

Place2Be support for children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic



Since schools were closed to most pupils due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Place2Be has transformed the way it delivers its core service.

Our teams have been working tirelessly to reach those in need during the lockdown. Our mental health professionals are conducting around **1,900 phone sessions with young people, parents and teachers every week.**

This is an opportunity to listen, help with any immediate issues, as well as signpost and facilitate additional support as necessary.

Families we support

Place2Be supports families who were already living with challenging circumstances, even before the pandemic hit. Of the children and young people we supported last year, more than half (51%) were eligible for Pupil Premium (government funding for disadvantaged pupils), and over a quarter (28%) had some form of special educational need. In 27% of cases, social care was already involved with the family.



Impact of COVID-19 pandemic - survey of frontline staff

A survey of over 200 of Place2Be's frontline mental health professionals reveals the common themes* that young people and parents are raising on these calls:

Young people

1. Loneliness & isolation (55%)
2. Academic worries (48%)
3. Juggling schoolwork (45%)
4. Loss of rituals like end of year activities or exams (43%)
5. Family relationship difficulties (42%)

Parents and carers

1. Loneliness & isolation (54%)
2. Family relationship difficulties (51%)
3. Meeting basic needs, incl. food (45%)
4. Behaviour management (43%)
5. Juggling work & home schooling (42%)

Our mental health professionals have had at least one conversation** about:



worries about losing home with a parent/carer (47%)



self-harm or suicide ideation with a young person (55%)



violence in the home between parents/carers with a young person (32%)

*Based on those who said they 'Always' or 'Very Often' discuss these themes during phone sessions

**Based on those who answered 'Always', 'Very Often', 'Quite Often' or 'Not Very Often' (i.e. not 'Never').

Our teams are supporting families with incredibly challenging circumstances – the vast majority have had at least one conversation with a parent or carer who is concerned about losing their job, and almost half with a family who are concerned about the risk of losing their home. Over a quarter have discussed a child or young person's self-harm or suicide ideation with at least one family, and one in five have discussed an eating disorder with at least one family.

Concerningly, more than half of our teams offering phone sessions for young people in secondary school have had at least one conversation** that covered self-harm or suicide ideation, and almost a third have had at least one conversation discussing violence in the home between parents/carers.

A view from a Place2Be Parent counsellor

"My first 'check in' with Sam started with broken sentences as she gulped for breath. I established that she and her children had symptoms of coronavirus, and her previous fears of dying as a single parent responsible for children, were overwhelming. She had phoned 111 and been told to stay indoors and use an inhaler but didn't have the confidence to tell them she didn't own one.

"I reassured her and reminded her of previous times she had been ill and had found creative ways to manage as a new single mum. I reassured her it was ok to tell 111 that she didn't have an inhaler. I acknowledged that this was all very scary but with being understood and reassured; her feelings calmed down and her breathing stabilised.

"We then discussed practicalities. She had been told to stay at home but had little food in the house (or money). I got consent to forward her name and address if I could find a solution and subsequently organised food from the food bank. We discussed how she might cope with caring for the children when so unwell herself; what would support her, what might occupy them. A friend had offered to help but she was finding it difficult to accept this. As we talked through the options, she herself concluded now was a time to accept help rather than struggle on.

"She subsequently survived, secured the medical help she needed, accepted help, provided food and care for her children, and by the next 'check in' was in a much better place."



**Based on those who answered 'Always', 'Very Often', 'Quite Often' or 'Not Very Often' (i.e. not 'Never').



A view from a Place2Be School Project Manager

"Lucy has been finding the lockdown especially difficult. A single parent with a teenager and a younger child, she had been phoning the school several times a day seeking help. She was worried about keeping herself and her children safe from coronavirus, and about providing food for the family. With a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder, Lucy's thoughts were spiralling and her anxiety was intense, making it hard for her to sleep. Her own counsellor had suspended their sessions at the start of the pandemic.

"I listened to Lucy's worries and empathised with her. Raising children can be challenging, especially as a single parent. I checked that Lucy had adequate supplies of her medication and asked whether she had spoken to her GP. I gave her a telephone number for emergency mental health support in the borough, should she need it. I also shared details of voluntary organisations which were delivering food to vulnerable people.

"To address Lucy's spiralling anxiety, I shared links to breathing exercises which might help and to a YouTube yoga session designed to be calming. I also sent links to sites which the children might find useful, including a book explaining COVID-19 to children.

"When I checked in with Lucy a couple of days later, she sounded much calmer. She said she had made a note of the emergency contact number, which she found reassuring. She had tried the yoga the night before and had had her best night's sleep for a while; she thought she might try to find a yoga class when the lockdown was finished. I'm continuing to check in with Lucy while the lockdown continues."

Find out more

To find out more about Place2Be's response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

 Visit place2be.org.uk/coronavirus

Royal Patron HRH The Duchess of Cambridge

Place2Be is a national charity working in England, Scotland and Wales.

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