

Diary of a schools' worker in lockdown

One of our professional team shares what it felt like at the start of lockdown when she was faced with a growing caseload and a new way of working. Here we learn about the types of issues faced by families at this difficult time.

March 17th 2020



It's St Patrick's Day and my last day in schools before lockdown.

There is a general sense of unease about what is to come: the children's reaction is mixed. Some are pleased at the prospect of not attending school, others dreading the loss of security, sustenance, friendship and community provided by this anchor they so rely on.

March 23rd 2020

We have woken up to a new world as lockdown is announced. We receive plans for remote working from management at **bccs**. I swiftly download and familiarise myself with the on-line communication platform 'Zoom' and a new way of working...

A week in and I review my caseload:

- I have a child living in cramped, shared temporary accommodation who has fallen ill with Covid-19 symptoms along with other family members.
- I have children living separately from their parents, frontline NHS workers, overloaded and stressed.
- I have children cared for by vulnerable grandparents doing their best in very challenging situations.
- I have single parents, at home and isolated with young families, one of whom - a keyworker - has also contracted the virus.
- Some families are struggling to home-educate children, one is sharing a computer also needed for remote working by a parent.
- Another family has lost a beloved grandparent and are devastated at not being able to be with them when they passed.

I do my best to help and support each family and child, liaising with schools and services to find out what help is available and where it is needed, sending resources which we are all sharing at **bccs**, making recommendations and setting up regular telephone and Zoom check-ins.

The following week I receive a new referral for an 8-year-old boy. Most of his family has contracted Covid-19 with his dad currently hospitalised in ICU. The child is healthy but terrified, having frequent panic attacks from which he cannot be calmed and convinced everyone close to him is going to die. I speak to his mum, who is recovering but extremely fragile and suggest some strategies I think may be helpful, including a creative project which I feel may focus her son's mind elsewhere, at least temporarily. We also look at what might help to alleviate her own stress at this awful time. A few days later and I am able to speak her son on the phone, his father is now out of danger and recovering well. We talk about the project I have given him, which he is enjoying and other ways of emotionally self-regulating in challenging circumstances which he feels might work for him. He tells me about himself, what he

is interested in, what he enjoyed doing before lockdown and what life is like now. He is happy for me to check in with him via Zoom the following week.

A week later and everyone in the family is now safely at home and recovering. The boy's mum tells me he is much improved and no longer having the extreme panic attacks that so scared her, though still up and down in his moods. In the weeks that follow we look at lots of different strategies to help with his anxiety, including Mindfulness, visualisation and breathing exercises, we practise positive thinking and I give him the time and space to talk about his recent experiences in a safe setting and at his own pace. We play games, do quizzes, have fun and look at what he is looking forward to as lockdown eases.

A few weeks later, he is able to return to school part-time and is coping well. His family is pleased and grateful and I am happy he is now in a much better place and will be well prepared to face whatever challenges the new school year might bring in September.

bccs Schools' Worker
June 2020

