**What children are saying to Childline about coronavirus**

This briefing provides an overview of the main concerns that children and young people have been talking to Childline counsellors about during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). Gaining an insight into these worries can help adults think about what support needs to be put in place for young people at this time.

**Abuse**

Being at home more due to social distancing measures can make young people more vulnerable to abuse. For children who are experiencing abuse or neglect at home, they are unable to leave the house to get support from the places they usually go to feel safe such as schools, clubs or friends’ and close relatives**’** houses.

The most prevalent forms of abuse that have been talked about in counselling sessions are:

• emotional abuse

• sexual abuse and online sexual abuse

• physical abuse

• neglect.

**Family relationships**

Young people say that being in constant close proximity with other members of their household has created a difficult and stressful environment. This often results in more arguments.

Other family issues that are affecting young people’s wellbeing include:

• witnessing arguments between parents about financial pressures and job loss

• parents who are divorced or separated arguing about visiting rights and where a young person should be staying

• young people having parents in the middle of separating and being concerned that the pandemic will delay the process (making family life under the same roof unbearable)

• young people feeling distressed because they can no longer seek refuge and emotional support by going to see close relatives such as a grandparent

• worries about relatives contracting the virus, particularly grandparents or more vulnerable family members.

**Mental health**

Young people talk about:

• struggling with increased feelings of depression and anxiety

• having panic attacks more frequently

• having nightmares or finding it difficult to fall asleep

• feeling lonely or isolated.

Young people use the word “trapped” to describe how they feel about being at home, particularly since strict social distancing measures were put in place. Not being able to go to school, visit family or friends or take part in activities outside of the family home is having a negative impact on their mental health.

Some young people said they are having suicidal thoughts and feelings and some talk about using self-harm to cope.

**Reduced support**

Young people who have been receiving ongoing support for existing mental health concerns are saying that they are either no longer receiving support or support has been reduced. As a result, some young people feel like their mental health is getting worse.

**Doing schoolwork at home**

In some cases being schooled at home has been the cause of family arguments. Young people are also:

* finding it hard to have their day organised by their parents or carers
* struggling with their work and not being able to access the usual support offered in the classroom
* finding it difficult to find a quiet space to concentrate
* struggling with motivation
* worrying about their future prospects.

**Bullying**

In the earlier days of the pandemic, January/February time 20 per cent where the young person talked about coronavirus, related to bullying. Young people said they were being bullied about race or ethnicity, experiencing name calling, belittling comments, rumours, cruel jokes and verbal attacks.

Some young people talked about feeling unaccepted. It affected their self-esteem and some young people even talked about being ashamed of their facial features.

Young people said they contacted Childline for support because they found it difficult to tell their parents or teachers about the bullying they were experiencing.

Following the school closures in March, fewer young people have been talking to us about bullying.