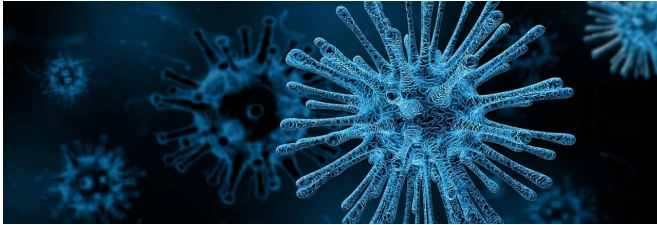


Steps to address mental health effects of the pandemic on young people

11 October 2021



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Researchers have outlined 14 steps that schools, mental health services and policymakers can take to help children and young people whose mental health has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a new policy briefing, a team of researchers at King's College London and Oxford University highlight the multiple effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on children and young people in the UK through their education and daily life, including challenges around social isolation, academic pressures, adjusting to online learning and coping with reopening of schools.

They also say there has been severe disruption to support services, and they point out how children and young people have been affected by the loss, trauma and financial insecurity linked to the pandemic which has occurred within wider society, communities and families.

To help address these short- and long-term effects, the research team has set out potential solutions that can be put into place within schools, [mental health services](#), and the wider policy and practice environment. They suggest:

- Equipping [school staff](#) to normalize conversations about mental health to

identify who needs help

- Taking a 'whole school approach' to children's mental health that involves parents, carers, public health teams, governors and teachers.
- Maintaining or increasing financial support of families facing hardship caused or exacerbated by the pandemic
- Reforming the benefit system and universal credit, and exploring the feasibility of implementing a guaranteed income scheme
- Reviewing digital education tools and investing in those that have improved children's experience of education
- Bridging the digital divide by providing children with internet access and IT equipment needed for their education.
- Allowing some children to have a gradual return to conventional learning through a hybrid model
- Strengthening the provision of early interventions and greater support at times of transition
- Developing open access mental health services for young people up to the age of 25
- Assessing the impact of changes such as more online mental health services during the pandemic
- Improving links between schools and families
- Investing sufficient resources in special education, support care and mental health funding
- Providing COVID-19-related mental health resources for those who have experience trauma and loss.

Professor Cathy Creswell, Director, UKRI Emerging Minds Network and Professor of Developmental Clinical Psychology, University of Oxford said: "In seeking to limit the impacts of the pandemic on young people and provide much needed supports, we need a multi-pronged approach that

incorporates actions in each of these settings. This is so that we can foster the environments in which young people can thrive—in communities, in schools, and at home—and provide the mental health care that an increasing number of young people need."

Provided by University of Oxford

Professor Craig Morgan, Co-director of the ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health, said: "There is currently widespread concern about the mental health of young people. These recommendations provide [policy makers](#), school leaders, and service providers with concrete actions that they can take to address these concerns and to promote mental health and well-being among the many young people who have been adversely affected by the pandemic."

The findings are set out in a new policy briefing jointly produced by the ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health, Emerging Minds, and The Policy Institute.

They developed out of a policy lab held in early 2021 which included participants from policy, academia, wider society and schools, as well as young people, including those with lived experience of mental health issues, and parents and carers.

The lab was held as the culminating event of a conference on youth mental health and COVID-19 and participants included policymakers, academics, representatives from schools and wider society, young people, including those with lived experience of mental [health](#) issues, parents and carers.

Dr. Helen Fisher, Reader in Developmental Psychopathology at ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health, King's College London said: "It is imperative that we understand, quickly, the impacts of the pandemic and related social restrictions and [school](#) closures on the [mental health](#) of young people, particularly young people in marginalized and vulnerable groups. This is so we can develop and implement, again quickly, measures to mitigate these impacts, to ensure—as we emerge from the pandemic—that all [young people](#) are enabled to flourish."

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