

Posted by: Olivia Morris Mental Health Champions Volunteer (MHC)

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This year Children's Mental Health Week is a little different - although mental health related issues such as anxiety and stress are still just as prominent as ever, children and young people now have the added strain and uncertainty that has arisen whilst the country battles a pandemic. With emotions heightened due to the coronavirus outbreak, children are extremely vulnerable to increased mental health issues.

Here at the YMCA we want to highlight a range of concerns that children and young individuals are experiencing due to the ongoing pandemic. We will outline ways we can help offer support with these issues, ensuring children and young people can be mentally healthy, happy and safe.

Inconsistency

Many children and young people have been greeted with an ever changing routine since the pandemic began. For those younger individuals having to adopt homeschooling, and those older students who are independently working, it has led to a huge lack of consistency and stability for many. For some who work well self-sufficiently, and those children who are receiving added support from parents, this has potentially been beneficial. Yet this can't be said for everyone. For those who perhaps thrive working in a team and feel comforted by peers, this is a different story. Many children and young people are feeling extremely overwhelmed and whilst remote techniques may work for some, we have to remember that every child and young individual is different.

To ensure a level of regularity and help maintain elements familiar to those now having to face a change of schedule, an efficient routine may prove helpful. For instance, going to bed and getting up at an appropriate time, continuation of wearing suitable clothing such as their uniform, and scheduling regular breaks in line with their familiar timetable may all be advantageous. This will provide a level of routine which is recognisable, helping individuals feel organised and structured in their mindset.

A little side note:

My name is Olivia Morris, I am 20-years-old and originally from Nottingham. Whilst studying at the University of Salford I was given the exciting opportunity to work with the YMCA to write some content that I believed would be beneficial and could help those struggling during what is an incredibly strange and confusing time. As a born worrier myself, I am extremely passionate in supporting children and young people to feel comforted and reassured that they are not on their own. When the phrase 'mental health' is mentioned we assume this has negative connotations, whereas in reality we all have mental health and it's how we care for our own mental health and choose to look after our mental wellbeing that is important. I really hope this blog helps the 'next generation' feel calmed that their emotions and thoughts are being experienced amongst different ages, in different cities but most importantly, they are not alone and there is help out there.



Stress



Sadly stress is increasing rather than improving for many young people and children. Amongst the chaos and unpredictability of the ongoing pandemic, many students are feeling pressurised to perform and produce the same standard of work prior to the pandemic. Many young minds are constantly battling to remain consistent in their levels of learning, but are failing to recognise how much stress and pressure they are putting themselves under.

At the YMCA we believe that children and young people need support in appreciating that the pandemic may have impacted on their mental abilities more than they think. It is natural to experience a potential fluctuation in their learning and they need to understand this is not failure. Taking regular breaks from their work will allow them to refocus and relieve a little stress.

Additionally, children and young people may benefit from reading, gardening, colouring, baking or perhaps undertaking a little exercise. These recommendations can all help calm your mind. We must also not underestimate the power of humour, a little laughter can go a long way, triggering the release of endorphins and lowering stress hormones.

Exhaustion

For some children and young people the postponement and cancellation of exams and tests has been a huge weight lifted off their shoulders. But for others, there are feelings of anger and frustration that their academic pathway has now changed. Many feel drained and exhausted with their end goal no longer in sight.



Children and young people need to know they are not on their own, with many others experiencing the same feelings and thoughts. They may take comfort in watching accounts on YouTube and connecting with other children and young people on social media platforms, displaying the same emotions. This may help them feel supported, acknowledging they are not alone and that there is a whole community out there who understand.

Overwhelmed

Children and young people are all experiencing huge life changes, both physically and mentally. Many are therefore finding it extremely difficult adjusting to the lifestyle changes resulting from the pandemic, in addition to the hormonal changes they may already be facing. Some may have become overly attached to those they love, as opposed to others



who are experiencing increased anger and frustration. For many they are also finding remaining indoors mentally challenging, adding to this emotional journey.

The importance of daily walks and fresh air is therefore crucial. Some individuals, for example teenagers, may feel embarrassed and view walking with members of their household 'uncool'. But we urge parents to get their children outside, even though this may prove challenging, it is vital for their own mental health and can help lower their blood pressure and increase their energy levels.

Here at the YMCA we want to help support children and young people through this difficult time, so please check out our social channels for activities you can get involved in. We want you to know that although we are living through a pandemic, we can still support **YOU** and help **YOU** with your mental health and wellbeing.

Instagram: @ymcamanchester

TikTok: @ymcamanchester

Website: <https://ymcamanchester.org.uk>