

Week 1 of Lockdown

Hi folks, my name is Anna McQuade. I've been the counsellor at SGHS for over 12 years and in that time I've worked with hundreds of girls. I am also mum to Mabel, the school's therapy dog.

For 13 years I have been one of Relate's Young Peoples Counsellors and I also manage a counselling service at a small primary school in inner city Leeds. The 15 years prior to that I began my working life as a PE teacher, which gradually migrated into working with young people with a whole range of emotional and behavioural difficulties. This was channelled even further, by undertaking my Masters in Counselling Children and Young People, so I could then hopefully use my many years of working with this age group in a therapeutic capacity. So today – here I am – with the rest of the world – in lockdown, trying to find a new normal – quickly!

My job at SGHS is to help with the young people's emotional and mental wellbeing. Two weeks ago, I knew how that worked and how I played out my role, coming to school and seeing the girls in my room. Today, like everyone in the world – this has changed but I don't intend to stop endeavouring to undertake that role. We still aim to deliver counselling via Teams, but as you can imagine this is littered with an ocean of logistical technical and safeguarding issues, so once we are ready to offer this counselling provision, we will let you know.

What I thought may be helpful after we are all near completion of week 1 of lockdown in today's new (temporary) world, was to think about our collective need to adapt and to be flexible to our new restricted life. To somehow adjust at lightning speed to the parameters of our own home, where we now within it have to recreate a workday, eat, play, go to school, exercise, socialise etc. and all in close proximity to our family members. What an ask of us all and for how long – we don't know. What we do know is that it will end – we just don't know when.

So, how do we get through it? We adapt. We acknowledge that we are all grieving for the life only a week ago we took for granted. We communicate. We listen. We create. We share. We are grieving for the abrupt loss of our lives; the fact that I never got to finish my school life in the traditional way; that I can't hug my friend who's having a really tough time at the moment; that I missed having my 16th birthday party with my friends and family; that my grandma is in a nursing home that has been shut for three weeks and I may not see her again; that my baby cousin has been born and I can't hold him.....the list is literally never ending, right down to I can't get my favourite coffee at Costa or that cheeky sausage roll from Greggs! All valid and real emotions.

As we know grief isn't time defined and we flip flop back and forth through the different stages (denial, shock, resistance/anger, uncertainty, understanding, acceptance), hopefully heading out the other end in a better/different place than where we started. For you as families right now – it's about trying to understand where each other is at on that continuum, which is very different for us all. For you as parents and young people to learn (quickly!), how



to communicate with each other in a way that is effective for all, while simultaneously keeping family life as calm and 'normal' as possible. Under 'normal' circumstances, finding how to communicate effectively may take an awful long time and you are being asked to fast-track through this.

We are all going through this together, yet each family will experience differing issues along the way, financial, health, emotional but hopefully, together we – you – me, can take time to acknowledge each other, to listen to each other and move forward together to problem solve and find solutions and to laugh and play – together. Remember – THIS IS NOT FOREVER.

Many of you may have questions that I may be able to answer – I am happy to help where I can, so please address them to sghs@sghs.org.uk

Watch out for Mabel's own Instagram page coming soon!

Kind regards
Anna McQuade