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Press release

Extra mental health support for pupils and teachers

Online resources and charity grants to help schools and colleges respond to the impact of coronavirus on mental health and wellbeing

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From:

Department for Education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>), Department of Health and Social Care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care>), Nadine Dorries MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/nadine-dorries>), Vicky Ford MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/vicky-ford>), and The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/nick-gibb>)



New online resources designed by health and education experts will be provided to schools and colleges to boost mental health support for staff and pupils, encouraging them to talk more confidently about the anxieties and concerns they feel as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Videos, webinars and teaching materials, produced in partnership with charities, will be made available to schools and colleges, helping to foster conversations about mental health and reassure many young people who are worried about the impact of the virus on their lives.

As more pupils return to the classroom as part of the Government's phased approach to the wider opening of schools, the Department for Education has announced grants worth more than £750,000 for the Diana Award, the Anti-Bullying Alliance and the Anne Frank Trust - to help hundreds of schools and colleges build relationships between pupils, boost their resilience, and continue to tackle bullying both in person and online.

A new £95,000 pilot project in partnership with the Education Support Partnership will focus on teachers' and leaders' mental health, providing online peer-support and telephone supervision from experts to around 250 school leaders.

It adds to the support (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-advice-to-support-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>) the Government has already put in place to help families and children during the pandemic, with more than £9 million (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2020/06/top-nhs-doctor-issues-advice-for-children-going-back-to-school/>) already being invested in mental health charities to help them expand and reach those most in need, and priority given to it within planning guides for a phased return to education.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

There has never been a more important time to speak about mental health and wellbeing – especially for thousands of children, young people and teachers who are adapting to education and different ways of living and learning in these unprecedented times.

Schools and colleges are often a safe haven for children and young people, but the challenges we face at this time mean we are all more likely to feel anxious or sad – no matter our age or circumstances.

These new resources, created with charities and health experts, will encourage confident conversations between friends, colleagues, pupils and their teachers, and improve our understanding of how to make ourselves and others feel better.

Minister for Mental Health Nadine Dorries said:

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on the importance of looking after our mental health. It is very normal during these uncertain and unusual times to be experiencing distress or anxiety, or be feeling low. What's important is that you get help.

We know the impact on our children and young people has been especially tough, which is why as schools return we're determined to equip teachers and pupils with the tools they need to look after their wellbeing.

Mental health must be a priority as we get start to get back to normality and I hope these brilliant new measures alongside our NHS services will help start new conversations and reassure children that it's ok not to be ok, and that support is available.

A new training module (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-mental-wellbeing>) for teachers has also been published to support them in giving lessons on the Government's new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum, which will make mental health and wellbeing a compulsory part of pupils' education in primary and secondary school.

Developed with clinical experts, the training module will help subject leads and teachers deliver the new curriculum effectively when it becomes compulsory from September, as well as improving their confidence in talking and teaching about mental wellbeing in class, especially as many measures to stop the spread of coronavirus remain in place and many people continue to experience restrictions in their daily lives.

While schools have some flexibility over how they introduce the new curriculum within the first year of compulsory teaching, the new module will help schools prepare ahead of time.

The Government's announcement today (Sunday 7 June) builds on the excellent partnership working already seen between schools, colleges and health services in local areas in response to the pandemic.

Professor Prathiba Chitsabesan, NHS England Associate National Clinical Director for Children and Young People's Mental Health, said:

The coronavirus outbreak has had an impact on everybody's lives, so it is understandable that children and young people may be experiencing anxiety, distress or low mood which is a normal response to a significant disruption to their lives.

The NHS is here for anyone who needs it, and has adapted to the pandemic through offering flexible options including phone and video consultations. We will continue to work in partnerships with schools and other services to ensure children and their families access the support they need.

In addition to the RSHE module, the new resources will include examples of good practice already being used around the country, developed by mental health charity MindEd, to be provided to schools and colleges before the end of the summer term. These are in addition to high quality tools already made available by mental health charities, including the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families and Place2Be.

Professor Peter Fonagy, Chief Executive of the Anna Freud Centre said:

We welcome this is important announcement. At this time of immense stress children have a right to expect that their teachers are well supported. This directly benefits children and young people not just in their education the quality they receive but also in their own wellbeing and the sense of support they experience.

Catherine Roche, CEO of children's mental health charity Place2Be said:

As a charity providing expert mental health support within school communities, at Place2Be we've heard first-hand from teachers, parents and children of the huge mental health challenges they are facing as a result of this pandemic.

These resources and training courses will be a welcome addition to help support the emotional wellbeing of teachers and pupils in the short and long term.

In response to continuing social distancing measures, while many older pupils remain at home to allow for vital year groups to return in a phased way, existing school and college-based mental health programmes have also adapted their work to make sure their services are still accessible for those who need them the most. This includes:

- The Link Programme, which connect schools and colleges to external specialist mental health services, which will begin offering online workshops nationally to facilitate joined-up working to plan for the recovery phase, and to ensure learning from successful areas already using this approach is shared; and
- Mental Health Support Teams around the country, which join up schools and colleges with additional trained staff supervised by their local NHS mental health services, will encourage teams to step up their support to more schools and colleges locally, accept referrals through new pathways, and help develop a recovery approach.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb has also written Nick Gibb letter to Expert Advisory Group (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/890547/Nick_Gibb_letter_to_EAG.pdf) (PDF, 409KB, 4 pages) to the members of the Department for Education's Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on education staff wellbeing, accepting its recommendations including a commitment to develop a wellbeing charter for the teaching sector. The charter will help create an open culture around wellbeing and mental health, breaking down stigma, and will include commitments from the Government to regularly measure staff wellbeing, and to embed this into training, guidance and policy making.

The grant to the Education Support Partnership will respond specifically to the mental health needs of school leaders at this challenging time and additional funding of £45,000 to Timewise will provide practical support and resources on flexible working in light of new arrangements for schools responding to coronavirus.

Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, said:

Mind was pleased to contribute to the Expert Advisory Group on school staff wellbeing, but what is most important is that concrete action comes out of this when it comes to making sure mental health and wellbeing are prioritised within our education system. Today's announcement is a welcome first step, and we hope it will be the start of a sincere commitment to address issues like stress, and other mental health problems among school pupils and staff, helping make sure we build a fairer and kinder working and learning environment for everyone.

Coronavirus has impacted all of our lives, but some more than others. We cannot underestimate the long-term effects that this pandemic will have, especially on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Wellbeing and emotional support must be available to anyone who needs it, now so more than ever. As the UK Government asks schools to begin to open to more children, it is crucial that we all come together to support the mental health and physical health of teachers and pupils, not just now but for the years to come.

Stuart Rimmer, Principal of East Coast College and Expert Advisory Panel member said:

It is a hugely positive step that we are seeing thoughtful and considered announcements to support staff mental health and wellbeing in the school and college sector. Supporting leaders and front line staff is critical, amplified recently by significant additional pressures of COVID-19. Developing support programmes, peer to peer and coaching will help at these critical and complex times.

Sinead McBrearty, CEO of Education Support Partnership, said:

The mental health and wellbeing of teachers and senior leaders must sit at the heart of our education system. The Expert Advisory Group has brought new voices into the policy-making process, and the resulting recommendations set a direction for supporting and improving the wellbeing of those working in education.

Education Support is pleased to have the opportunity to pilot remote services for school leaders. Early testing has shown that online peer support and telephone supervision can help school leaders find ways to process the impact of work-related stress. We hope that the timing of this work will help school leaders in the short term, and inform best practice post-pandemic.

DfE enquiries

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1. 10 June 2020

Updated Relationships Sex and Health Education training module with link.

2. 7 June 2020

First published.

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