

24th May 2023

Supporting Children and Young People's Mental Wellbeing

At this time of year, with additional pressures such as exams, it may be helpful to remind you of the many local and national resources available for children and young people who may be vulnerable.

This additional support is specialist, to help them better manage their emotional reactions and feelings to avoid critical incidents happening.

Existing local and national support:

- **Frimley Healthier Together**
<https://frimley-healthiertogether.nhs.uk/mental-health/mental-health-and-wellbeing-1>
An NHS Frimley website for parents/carers offering advice and support on a range of issues including mental wellbeing.
- **Achieving for Children Windsor & Maidenhead**
<https://rbwm.afcinfo.org.uk/pages/community-information/information-and-advice/family-hub-service/support-for-parents>
Family Hub Service run by Achieving for Children, offering advice and support for parents on a range of issues including mental wellbeing.
- **Kooth**
<https://www.kooth.com/>
A free, safe, and anonymous space for young people to find online support and counselling. It also has contact details for Childline and the Samaritans.
- **Thames Valley Suicide Bereavement Support Service (Amparo)**
Tel: 0330 088 9255
<https://amparo.org.uk/>
Provide practical and emotional support for anyone (adults, children/young people, and families) affected by suicide in the Thames Valley. A confidential, free service, offering short and long-term support.

For telephone support:

- **Shout**
Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people across the UK experiencing a mental health crisis. Simply text 'SHOUT' to 85258. It also has a website <https://giveusashout.org/>.
- **Parents Helpline**
National service offering detailed advice, emotional support and signposting about a child or young person up to the age 25. Call 0808 802 5544 (Monday – Friday, 9:30am - 4pm).
- **Childline**
ChildLine offers free and confidential support for children and young people up to the age of 19. This is a 24/7 service. Call 0800 1111.
- **Papyrus HOPELINE**
For young people who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide. Parents can also contact it if they're unsure how to start a conversation with their child about suicide and would like advice from a specially trained adviser. Call 0800 068 41 41 or text 07860 039967.

For vulnerable children/young people:

Parents and carers can find telephone numbers for local and national emergency mental health support on the 'Help I'm in Crisis' section of the Frimley Healthier Together website (listed above). But for ease, here is the direct link <https://frimley-healthiertgether.nhs.uk/mental-health/mental-health-and-wellbeing-1/having-mental-health-crisis>.

Schools can also contact their school link Educational Psychologist at edpsych@achievingforchildren.org.uk. Alternatively, contact the Getting Help/ Wellbeing Team and Multi-Agency Referrals for Windsor and Maidenhead at mash@achievingforchildren.org.uk.

We would be grateful if you could share these support details with your colleagues, students, parents/carers. To help you, below is some suggested wording you could use or adapt, as you see fit, in your next communications to parents/carers via your usual channels:

PARENT NEWSLETTER

Supporting Children and Young People's Mental Wellbeing

Our mental health and wellbeing can change all the time. Because of this, it can help to check in regularly and be available for your children and teenagers to talk about how they're feeling. You don't have to wait until they're struggling.

There is a lot of specialist support out there to help your child or teenager better manage their emotional reactions and feelings to avoid critical incidents happening.

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All of these above services can support your child or teenager all year round, so it's important for them to know support is there if they need it.

If however, your child or teenager is at risk of harming themselves or others, please dial 111 and press Option 2 (for mental health).

Talking to your child/teenager

It's okay to feel uncertain about talking about mental health – you're not alone. If you're worried about speaking to your child or teenager about their mental wellbeing, it can help to feel prepared. Here are some tips from the national mental health charity Mind, for starting such conversations:

- Try to find a time and place that suits you both. The time may never feel perfect, but it can help if you both feel calm and comfortable. This could mean talking in a quiet place, or it could mean doing an activity together.
- There's no perfect way to begin a conversation. However you choose to do it, try your best to start in a calm and open-minded way. You might not understand exactly what they're going through, and that's okay.
- Try not to feel disheartened at your first attempt. They might not respond well the first time or might not want to engage at all. You can try again at a different time when they're ready.
- Give them the space they need. It's important to respect their boundaries – there are some things they might not want to share or talk about with you.

How to recognise signs of distress

When we experience a threatening event, our bodies automatically respond in a way that helps us to protect ourselves or to prepare to escape from the situation. This is often called the "fight, flight or freeze" response.

Our bodies produce excess adrenaline at such times, which results in an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension and breathing rate.

During an extremely traumatic event this reaction will be strong. Common physiological reactions may include pounding heart, trembling, shaking, fast breathing, sweating, nausea.

Psychological responses to traumatic stress

Children and teenagers respond differently to adults as they've not yet developed the same conceptual skills. Their feelings may be shown through behaviour, rather than words, and these behaviours will vary according to their age.

Behaviours might include:

- *Regression of behaviour to that of a younger child*
- *Being more naughty or aggressive*
- *Being withdrawn and reluctant to talk*
- *Sleep problems*
- *Clinginess*
- *Poor concentration*
- *Changes in appetite*
- *Worry about being safe*
- *Unwillingness to go to school*

All of these are normal reactions to an abnormal and distressing event. These are usually short-lived. Some, however, may have more severe and lasting reactions.