

## Coronavirus – the cost to child mental health



*Children's charity Barnardo's has warned that the coronavirus pandemic could affect the mental health of a generation, after a third of the children and young people it surveyed said they have experienced increased stress, loneliness and worry. Margaret O'Reilly reports on a worrying trend*

Barnardo's frontline workers have reported that rising mental health problems among the young are their biggest concern.

Teachers have echoed those findings with 85% of the school staff surveyed in Wales worried their pupils' mental health has been affected and fewer than one in five confident they have the skills necessary to support them.

It follows a survey of young people themselves, a third of whom reported problems since lockdown. The charity says the vulnerable are most at risk as families face growing economic and emotional pressure, cut off from the usual support systems. More families are being plunged into poverty, domestic abuse has risen and more children are suffering bereavement.



Barnardo's Cymru has responded by calling for family support hubs to be set up in the most deprived areas to provide early help not just for children and young people but for the whole family.

Research following the Christchurch earthquake and Hurricane Katrina showed that without help for the family as a whole, many young people suffered long term mental health issues.

Sarah Crawley, Director of Barnardo's Cymru, said: "The Covid-19 outbreak has exposed children and young people to an unprecedented level of trauma, loss and adversity.

"Schools will have a huge role to play in the rebuilding of communities. Investment in multi-agency working will be the key to success as schools will need support to cope with the increased demands on them."

Barnardo's has responded by offering extra support to families in need, moving some service delivery online and providing advice on its website [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk).

Follow links to the blog 'How to talk to your child about Coronavirus' for practical tips on reassuring them and reducing anxiety. The page has links to advice for parents and carers and other articles written for young people themselves.

The charity has also launched a virtual family centre called Barnardo's Family Space [www.families.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.families.barnardos.org.uk) which allows everyone to access advice on a wide range of topics.

They include tackling anxiety among teenagers, talking to young people about resisting peer pressure, keeping children safe online, positive parenting and mental health and wellbeing.

