Hartlepool Psychology Team – Support and Advice

Covid-19 (Coronavirus) - The Covid-19 pandemic is a very stressful situation for all of us. This is an unprecedented situation which is fuelled by uncertainty, resulting in fear and anxiety. This can be overwhelming and can cause strong emotions.

Guidance for school staff in managing anxiety

We all react differently to stressful situations. How you will be responding will be dependent upon a variety of factors and we need to be mindful at all times that despite us all being in the same situation, we are all facing different challenges that are personal to each of us.

In particular, you are likely to have fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.

You may be experiencing the following:

- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Difficulty concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Psychosomatic symptoms – fear that any symptom may signal that you have COVID-19

It is important to remember that you are having a **NORMAL** reaction to an **ABNORMAL** event.

Taking good care of yourself, your friends and your family can help you cope.

- Take regular breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories about the pandemic – including limiting social media. Hearing about it repeatedly can be upsetting and fuel anxiety and worry. Remember, not everything you read will be accurate. Try to stick to national news broadcasts (e.g. BBC) and information from Public Health England.

- Take care of your body - try to eat healthy, well balanced meals, exercise and get plenty of sleep.

- Make time to focus on activities you enjoy, whilst acknowledging any restrictions that are upon us.

- Maintain contacts with others and try to talk with people you trust about your worries and how you are feeling. It is likely that these will be shared worries. Try to avoid exacerbating each other's anxieties by keeping to the facts, as we know them, and being mindful of our tendency get caught up in negative thought patterns.

- Find ways to let off steam - and make effort to notice any positive signs or messages e.g. proactive support and acts of kindness shown by others.

- Separate what is in your control and what is not. Focus on those things you can control – such as making time for exercise and relaxation.

For those in a management position:

- Have a plan – let your staff know that you are thinking and looking ahead, that you are staying well informed so that you can respond to their questions the best you can.

- Worry and fear grow in the absence of information. Keep communication lines open – even if the situation remains unchanged.

- Empathise – recognise that it's ok to be anxious and share that you know it is stressful

- Reassure as best you can

- Understand and recognise when stress has become too overwhelming for particular individuals and suggest that they take time off, whilst reassuring that you will be able to manage in their absence.

Responding to COVID-19 can take an emotional toll, especially when dealing with families / children who may be feeling distressed and anxious. It is important that you try to reduce secondary traumatic reactions:

- Acknowledge that a secondary traumatic reaction can impact anyone helping families after a traumatic event

- Allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the pandemic

- Know the signs e.g. fatigue / illness (*physical*); withdrawal / fear / guilt (emotions); difficulty focusing/ negative thoughts (cognition)

- Seek professional support if you consider that your day to day functioning is being adversely affected.