

Summer Newsletter October 2020

Mental Health and the Pandemic

Recent research has indicated that schools in England have 'almost doubled' the amount of mental health support that they buy in. (1)



Following the full reopening of schools in September, we are beginning to see more clearly the mental health impacts of the pandemic and consequent lockdown. New research from the University of Bath, published in the

Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, concludes that children and young people are likely to experience high rates of depression and anxiety for many years after the coronavirus lockdown ends. (2)

This is going to present a major challenge for schools as they try to support pupils reintegration. Experts in child mental health are recommending that schools may need to focus on time for children to play and reconnect with friends as they adjust following this intense period of isolation. Research from the Anna Freud Centre in London also concludes that it is crucial that mental health services leverage partnership with school teams in order to ensure all children and young people are reached and harmful mental health consequences of the pandemic are mitigated. (3)

“Poor emotional health in children leads to long-term mental health problems, poorer educational attainment and has a considerable economic burden,” (2)

Professor Prathiba Chitsabesan, NHS England's associate national clinical director for children and young people's mental health, said the return to school

may cause anxiety for some pupils as well as those who remain at home feeling isolated or left out.

“Children and young people may be experiencing a variety of feelings in response to the coronavirus pandemic, including anxiety, distress and low mood, and it is important to understand that these are normal responses to an abnormal situation.”

Schools will need to have appropriate specialist support on to enable them to best support children's emotional wellbeing during the transition period. We know from our experience working in partnership with schools that emotional and mental health problems in children have a significant impact on educational performance.

Meeting the need

Our partnership schools have long been aware of the benefits of bringing mental health specialists ‘in house.’ Our work in schools is constantly evolving to meet the needs of each individual school, and we work in close collaboration with staff within schools to develop a bespoke package of support according to the particular needs of that school.

Within schools, our clinicians, who are specialists in mental health, will provide a range of support and expertise that ensures a wide range of the most vulnerable children and families can benefit from therapeutic input.

At the heart of our work is the delivery of high quality therapy for individual children and families in schools. Where a school is in a partnership agreement with

the Bridge, this will involve a clinician who is based in the school for a set number of days and will provide a rolling caseload of



children and families seen for therapy.

Individual therapy involves working closely with both the parents and school to understand the child in a holistic way, and to gather information to help us understand the child's feelings and behaviours whilst providing them with a safe and confidential space. We feedback and consult with parents/carers and teachers throughout the work to generate strategies and think through issues as they come up

Additional benefits

Within our partnership schools, we also offer a menu of additional interventions that help us to develop a whole-school approach to mental health. This can mean offering parent or teacher consultation slots, where a specific issue can be thought about therapeutically as a one-off consultation; we might offer a classroom observation, after which we can feedback thoughts and ideas to parents and teachers, and we offer

classroom workshops that focus on social or emotional skills. On a more strategic level, we can contribute to thinking with the school about behaviour policy, we can offer consultation and reflection on team dynamics and conflict resolution, and we can consult with heads and leadership teams around role and whole-school issues.



To support the vital work that staff do, we offer supervision to specialist support staff, both as part of our school partnerships, but also increasingly, to schools who want to incorporate supervision and reflective practice as an integral part of school wellbeing and teacher development.

We can also offer confidential staff support to think through issues that might be more personal but impact on performance, as well as contributing to mental health understanding in schools through the delivery of high quality training.

Tailored Interventions

As part of the Bridge in Schools service, we run the Brief Intervention Service, where schools who are not in partnership with us, or partner schools that would like

additional sessions for individual children, can commission interventions on a case by case basis. The number of sessions would be decided in conjunction with the Assistant Clinical Manager, taking into account the presenting issues and the potential for the child to make use of therapy. Work usually takes place within school, with parents and carers, teachers and other relevant professionals all involved in the assessment and feedback of the work. A detailed report can also be commissioned as part of the work, if needed to form part of a wider assessment or as part of a transition. Brief Interventions can consist of just a few sessions to ascertain something of the internal world or state of mind of the child, or can be a longer term intervention designed to address identified issues.

Changing with the times

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been working to ensure continuity of service in our partnership schools. Our service delivery model has followed government guidance to seek to minimise risk as far as is possible. During lockdown this meant delivering support remotely, either through online therapeutic work or through other forms of parent and family support. Since schools have returned we are offering a flexible mixture of direct and remote working on a case by case basis, and as appropriate to changing circumstances. Our experience has been that remote working can still be effective in many

“It feels good working on my laptop with being able to see you. I prefer this because I’m on my tablet and I’m at home, and I can still do it even if I’m ill, but not too ill. It’s safer because you can’t give each other bugs.”

Year 6 child

cases, but we try to provide on site face to face work where possible.

There continues to be an increased demand for parent support, whether by telephone or using online platforms, and we aim to provide responsive and flexible support to children and families who have struggled with the rapidly changing world they are faced with.

Supervision of staff in schools has transferred naturally into online work, both individually and in groups. Teachers have reported feeling supported at a difficult time, and have appreciated having a space to think through the new challenges that schools and classes face as schools return, but continue to have to manage the complexities of delivering education during a pandemic. The flexibility of online work has meant teachers have been able to access support from home, or as a group within school when they cannot be in the same room.

Looking ahead

As the impacts of the pandemic continue to unfold we are having to work with ongoing high levels of uncertainty. Working with our partner schools we have developed a framework for delivering

services during this transition period that emphasises a multi-modal approach with services able to be delivered online or on site and adapt as the situation demands.

“Bridge in Schools has been an incredibly valuable resource for us to be able to draw upon in school. Having a counsellor in school each week has meant that we have been able to offer bespoke support to some of our most vulnerable children, their families and the wider community.

Hugely positive and trusting relationships have been formed by all those involved and the result has been that our children’s emotional and mental wellbeing has improved. The service is incredibly professional, with individuals working alongside the existing staff in school to improve the provision available to our vulnerable children. We cannot recommend them highly enough.”

Senior Leadership Team member

If you are interested in exploring a possible partnership with Bridge in Schools in your school, or have a specific child you are concerned about, who might need schools-based additional specialist support, please contact

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1. [https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/feb/03/english-schools-buying-in-mental-health-support-has-almost-doubled-in-three-years?](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/feb/03/english-schools-buying-in-mental-health-support-has-almost-doubled-in-three-years?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)
CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7267797/>
3. https://www.annafreud.org/media/11992/coronavirus-emerging-evidence-issue-2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3dl8HCkE4bRMND5eM5JTEz1cxP8MR1oeahpkWFGj2erIkFZ9sEHbeA_GY