

Safely returning to school



School health teams have worked tirelessly to provide services and support children and young people. Now, as they are beginning to return to school, it is important to prepare to address other difficulties that they may be experiencing.

Sharon White OBE, CEO SAPHNA

During COVID-19, school health services have worked tirelessly with our schools across a whole host of issues ranging from health protection advice, food poverty through to resuscitation guidance and PPE in special schools; it has been a team effort with some amazing partnership working. Now, as our children are beginning to return to school, our focus must continue as we know many will, for varying reasons, find this a significant challenge.

We cannot deny that we are all living through the most extraordinary of times and will, to some degree, have experienced trauma; the same applies to our children, young people and families. The way in which we respond to this is different for each and every one depending on our protective factors such as positive relationships, family, friends, social connections, housing, employment, etc. and, therefore, our ability to 'bounce-back' and cope.

During lockdown many of these naturally occurring protective factors have been stripped away as families have become isolated, thrown into poverty, homes over-crowded and much more. Additionally, for many, these protective factors do not exist and now, due to immeasurable pressures, they will also have tragically suffered abuse and/or neglect during this period. We need, therefore, to assume that our children may not be in a good starting place to face the return to school and will be in need of our help and protection.

In the past few years, there has been



a much keener focus on creating schools into mentally healthy environments that promote children to grow and flourish so that they may learn. Alongside,

school nurses are only too acutely aware of the increasing numbers whom they support with their emotional health and wellbeing and those on long waiting

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lists for CAMHS services. What this means though is that both education and school nurses are well placed to work in partnership to develop and embed essential trauma informed practice.

During COVID-19 school nurses have used many methods to provide active in-reach to our most vulnerable children as well as to our universal caseload. They have offered support to schools, children, families and our partners through efficient and effective use of technology/ virtual assessments, interventions, support, advice, signposting, advocacy and referral; in compelling situations they have, following thorough risk assessment, also offered face-to-face, 'walk and talk', doorstep and even drive-through services!

Consistently and tenaciously offering services has and is helping to further strengthen trusted relationships with children and families. This, alongside our schools keeping in regular touch with their students has huge potential to provide a positive platform on which to build, and on which children can rely and know they can turn to for support.

To ensure we are as prepared as possible for what NHS England Safeguarding refers to as 'pressure cooker homes', school nursing services must now work in tandem with their schools more than ever, to develop and tailor services that are fit for the future in becoming the places where our children will heal.

To further strengthen school nurse's preparedness, we are delighted that, in

partnership with Dr. Pooky Knightsmith and Creative Education, SAPHNA have been successful in obtaining a COVID-19 small grant from the Burdett Trust for Nursing. This will be used to develop and deliver training for our workforce to further support their learning in trauma-informed best practice in helping children return to school. This will commence in July. Visit www.saphna.co for further information on how to gain your free access.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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