Mental health resources during a national crisis

RCPCH were kindly donated a legacy from a member's family to do a project looking at children and young people's mental health. RCPCH &Us set up a six month project which ran in 2020 bringing together 30+ young people and five members to share reflections on experiences during the pandemic, gaps and solutions for the future. You can read more and watch the video explaining the project from the youth steering group here.

Children and young people's voice is at the heart of everything we do at RCPCH. Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we support children and young people to have their voices heard in decisions that affect them (Article 12) and work with them to help shape services so they have the best healthcare possible (Article 24)[1].

The RCPCH &Us network brings together children, young people up to the age of 25, their parents/carers and families to work with clinicians, decision makers and each other to educate, collaborate, engage and change to improve health services and child health outcomes.

By Bethany, 16

Why this project?

We know that children and young people's lives get turned upside down by a national crisis, whether that is a flood in their community, a terrorist incident or a national pandemic like COVID-19. Young people's mental health was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 80% of young people responding to a Young Minds survey stating that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse[2]. We also know that children and young people are the key to understanding what works, what doesn't and need to be involved in creating solutions[3].

What did we do?

In May/June 2020, we asked two groups of young people supported by their local workers to think about what resources have they know about to support mental health, what is missing and what ideas they might have. We also asked doctors for their feedback, and a worker who delivers mental health first aid training in schools and other organisations.
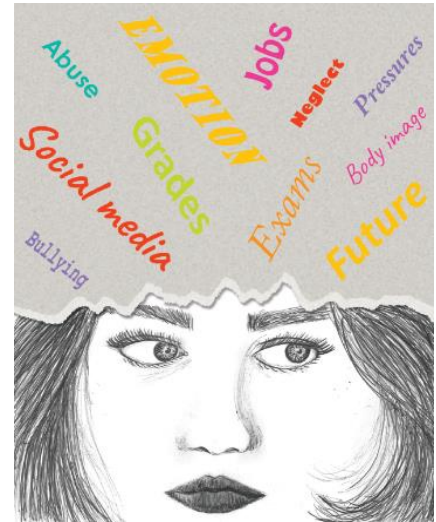
[1] Rights Matter (2020) https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/rightsmatter
[2] Young Minds (2020) Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/
[3] Sparrow, E & Linney, M (20200) 'RCPCH & Us: Improving healthcare through engagement' in Brady, L-M. (eds.), *Embedding Young People's Participation in Health Services: New Approaches*. 1st ed., Bristol University Press.

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Young people from the two youth groups said:

- Young people were either able to name a lot of mental health online resources or could find them with a quick google search
- Young people were using online sources to help distract (Netflix, YouTube, games), relax (music) or comfort, not just to find out about mental health support
- Sites to find out about mental health were a bit dry and boring, so young people were reaching out to peers or family instead
- Mental health support and messaging should use mediums that young people already use like Tiktok, Instagram, YouTube
- There can be a lot of information / misinformation on these platforms that are triggering or increase anxiety during crisis so safe and trusted information was key
- Online counselling is time limited and you sometimes have to speak to different person each time
- Some apps are good, but some you have to pay for
- There are too many apps and sites out there so it can be a bit overwhelming
- Apps don't always provide the tailored functions that young people want

They also identified a range of online resources that they were using for support

Young people: Information, wellbeing tips and signposting
- On My Mind (Anna Freud Centre) https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/
- The Mix https://www.themix.org.uk/
- Young Minds https://youngminds.org.uk/
- Childline https://www.childline.org.uk/
- Papyrus https://www.papyrus-uk.org/
- Apps including Calm, Headspace, MeeTwo, Kooth, Mindshift, journal and tracker apps

Websites found useful by older young people
- Mind https://www.mind.org.uk/
- Samaritans https://www.samaritans.org/
- NHS Youth Forum: https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/nhs-youth-forum/peer-support

To find local services
- NHS https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/
- Child and Adolescent health services - search for your local providers
- Youth Access https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/services/find-your-local-service
- Youth Wellbeing Directory https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing/

Registered Charity in England and Wales (1057744) and in Scotland: SCO38299
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For parents
- Young Minds Parent line https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-helpline/
- Charlie Waller https://charliewaller.org/
- BBC Bitesize https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/znsmxyc
- Anna Freud Centre for children and Families https://www.annafreud.org/parents-and-carers/
- Families under pressure https://maudsleycharity.org/familiesunderpressure/

During July – August, RCPCH &Us young people looked at the answers collected in May and June and thought about their own experiences and started to look at the gaps in services. They noticed that there was a lot of uncertainty for young people about the future, they can feel lonely, worried and have negative feelings but that they often said they needed support but either didn't know where to find it or were overwhelmed by the amount of different information (websites, apps etc) and didn't know where to start.

RCPCH Members shared that they signposted young people to CAMHS or colleagues in psychological, play services or family support workers for support, as well as national charities or organisations. Apps / self-help or peer support options identified by the young people's sessions weren't mentioned, but it was noted that mental health support was a specialist role, with some professionals not being as confident as others about mental health support.

The steering group then refined the learning so far to 7 key areas for exploration:
1. That there was too much information from too many places about mental health that could be overwhelming
2. Information too generic and needed to be more personalised
3. Mental health services were not effectively providing information through the online channels that young people used (Instagram, Tiktok, YouTube)
4. Peer support was a preferred option for young people, but there were questions about whether there was enough available, if young people felt confident to provide peer support and had their own support channels if needed
5. Online therapy and support was not geared up for a crisis, with issues such as having to speak with different therapists each time, having a 1 hour time limit then have to start process again, it being short term support or there being no private space to speak when at home accessing online support
6. Workers did not always know where to signpost young people to
7. University and school wellbeing services were offering inconsistent support between areas

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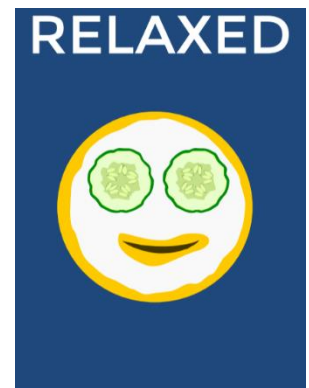
Emoji cards designed by Amina, 16

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The steering group then prioritised these themes for wider discussion with young people, ranking them using the following criteria:

- How big an issue is this for young people?
- How easy is it to have an impact on this issue?
- Can RCPCH make a difference?

The four priority areas selected for further discussion were:

1. **Mental health services do not use the online channels effectively to reach young people**
   Many mental health services publicise their services through their websites. However young people have told us that during COVID-19 a lot of the places they got their information from was Instagram, WhatsApp groups, YouTube etc. How can mental health services use these channels to reach and support young people better?
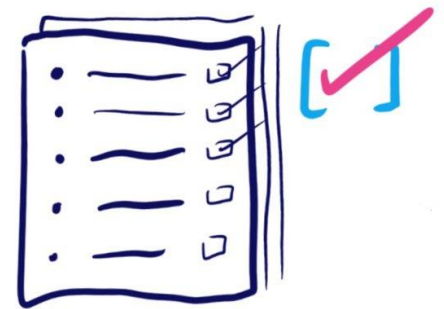
2. **Peer support is the preferred option for young people, but they can't always access it**
   Young people have said that peer support is the way that they prefer to get support for their mental health. How can peer support services be increased so more young people can access them? What type of peer support works best (talking to your friends online, using forums with other young people or more organised peer mentoring services)? How can young people who provide support to other young people be supported themselves?

3. **Online therapeutic support not geared up for a crisis like COVID-19**
   Counselling and CAMHS services had to adapt quickly to COVID-19 and didn't always get it right. What should mental health services in a crisis look like for young people? What do you want to know, how and when about how they are changing their services?

4. **Workers don't know where to signpost young people for mental health support**
   Workers in hospitals, GPs, schools, communities don't know the best sources of mental health support for young people. How do we make sure they have the latest info about the most useful services for young people in a crisis? What works best for you if you are signposted to another service for help or advice?

In October, the steering group facilitated an online workshop that they had planned with young people from other groups and organisations, to explore the priority areas and to help develop solutions for services to consider. The young people attending chose to focus on mental health services using online channels, online therapy and peer support, coming up with ideas for each topic.

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Topic	Issue	Ideas
Mental health services using online channels ineffectively	• Not always up to date information • Not well publicised • Can feel disconnected • Overwhelming to know what online support to use	• Use adverts on social medial sites like snapchat to get messages out • Make it easy to understand and personalised • Keep it up to date and tell professionals where it is so they can sign post • Use online channels to create mental health drop ins online
Online therapy	• Not personalised • More BAME therapists needed • Offer choice of how to access it • Not always private and confidential if at home	• Work with local charities • Review CAMHS so it works the same everywhere • Awareness raising campaign like "hands, face, space" but a mental health version • Mental health first aid training for all
Peer support	• Not everyone opens ups to friends • If there is a serious issue, where does the peer supporter get help • Peer supporters don't always take their own advice	• Mental health training for everyone • Have a peer support programme linked to a therapy service • Have good support for the peer supporters

The youth steering group shared these ideas and the project to professionals at the RCPCH Annual Conference in October 2020.

Next steps
There were clear actions for all services to consider from the project:
- increasing training opportunities for children, young people, families and professionals in mental health first aid
- to have up to date sign posting information that is clear to understand and not overwhelming

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- to think about how they will be ready to deliver online mental health support that is private, confidential, consistent and provides choice for children and young people in how they access it.

RCPCH &Us will continue to advocate and champion for improvements in mental health support for children and young people. You can read more about what children and young people think (pre COVID-19) in the State of Child Health report and from COVID-19 experiences collated by the young people's COVID-19 Book Club. One of the steering group members created this reminder for all at the online workshop that is a great cut out and keep:

Many points of access

Exclude no one include all

Notice our feelings and express them

Talk about your problems

Ask for help

Learn from one and other

Happy is just one emotion
Emotions are difficult to process
Appreciate the time you have
Laugh for as long as you can
Tough is what life can be
Honest you should always be
with yourself and others

Keeping you safe
You might have worries or concerns about COVID-19, mental health or something else that you want to talk about. There are national support services that you can talk to, not just about COVID-19, but about other things that might be going on in your life:

- www.themix.org.uk/get-support The Mix, a charity supporting young people/young adults online or by phoning 0808 808 4994.
- www.childline.org.uk/ Childline for support for children and young people online or by phoning 0800 1111
- www.kooth.com/ App for young people
- www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/ lots of different resources for all ages
- www.giveusashout.org/ or text 85258 for all age support
- www.rcpch.ac.uk/key-topics/wellbeing-for-health-professionals for RCPCH members

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Thank you to everyone who got involved

RCPCH &Us steering group: Adam, Anisah, Demi

Young people who joined in sessions: Central Bedfordshire Youth Voice, Shuttleworth College, RCPCH &Us, Debating Mental Health

RCPCH Members

RCPCH Children and Young People's Engagement team: Esta Orchard, Emma Sparrow, Emma Hosking, Alli Guiton

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Contact information

If you have any questions about this piece of work, please contact and_us@rcpch.ac.uk