Recovery and mental survival as children prepare for phased return to school

Wednesday 13 May, 2020

Children's mental health charity Kids Inspire is preparing for an increase in demand as the 'new normal' phased return to school is proposed across the country.

Since the start of the pandemic, Kids Inspire has responded by increasing capacity hosting 400 plus online sessions per week as demand for its specialist therapeutic services increased. Alongside children and families, services have also been extended to key workers, to offer support during extraordinary times.

In a paper
written for *local authority leaders* about the response and recovery phase of the pandemic and the impact on children's mental health, Sue Bell Clinical Director of Kids Inspire and Dimitra Theodoropoulou, Clinical Impact Manager emphasised that a return to school will likely be a traumatic experience for many children and young people.

While this is an unprecedented pandemic, in their paper the experienced mental health and trauma therapists drew from both academic texts, as well as from their own knowledge and experience:

"There seems to be a consensus that the *trauma* - during and after the pandemic- will be significant and with no certainty as to what extent the actual impact will be, it is essential that we are prepared. We cannot underestimate the need for specialist support if those who have physically survived COVID-19 are going to also recover and survive mentally."

The paper titled *'COVID-19 Pandemic and the Impact on the mental health of Children and Young People',* referred to:

"The common denominator in all 350 open cases at Kids Inspire, is the lack of sense of security in all levels that is so needed for children to survive and thrive. In today's threatening situation children and young people will return to schools, having survived a global pandemic; however, it is uncertain how they will be able to make the transition from *survive* to *thrive* and how long it will take for their brain and nervous system to switch off from the *survival loop* (Fight, Flight and Freeze)."

Warnings of such impact and how the system may fail to respond to the children's needs during a pandemic were highlighted by *Bruce-Barrett et al (2007)* in their article '*Pandemic Influenza Planning for Children and Youth: Who's Looking Out for Our Kids?'* written after the experience of previous pandemic1 similar to COVID-19. They warn:

"No amount of planning prior to a pandemic can fully prevent the uncertainty, loss and grief that a pandemic will wreak. Indeed, the social, psychological and financial disarray attendant upon a pandemic will far exceed the physical impact." (Bruce-Barrett et al 2007)

Not every child is feeling anxious or depressed in lockdown. In fact, some children who found school stressful - often due to negative learning experiences, their own special needs and bullying - are finding lockdown, in comparison, a calming experience and are even thriving.

In the closing sentiment of the paper, Sue and Dimitra who have 50 years combined childhood trauma practice between them, said:

"Schools can provide a safe environment for children to return to when the crisis is over. However, this will not be a smooth transition. Things cannot and will not go back to normal by themselves."

This informed paper was shared with the local authority early in the response phase of the Coronavirus. Sue and Dimitra welcome the findings being shared as their contribution to raising awareness during Mental Health Week 18-24 May 2020.

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For more information or to speak directly to Sue or Dimitra about their experiences and findings, please contact Emily Patel emily@kidsinspire.org.uk **or 07920163736**

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Notes to editors

Kids Inspire is planning a **transition programme, peer mentors** and an **online support group** for children and young people. Please contact Clinicaladmin@kidsinspire.org.uk **or** 01245 348707 for more details.

Increased capacity during the Coronavirus response phase has been possible due to successful bids to funders, flexibility on existing funded projects and reaching out to trained professionals to volunteer their time.

A new programme: Talk Together

Talk together was set up by Kids Inspire in response to the impact of the coronavirus on mental health.

In addition to our existing service users, online support is being made available for children, young people, families and keyworkers to manage their emotional wellbeing and sanity during this difficult time.

To access this programme, please contact:

clinicaladmin@kidsinspire.org.uk M: 07908 829 550 T: 01245 348707

About Kids Inspire

Kids Inspire empowers children, young people and families to make positive change supporting recovery from traumatic experiences or dealing with emerging mental health difficulties.

Early in our 13-year foundation, we established that bespoke therapy, coaching and mentoring best addresses childhood adversity. Individual plans are created for children, young people, couples and families with the aim of promoting resilience, greater self-awareness and positive relationships to empower life choices.

With each child we meet we look and listen to how their past affects their present, reviewing closely the whole system around them to address the cause rather than symptoms.

Psychological and behavioural issues can often arise from underlying trauma - which could be anything from family breakdown or conflict, bereavement, abuse or neglect.

Our qualified, experienced therapists have trained in a broad range of orientations (psychodynamic, CBT, integrative, attachment-focused, expressive arts, systemic) and work creatively to encourage body/mind reconnection, focusing on the strengths of the child and family in order to build and nurture resilience.

To find out more about us, or how you can gift your support please visit kidsinspire.org.uk

You can also find us on social media.

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