

Annex – Mental Health advice following school closures due to COVID-19.

This annex should be read in conjunction with the Tudor Grange Academies Trust Safeguarding and Mental Health policies.

Introduction

From 20th March 2020, parents/carers were asked to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and for schools to remain open only for a limited number of children - children who are vulnerable and children whose parents/carers are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home. From 1st June 2020 primary schools are able to partially reopen for certain year groups, in addition to children identified as vulnerable and children of keyworkers. The same is true of secondary schools from 15th June 2020.

This annex of the Tudor Grange Academies Trust Mental Health Policy contains details of enhanced support available to support those struggling with mental health issues. Sadly we anticipate an increase of such concerns within our school communities as a result of this pandemic and the subsequent unprecedented government lockdown. However, we remain committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all our children and young people and staff during this time.

Mental Health and School Reopening

We all have mental health and for this reason we grant any concerns in this area with the same parity of esteem as any physical health need. Negative experiences and distressing life events, such as the current circumstances, can affect the mental health of children and their parents/carers. We will be aware of this in setting expectations of children's work while they are at home. We will be mindful of the guidance on [mental health and behaviour in schools](#), particularly how mental health issues can bring about changes in a young person's behaviour or emotional state which can be displayed in a range of different ways, and that can be an indication of an underlying problem. This could include being fearful, withdrawn, aggressive, oppositional and excessive clinging.

We acknowledge that children will experience school differently going forwards, as a result of physical changes to how we will operate in light of social distancing and use of shared spaces/resources, increased focus on cleanliness etc. There will also be differences in usual routines, for example start times, class sizes and different operational hours and days. This will impact upon our children and the 'new normal' will take getting used to by all. We do not underestimate the mixed reaction to schools gradually re-opening after a sudden and sustained period of closure. We are also aware that transition periods continue for all children, some of whom will be joining our school community and others leaving us, in addition to those changing phases of education or changing year group within provisions. This is typically a time of increased anxiety, let alone the under current conditions.

We must also acknowledge that our staff will also be experiencing a range of emotions based on their own experiences of the pandemic and associated personal concerns. Therefore, we will continue to plan meticulously and consult with staff about the measures in place to keep them and the children in their care safe.

Response

We will consider how best to support all our pupils' mental health, including children who are returning to school and those remaining at home. Support for children in the current circumstance

may include existing provision, although this may be delivered in a different way, for example over the phone, or support from specialist staff or support services through referrals.

We will be mindful that support may be required for pupils with known, pre-existing mental health needs and that for some their mental health may have deteriorated further since school closures. It is also important for staff to be aware that new mental health concerns may be identified for other pupils. Any concerns relating to mental health should be logged on MyConcern as per the usual procedure.

In a bid to address concerns and help in the healing and recovery process, a Mental Health Working Group, consisting of a cross section of staff across the Trust, have contributed towards the compilation of Trust guidance and a resource pack with the specific focus of supporting children, their parents/carers and staff. This guidance is available to all of our schools and contains activities, advice, a directory of mental health expertise across all Trust schools and signposting to specialist services. Opportunities to undertake further training in the area of mental health are also available as part of the resource pack.

We have commissioned a group of Educational Psychologists to produce a series of training videos to further support anticipated need in this area. All staff are expected to view the first two sessions in this series, which focus on supporting the emotional wellbeing of children and young people, and on supporting their own emotional wellbeing. Four additional sessions are available for key staff, focusing on trauma, loss, anxiety and vulnerable children.

We accept that we cannot and should not expect to start back from where we all left off. However, we are confident that our schools have the care, consistency and commitment that our school communities can continue to rely upon.