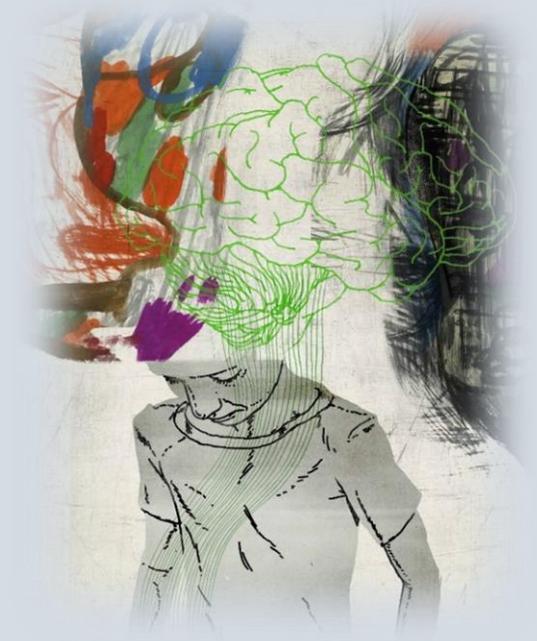


Coronavirus and Young People's Mental Health

Where to start with writing this? As you will know, there is already plenty of information on the web about how COVID-19 is affecting our children's mental health. Last week I received a tweet from a concerned mum; her 12-year-old son was showing signs of anxiety, and in turn, this was making her very anxious. How to reply in limited word count: "Help young one 2 realise reactions are normal for what's happening. This isn't trivialising it, but acknowledging feeling scared and anxious is real and can be helped". This is a good starting point when supporting anyone who is distressed. Then go on to signpost to some apps and organisations she could use.



Mental Health First Aid: If you have completed an Adult Mental Health First Aid course, the principles are the same for children and young adults - **ALGEE**:



Approach, assess, assist

Listen and communicate non-judgmentally

Give support and information

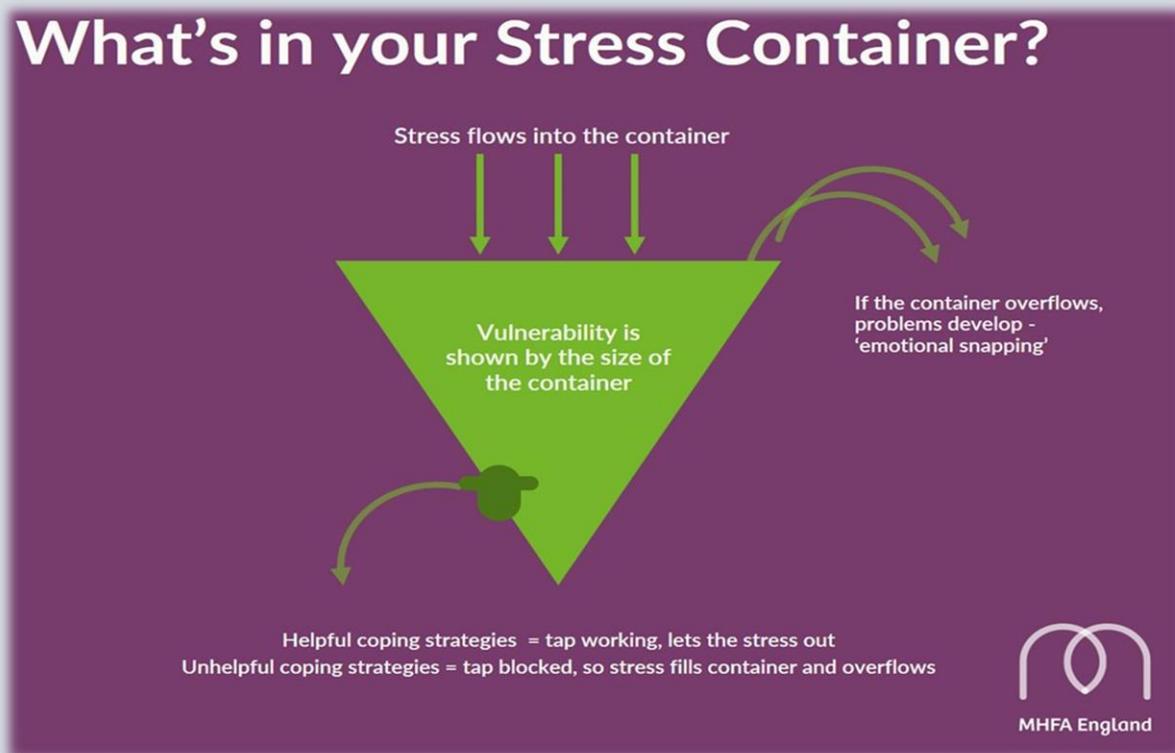
Encourage to get appropriate professional support

Encourage other supports.

The Stress Container can also be applied. Don't worry if you haven't done a Mental Health First Aid course yet; most of it is common sense and the tips in this article can be used by anyone to support someone else experiencing mental distress. I've included some information from MHFA England in this article.

The Stress Container & Lockdown: Everyone responds to stress in different ways, some will delight in being at home all the time, others will have loved ones they are worried about, and many will miss being with friends. We all have a stress container, which is our comfort zone. Stress comes in and sometimes the container can overflow.

It helps to have a tap that we can turn on to relieve the stress. This tap is our coping strategy (resilience) which is very important to have positive mental health. During the period of lockdown, there is likely to be increased stress (probably in forms we're not used to), but even more importantly we may see a reduction in helpful coping strategies; things such as meeting friends, sports, school, family visits (these are different for everyone).



So, one of the main goals when supporting a young person is to encourage them to identify and manage the stress going into their containers and then build in new coping strategies and activities (the tap). Here's a worksheet to help with this from the BBC Open-Up campaign:

<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/safety/documents/health/health-stress-container-exercise.pdf>

Spotting the Warning Signs of Poor Mental Health in Young People: To generalise, there could be cause for concern that a young person's mental health may be worsening if there is a change in their usual behaviour, whether it is behavioural or emotional. Physical symptoms may be present too. Withdrawing from social interaction is often a strong warning sign, but this may be less noticeable during lockdown as most socialising has moved online. Look out for out-of-control behaviour that can be harmful, drastic changes in mood or personality, extreme irritability or difficulty concentrating. Physical warning signs include stomach problems, reduced immunity, rashes and eczema, changes in eating habits, poor exercise and changed sleeping habits. The better you (or a colleague) know the young person, the more likely you are to spot changes.

The risk of suicide, eating disorders and self-harm increase with mental distress, so act by speaking

to a professional (GP, Nurse, Health Centre) immediately. Do you have you any suicide awareness training? - <https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/> is a perfect place to start. Remember: talking about suicide won't make it worse.

Helping Youngsters to Build Resilience. I've listed a few things that will help with resilience below, and are taken from the #MHFAEngland 2 day Youth MHFA course. Make connections. Take regular exercise. Help them to help others. Maintain daily routine. Take a break. Teach self-care and concrete skills. Move towards goals. Nurture positive self-view. Help them manage emotions. Model resilience. Avoid catastrophising. Have perspective and a hopeful outlook. Let young people make mistakes and build self-discovery. Accept that change is part of living. Don't accommodate every need. Avoid eliminating or risk. Teach problem solving.





Resilience is key, think back to the Stress Container. A quick note about supporters'/parents attitudes': mental distress is usually a result of what is going on in our lives, so approach the young person in a non-judgemental way, seek to

understand before being understood and be aware of your own worries transferring to them. Be compassionate, and help them to realise what is happening is normal and can be helped.

Please don't hesitate to contact Antony Dowell at Imagine Independence if you would like to know more about the courses that we run around Mental Health First Aid. I've put some additional links in below where you will find help for a young person who is struggling with their mental health at the moment.

Antony Dowell

Mental Health Guidance: Government, BBC & Young Minds. Recently, the BBC posted an article Coronavirus: How it's affecting young people's mental health <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-52110460> and highlights the study produced recently by Young Minds. There is government guidance (obviously) on supporting young people's mental health and is worth a read: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

Young Minds are always an excellent resource for finding up-to-date information around mental health: <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>. The coronavirus advice from Young Minds is split up into sensible sections:

Talk to someone about how you're feeling
Arm yourself with the facts
Know what you can do
Don't overexpose yourself to the news

Plan your time
Find things that help you feel calm
Dealing with self-isolation
Helpline services available

Young Minds Crisis Messenger. Provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you need urgent help text YM to 85258. All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors

Other Resources

Childline Comforts, advises and protects children 24 hours a day and offers free confidential counselling. Phone 0800 1111 (24 hours). Chat 1-2-1 with a counsellor online

The Mix Information, support and listening for people under 25. Phone 0808 808 4994 (24 hours)

Samaritans 24 hour confidential listening and support for anyone who needs it. (Adults included.) jo@samaritans.org. Phone 116 123 (24 hours)

Kooth Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people. <https://kooth.com/>

Shout Anxious? Worried? Stressed? Get 24/7 help from our team of Crisis Volunteers 85258

Antony Dowell

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For details of our MHFA England accredited Mental Health First Aid training please visit:

<https://www.imagineindependence.org.uk/services/mental-health-first-aid-training/>

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