schools and colleges have a role to support the people around them, such as teachers, parents and carers as well as others who work in schools and colleges. It may be useful to identify support outside school available to children and young people. Schools and colleges may also consider running workshops for parents and carers. Finally, don't forget your staff. You may wish to run workshops for them and make sure they're cared for. Our free [Supporting Staff Wellbeing in Schools booklet](#) may be helpful.

Be aware of vulnerable children

For children and young people who are generally anxious, the experience of uncertainty can be very threatening and can lead to unimaginable increases in anxiety levels. Schools and colleges are in a good position to identify these children. Talk to them about what they're worried about – their worries may be different to adult concerns, and they need to know that's okay. If they appear particularly anxious and clearly need extra support, work with the child, their parents or carers, and those who are close to them to agree together how best to help them.

If a young person is concerned about treatment they are receiving from mental health professionals being interrupted, find out how their support will continue or change and share this information with them. If they are worried about what will happen if they or those close to them become ill, talk openly about this too.

It is important that we avoid making assumptions about how all children and young people may be feeling, and encourage them to speak about and share their experiences, if and when they are ready, in a safe manner.

Primary settings:

- Increase regular communication to parents/ carers in bite size readable format
- Ensure a range of communication to reach all parents, including paper copies
- Direct parents and carers to other key sources of information where relevant
- Promote a range of ways and times for parents/ carers to contact you, including in the event of sudden closure
- Pastoral support for individual, small group

and whole class discussion, such as Circle Time, to share information with children and to answer their questions

- Plan for ways to continue support for vulnerable members in your community in the event of closure

Secondary and Post 16 settings:

As above plus;

- Topic specific assemblies
- Extended tutor time
- Drop in sessions

About the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families:

The Anna Freud Centre believes that all schools and colleges can be wellbeing schools and colleges. This means taking a whole-school approach, which recognises that all aspects of a school or college's culture shapes a child's mental health and wellbeing. Our work reaches over one million children in schools. By 2024 we aim to reach out to every school in England.

We support schools and colleges by :

- providing world-class research so that schools and colleges have a rigorous evidence base for mental health
- developing practice and new approaches to education to support mental health and wellbeing in schools
- providing training
- sharing resources through our free Schools in Mind learning network

Our Patron: **Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge**

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