



The impact of Coronavirus on young people's Mental Health

Lockdown has brought disruption and uncertainty to all our lives. Life as we knew it was abruptly interrupted. This had a particularly profound impact on teenagers, who by the very nature of being in the throes of adolescence, are already at a stage of life which is full of uncertainty and change. Not only has lockdown interrupted their daily lives, it has interrupted their developmental process of separation and individuation. Of course, this is a process which starts in childhood, as young children learn to spend time away from their families and discover who they are in the outside world. However, this ordinary separation-individuation process is particularly poignant for teenagers who are separating further from their families and starting to make autonomous decisions. Adolescence is a time where young people are discovering who they are as individuals. It involves new freedoms, responsibilities and opportunities. However, lockdown halted this process. In a survey carried out by YoungMinds, 81% of young people reported that Coronavirus made their mental health worse.

Young people's responses to lockdown, have been determined by how they were already feeling about growing up. Their responses have been as varied and diverse as our young people themselves. For those who were successfully navigating growing up and enjoying freedoms outside of family life, their independence has been stifled. This felt particularly frustrating for young people whose friendships are so important and who are in the process of discovering themselves through relationships and interactions with others. Many have been angry about these restrictions and other injustices such as exam results. The YoungMinds survey reported that the deterioration in mental health was related to feeling lonely and anxious.

However, in my therapeutic work I have observed a group of young people who experienced lockdown quite differently; those already struggling with the process of growing up. These young people may have found social interactions difficult, perhaps because they are on the Autistic Spectrum or were already suffering with social anxiety or separation anxiety. These young people felt relieved and less anxious as lockdown provided a break from school and other pressures. The YoungMinds survey found that 11% of young people reported improvements in their mental health during this time. I observed how lockdown provided some with an opportunity to regress to a younger age developmentally, where they could be enveloped in family life. Of course, those with difficult home lives did not have a safe place to regress to. The question now is how to support all our young people to re-engage with the developmental tasks of adolescence and adjust to post lockdown life.



I understand that for many families seeking support can be a difficult step to take. Many hope that the difficulties will pass and therefore wait until the situation is at crisis point before reaching out. If your young person needs support in navigating the challenges of adolescence, then now is the time to seek help.

**Please contact me to discuss how
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