



# **The Sittingbourne School:**

## **Mental health and Wellbeing**

### A Guide for Parents

Coronavirus has changed lots of things about family life and normal daily routines. It's natural to feel worries about trying to manage all these changes and the adapting to a new way of life. It's important to remember that we all cope with change and stress in different ways and you are not the only one feeling this way. We have put together this guide to help you identify if your son/daughter is struggling and how you can help.

### **Taking care of your mental health during lockdown**

Being a parent can be challenging enough in normal situations but now more than ever, taking care of your mental health is important. Changes to our mental health can sometimes affect children and their wellbeing as they can pick up on your low mood and anxieties. It's important to not ignore how you are feeling though and to talk to your son/daughter so that they know that they are not alone and everyone can feel like this sometimes. Ignoring the issue doesn't make it go away. Talking is good and there is a lot of support out there.

### **Signs that your son/daughter may be struggling**

The signs that your son/daughter could be struggling with the current situation can include:

- Persistent low mood or lack of motivation
- Not enjoying things they used to like doing
- Becoming withdrawn and spending less time with family and communicating with friends
- Experiencing low self-esteem or feeling like they are worthless
- Feeling tearful or upset regularly
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Feeling nervous or on edge a lot of the time
- Suffering panic attacks
- Feeling angry
- Trouble sleeping
- Self-harming and having dark thought

## **Signs of Self Harming are:**

- Covering up ie wearing long sleeves even when it's hot.
- Unexplained bruises, cuts, burns or bite marks on their body
- Blood stains on clothing or finding tissues with blood on it in their room
- Becoming withdrawn and spending a lot of time in their room
- Feeling down, low self-esteem or blaming themselves for things
- Outbursts of anger or risky behaviour.

## **Ways you can help a child who's struggling**

- Let them know you're there for them and are on their side.
- Try talking to them over text if they don't feel able to talk in person. This can be a good way to get them to open up without the embarrassment of doing it face to face.
- Keep communication open between you. They need to know that you are there for them and that they can talk to you about anything that is worrying them.
- Try to answer their questions and reassure them, even if you don't know all the answers talking things through together can help them feel calmer and that they are not alone.
- Be patient, stay calm and approachable, even if their behaviour upsets you.
- Recognise that their feelings are valid and letting them know that it's okay for them to be honest about how they are feeling.
- Think of healthy ways to cope that you could do together, like yoga, breathing exercises and mindfulness or daily walks together.
- Encourage them to do things that they enjoy doing.
- Keep as many regular routines going as you can. This helps to make them feel safe and secure. There are many things that have changed but still a lot that can remain the same, bedtime routine, regular meal times and setting their day as it would be at school. Helping them get into a home school routine with their live lessons can really help.
- Encourage them to talk to your GP, someone at school or one of the many helplines available. Especially if they are finding it hard to open up to someone at home
- Take care of yourself and get support if you need to. Don't blame yourself for what's happening and stay positive.
- If you suspect that your child is having dark thoughts or self-harming you need to contact your GP and let them know. They can put support in place for you.

If your son/daughter is self-harming telling them simply to stop won't work but it can be helpful to suggest something they can do instead when they are feeling this way. Distraction is a great thing.

- Try getting them to draw/scribble in red ink
- Hold an ice cube in their hand until it melts
- Write down negative thoughts then rip the paper up.
- Wear an elastic band on their wrist and snap it every time they feel the urge to harm
- Listen to music
- Punching or screaming into a pillow
- Talking to someone
- Exercise

## Support available:

There is a lot of support websites and helplines that are available to you online if you are worried about your son/daughter's wellbeing or mental health. These include the following:

### Youngminds

Information on child and adolescent mental health. Services for parents and professionals

Phone: parents helpline 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday 9.30am – 4pm)

<http://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

### NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/cypmhs-information-for-parents-and-carers/>

### Mind

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/>

If you have very serious concerns about you son/daughters mental health, think they are having dark thoughts or self-harming and are concerned about extreme behaviour you can either contact your GP service or complete self referrals to the following agencies

**NELFT** self referrals, [www.nelft.nhs.uk](http://www.nelft.nhs.uk)

or call **CYPMHS**, (Children and Young People's Mental Health Service) on 0300 123 4496

**Early help** can be accessed via [www.kent.gov.uk](http://www.kent.gov.uk) or via your local children's centre, Youth Hub or school.

They provide a range of services to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of children, young people and families in Kent.

For example, they can offer support if:

- you are worried about your child's behaviour
- you are struggling to cope
- you are worried about your family finances
- your child is struggling to cope with bereavement
- your child is being bullied
- you are having difficulties with family relationships.