



Meeting the challenge of COVID-19

Learning and practice



How Place2Be provided children and young people with mental health training online during lockdown

What was the challenge faced?

UK mental health charity Place2Be provides mental health support services for pupils, their families and school staff. This is usually done through one-to-one and group counselling, guidance sessions and training programmes. The charity also delivers professional training for people looking to become child counsellors.

COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown with school closures meant that Place2Be's usual face-to-face sessions in schools had to be reimagined.

What change in practice took place?

To be able to continue supporting the wellbeing of the children and young people the charity supports, its frontline mental health professionals started offering phone support sessions for young people receiving one-to-one counselling in person, and to the parents/ carers of younger children they were supporting. These sessions were used to stay in close contact with families and to check in and direct them to extra support if they needed it.

A survey of more than 2,600 11-18 year olds, which the charity undertook last year, had already shown a wish for more online support as well as face to face counselling. The charity decided to partner with two leading providers of digital mental health services to offer free online counselling and an interactive self-help app. Young people aged 10 or over at Place2Be schools can now access these resources when and where they need them.

The charity also fast-tracked plans to move some of its training for school staff online. Through its partner schools, it offered a pilot digital version of its Mental Health Champions – Foundation programme to over 3,300 teachers and other professionals working with children.

Who was involved in making the change?

Teams across the charity from Safeguarding to Operational to Legal and Compliance, and Research teams worked together so that a decision could be made to move to telephone-based support based on the demographics and needs of the people it supports.

The Mental Health Champions foundation programme involved working with teachers and other staff at partner schools to collect feedback through the digital pilot before expanding the scheme.

What difference did this change make?

Families and children who were supported by the charity during lockdown have reported that they found the telephone contact invaluable and appreciated this continued connection.

Matthew, 16, said: "It was so good to know you were there for that phone call each week, even though the chaos of lock down. I had my parents to talk to, but they were going through their own stresses so knowing that there was someone who cared and would listen really helped me during that time", and Louise, 9, said: "Talking to Place2Be during lockdown helped me feel less worried and calmer".

Feedback from the Mental Health Champions programme pilot scheme and evidence of the need meant that Place2Be was able to secure funding to offer the training to 50,000 teachers for free.

93% teachers and school staff who participated reported that they have changed their actions, behaviour or attitude in the classroom as a result of something that they learned on the course, improving their skills and confidence to support positive mental health in school communities as pupils start to return after the lockdown. The digital format of the programme also makes the training more accessible for remote and rural locations in Scotland. One class teacher in Scotland said: "I've been working with children for 30 years, and I've never seen so many young children with mental health issues, especially anxiety. The training on this programme was fantastic, and it really helped me personally too."

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