# Needs of children & young people <13 years during the COVID-19 crisis in contact with mental health or community services

April 2020

Health
Innovation
Network
South London

# About

The Health Innovation Network is the Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) for south London, one of 15 AHSNs across England. As the only bodies that connect NHS and academic organisations, local authorities, the third sector and industry, we are catalysts that create the right conditions to facilitate change across whole health and social care economies, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for patients.

This means we are uniquely placed to identify and spread health innovation at pace and scale; driving the adoption and spread of innovative ideas and technologies across large populations.
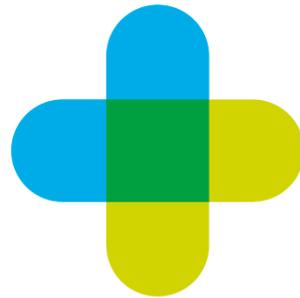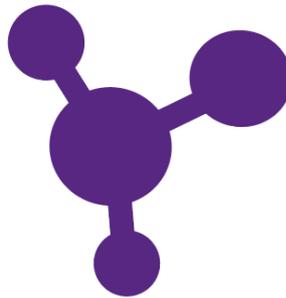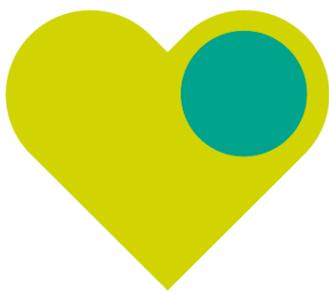
# The Challenge

Themes emerging for young children (<13 years) and their parents/carers with emotional, behavioural or conduct problems who are in contact with mental health (MH) services. To understand the pressing needs of this cohort during the COVID-19 crisis and how the changes enforced by the virus are affecting their needs.

# Responses

Twenty-eight organisations /clinical leads were contacted throughout England from 20 to 23 April 2020. Many represent large geographies.

The following 12 organisations responded within the 2.5 day time frame given by NHSX for this request.

- o Mental Health Foundation
- o South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust
- o South West London Health and Social Care Partnership
- o Wirral Council
- o University of Oxford – (Developmental Clinical Psychology) (via Oxford AHSN)
- o London borough of Lewisham Council
- o XenZone (Kooth)
- o Kent Surrey and Sussex AHSN
- o Centre for Mental Health
- o Leeds City Council
- o Forum Central Leeds
- o Achieving for Children Richmond and Kingston:

The following four organisations also responded, however were not able to contribute.

- o Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust – would have liked to have responded, but time frame was too short
- o Youth Access – work with 13 to 25-year-olds
- o Anna Freud – already engaged with NHSX
- o Innovation Manchester AHSN - contacts needed more time to respond.

No response was received from the remaining organisations contacted.

The AHSNs were also contacted. Please note, some AHSNs will not have a focus on this age group or a focus on mental health.

# Existing 'research' of needs

Two organisations, the University of Oxford Developmental Psychology Department and Kent Surrey and Sussex AHSN, provided reports on their existing work in relation to the needs of this age group.

**Co Space:** *Supporting parents, children and adolescents during epidemics* - University of Oxford, led by Professor Cathy Creswell, has recently launched a UK based study to track child and adolescent mental health over the next few months, to identify what is helping and the needs of families. Professor Creswell provided a first draft report as a response to our request, solely focused on 4 to 13-year-olds who receive support for any of the following: mental health/emotional/behavioural difficulties, support from social services and educational support.

**Feedback on challenges to children and young people's services across Sussex STP amid COVID-19 -** *High-level thematic analysis (Interim Report April 2020)-* Kent Surrey and Sussex AHSN. This report outlines an overview of the feedback from over 40 service providers across the Sussex STP regarding the challenges they are facing amid COVID-19.

# Themes Emerging from all Responses

**Concern about drop in referrals:**
- There is a lull in new referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Concern about high risk groups
- Last month there was a lot of anxiety around, but now we are finding a significant drop in anxiety cases with many clients saying they no longer need to be seen - presumably because they are not having to face their usual anxieties around school, tests / exams or friendships at the moment.

**High Risk populations:**
- Transition points Nursery to Reception / Year six to Secondary School GCSE / A Level to Uni / Employment
- Looked after children
- LGBQT +
- Asylum seekers / refugees are traumatised due to lockdown / confinement
- Children with obsessive compulsive disorder – crisis confirming need to wash hands
- Children with eating disorders
- Children having sleep issues
- Children with existing anxiety issues
- Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Autistic Spectrum Disorders, learning disabilities
- Children with challenging behaviours
- Children in households that are subject to domestic violence

- o Children at risk of abuse – known to safeguarding teams
- o Children of traveller communities.

### Increase in helpline calls:
- o High volume of professionals seeking advice
- o Increase in parent's 'desperation' calls to crisis line from unknown callers
- o Voluntary sector experiencing higher volume of calls.

### Parental issues:
- o Children and Young People (CYP) exposed to parental conflict more often
- o Witnessing parental drug and alcohol misuse
- o Worries about parent's finances / job and other personal problems.
- o CYP worried about parent's mental health
- o Worry about parents / key workers who are on the frontline COVID-19 working
- o Media focus on COVID-19 and people with underlying health conditions is likely to worry young carers indefinitely - what happens to parent if CYP becomes unwell?
- o Lack of confidence in parents who break lockdown rules
- o Sense that they can rely on adults in their lives to keep them safe diminished
- o Little/no support for parents who are managing very challenging behaviour with no break
- o For this age group, concerns from parents tend to be mostly around home schooling - managing this around their work commitments, trying to help siblings who are at different levels doing different work, worrying about their children's education, managing being both teacher and parent, or just generally having difficulty motivating their children. This stress is causing conflict in relationships.

### Routines and behaviour:
- o Social isolation of families
- o Challenges around managing behaviour
- o Anxiety around missing school
- o Anxiety around returning to school
- o Increase in safeguarding and abuse
- o Children who prefer being at home because home, in their bedroom, is their safe place. They are happy not being challenged and staying inside most of the time. Some of these parents say they cannot get their child out of the house
- o Isolation away from friends and support networks, especially for those with limited and or no access online.

### Bereavement and Loss:
- o Includes actual bereavement due to COVID-19
- o Loss of important figures in CYP lives during lockdown, such as grandparents.

### Education Health and Care Assessments (ECHPs):
- o Parental anxiety around impact on timeliness of EHCN assessment
- o Delivery of therapy provision in plans
- o Working collaboratively to agree a multiagency "vulnerable" list and ensure coordinate.

**Young people less anxious:**
- o Contributing factors to anxiety have diminished for some – school, exams and friendships
- o A lot of children feeling less pressure about school / exams / friendships / having to leave the house, anxiety often reduced because they are not having to go to school.

**Feedback regarding phone and video conferencing**:
- o Some successfully using phones and video counselling/conferencing facilities
- o Children / families opting out and getting no support
- o Time taken to set up online counselling is leading to missed appointments
- o For the under 13's, there are the added pressures of consent needed from parents/carers for accessing support. In the current situation where everything is online/telephone this may result in young people not accessing services and speaking up
- o Equipment is often in parents/carers names, so if things are difficult with parents/carers accessing online/telephone support could be problematic.

**Post-lockdown:**
- o Capacity for CAMHS to manage 'catch up' for those who opted out of phone support
- o Referrals may surge
- o Anticipated that current technology in use will continue after Lockdown
- o Anticipating issues regarding bereavement and loss
- o Fear of second lockdown
- o Initial euphoria versus anxiety regarding future – e.g. children's worries regarding parent's jobs and incomes
- o Anxiety regarding returning to school
- o Children not returning to school
- o Heightened levels of trauma symptoms, anxiety and behavioural problems in the aftermath, for example returning to school. This might be more apparent by looking at risk factors, especially those who are known to social care or have other safeguarding concerns, rather than protected characteristics
- o There is also anxiety already about returning to school and what this will look like and how children will manage this transition, particularly if they already had school-based anxiety before the COVID-19 crisis.

# Steps taken to respond to need

A couple of organisations also mentioned what steps they are taking to meet the needs identified for this age range.

Kent, Surrey and Sussex AHSN have implemented an online directory of children and young people's services.

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) mentioned that they had developed

scripts for some infomercials that will go out on primetime on Channel 4. SLaM have also extended the Empowering Parents Empowering Communities team's work with some parenting and other materials and apps.

The highest response for the Co Space research when asked 'How would you (parent/carer) like to receive this help?' (in relation to needs raised) was online written materials and online videos.