

Transcript - Mental health and wellbeing during a time of uncertainty

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Paul Ellis: Supporting students with their mental health and well-being during a period of uncertainty. We are delighted so many of you can join us for this webinar from across the world. And we hope that you're going to enjoy and get a lot out of this session.

My name is Paul Ellis. I'm Head of Teaching & Learning at Cambridge Assessment International Education. I think I've met many of you before in various times when I've been around the world presenting conferences and running workshops.

So, I'm delighted to see some of you here again whom I know, and I know also that many of you will be wanting to get involved, ask questions, join the chat box, and really participate in a good way in this webinar, so I'd encourage you to do so.

In a moment, I'm going to be handing over to our guest presenter, Jo Morton-Brown, who you can see on the screen there. Jo is an emotional health practitioner based in the UK. She's based about 80 or so miles away from here, 80 kilometres maybe. She's an accredited school counsellor, a family support worker, and provider of training to adults on mental health issues affecting children and young people. She has a YouTube channel called Flourish, and she'll tell you more about that later on. It's a channel which contains weekly videos aimed at 10 to 19-year-olds.

Before I hand over to Jo, I just need to mention a few things. Firstly, the session is being recorded. The recording will be made available. It'll be made available on our website in the next few days, so if you want to listen again or if you'd like to encourage some of your friends or other people to listen too, then you're welcome to do so as well. So, we will make sure you get the link about that at some point too. Secondly, we'd like to encourage you to ask questions. If you look around on your screen now you should find somewhere a Q & A box. So, if you want to ask a

question, ask in the Q & A box, please. Keep your questions brief, because otherwise they're quite hard to read quickly. Keep them to the point as well. The question should be about the topic that we're focusing on today. So, we're not going to answer any questions, for example, about future assessments at Cambridge international, how much content is going to be in exams. That's not what we're talking about today.

We're talking about mental health and supporting students with their well-being. If you wish you can like the questions that you see and that will help us know which ones are the most popular. Thirdly, if you have a technical problem or want to ask or comment on something else, you can do so in the chat function.

Many of you are already saying, "Hello from all over the world." Thank you for doing that. If you want to ask any other questions there as well, please do so. And my colleagues Salyza and Poonam will be reading what you write and responding as appropriate. And one more thing, we're not going to be issuing any certificates of participation to this webinar. So please don't ask about that, because it's not that sort of training. It's just for people to join in and listen, and hopefully learn a lot from what Jo will have to say to us.

So, I'll reappear again in about 20 to 25 minutes time, when we reach the question and answer section, and until then, Jo is going to be looking after you. So, it's my pleasure now to introduce Jo. Hi, Jo.

Jo Morton-Brown: Hi, everybody. Thank you, Paul, and it's a real pleasure to be here with you today. I love watching the comment box and seeing where you're from. So, please feel free to put where you're watching this from, because it's great to see and I hope that you're safe and well. Today, I would like us to talk about the mental health and the emotional well-being of our students.

I would like us to develop an awareness, an overall awareness about how COVID-19 is currently affecting our students, and also how it has affected some of our students already. Here in England, we're going into almost a second wave. So, it's having that time to actually stop and think about what some of our students have already been through certainly back at the beginning, earlier part of this year.

I'd like us to develop an understanding of the possible thoughts, and their concerns, and anxieties of the students and their families. It's really important to mention families, because what happens or what is happening at the moment is that it's not just affecting our students, it's

affecting their families. And it's also about us and our well-being and being part of a family as well.

I'd also like us to just identify and be aware of those groups that are unfortunately more vulnerable towards poor mental health, mental ill-health even. And just strategies in general that we can use as we continue to support our students and our young people.

Most importantly also out of this webinar I'd like to get across that, we have our own mental health which is just as important. And with regards to our mental health, there is so much in the media. There's so much in the news with regards to mental health and our mental health is just as important as our physical health.

But what we're also talking about today is actually about mental illness, and about how our students may be developing, if not have a mental illness, mental ill-health which can be affecting the way that they think, feel, and behave.

With regards to mental health, I always best describe it using a bendy ruler and I'm hoping not to break this and it fly into pieces, but what I'd like us to just imagine is that we all have mental health. We have good days and we have bad days. And what can happen sometimes is for our own well-being as teachers, it can just get really tricky and hard sometimes. And those tough days might get a little harder and a little harder. And as you can imagine with our mental health sometimes when it's under strain, it can just push us.

So, what I'm talking about, is I'm talking about our own mental health and just making sure that don't become to a point where we're like that if not snapping, because I really admire teachers. I admire anybody that work within a school setting, because it's not easy at the moment. It's having to contain our own anxieties and our own worries about COVID, as well as turning up to work, turning up to school, and putting on this mask that we're okay. And for a majority of us we are, but it's just to be mindful of your own well-being too.

Also with regards to the current situation with the pandemic, I really do think that there are quite a few positives from it as well. And I'll be talking about them towards the end of the webinar.

We are living a life of uncertainty at the moment, and that makes it really hard, because if I was to say to you that you're going to have one week at work which is going to be so hard, you're going to be pushed to your limit, you're going to possibly get physical symptoms of being poorly from stress. No matter how hard it would be for you, you'd get through it, because you know that it would be one week. One week of really tough hard work. And if we kind of just transfer that metaphor to the here and now with regards to the pandemic, the hardest thing is that we're not

where we were certainly back on New Year's Day when I was sat around the family table, and if somebody would have said to me that this is what would be happening this year, I'd never have believed them. So, we're not where we were, and unfortunately, we don't know where we're going. And that's what makes it really hard for us at the moment as adults and as teachers, is trying to provide a sense of normality during such uncertainty which makes it just more difficult.

So just a couple of research papers that are really interesting. And what we already know is that, back in 2005 they actually realised that 50% of mental ill-health was diagnosed by the age of 14 years old. So that's a lot of young people to have a diagnosis of a mental ill-health condition. And then, it goes on to say about 75% at the age of 24.

There's a most recent research paper this year that is actually looking into the actual symptoms, the effects that lockdown and isolation, and loneliness has had. And I really do, I can't wait to see what research does come from the current situation with regards to mental health, because there will be some really, really different changes that's for sure. And our young people are almost having to face this emotional chaos for some of them in their lives.

So, the best way for me to try and describe what some, all of our students might be facing whether this is day to day, whether this was back in the first wave, or whether this is in the here and now, is this particular cycle. Now, with this cycle this isn't what each and every child is experiencing, and it's in no order. It's just to highlight what some of them may be facing.

Some of them on there are really clear such as that grieving. And that's not necessarily grieving for the loss of a loved one that may have died from coronavirus or died during this pandemic, but also that grief and that loss of young people, children and young people, having that sense of freedom.

And for some of them with their exams cancelled last academic year, is really big for some students that have been working so hard for a couple of years to really prepare themselves for those examinations that were taken away from them. They weren't given the opportunity to prove themselves. And whilst I'm certain that some students would have quite enjoyed not having that pressure, for others they've really struggled with not having that sense of purpose. So yes, there's that grieving and there's that loss of just independence of sports days, of concerts, of parties.

You then move on, but you've got the curriculum demands. And whether your school is open, which would be great, it's knowing how hard that student is working to try and keep up with the attitude that every piece of work matters that they want to learn, or is it that they're tired and

certainly those that are due to take exams this year next year, were thinking maybe what's the point of even trying? They're not going to happen. So, it's one way or another. And if there are students that aren't back to school yet, then they're the ones that might be worrying thinking, "I'm I doing enough? Am I making my teacher proud? Am I keeping up with my friends? Is my work good enough?" So, there's just this mixture of what young people will be facing with regards to the curriculum demands.

The endings and the unstable transitions is certainly something that did happen during the first wave, which for us in here in England was back April, May time when obviously just all of a sudden, no school. Nothing to prepare them for that temporary ending, and that's the hardest thing with schools across the world. It's just not knowing what's going to happen. You've got that family hardship which just speaks volumes, because unfortunately so many children and young people will be facing such hardship with regards to family life, poverty, with regards to home arguments.

I know I had one of my clients at school, 11 years old. Home life before the pandemic, perfect. Live with Mum, Dad had its ups and downs. I'm sure, but very steady, very calm. And when she returned back to school in September, mum and dad aren't together anymore yet they're living in the same house. So just that tension that she's living within and obviously the emotional and the financial strain within a family as well.

And then you've got that anxiety and that uncertainty which just day to day is there, just day to day is there. And unfortunately, with that uncertainty, it's just trying to provide some sense of normality for our students, which as you can imagine is quite hard sometimes.

What I would like us to just be mindful of is that we as human beings go through abnormal situations and obviously with regards to the current pandemic, it's a highly abnormal situation. But what I would like you to consider is that there are going to be the signs and symptoms that are healthy, that are of the student expressing themselves, and whether that's low mood, irritable, avoidance, rumination, sleeping difficulties nightmares certainly for the younger ones in particular with that lack of control a little bit more, because they're younger.

Separation anxiety is a huge one certainly for those students that have gone back or recently due to go back, having lockdown, and certainly for some of my younger students. I work with four-year olds all the way up to 19-year olds. And certainly, those younger ones actually loved not being at school. My little boy who's six, he loved lockdown and not going to school. So, there's those positives that certainly some children would have appreciated.

However, with that has come back to this going back to school, with having this normal routine back in place, and that clinginess of that child.

And then certainly for our older ones, there's information seeking. And as you can imagine, they're not always seeking the right information. They're not always getting it from an accurate source.

Personally, I went through a stage at the beginning of the year watching way too much news, almost became addicted to it. And then realised actually that this isn't helping me. So, I was able to stop watching it, and then back in September I started again. And I was just realising actually is this information actually helping me or not? And I think that that's quite important for us as adults too, because I know that when I listen to it my mood changes. So just be mindful of your news intake and certainly just be wary that some of our students are going to want that news and information just for them to have a sense of control.

Now, obviously some students won't be coping as well. And with that, and I haven't got time to talk to you about it today, but I know that Paul and his team would love to know if there's anything specific that you'd like us to talk about on a different webinar may be. But there will be students that will be struggling with their emotions, and that might be leading them to have dark thoughts or even like suicidal thoughts or even self-harm.

So, it's just taking into consideration that our mental health affects the way that we think, feel, and behave. And obviously if we're not able to look after that mental health of our own, then obviously it can just develop, and that's obviously when we can develop those dark thoughts, start self-harming, and just life gets almost even harder than it already is.

And the students that I'd like us to just always be mindful of and to be aware of, are those students that have already experienced significant loss and bereavement. And obviously during this time, not being able to say farewell and goodbye to a loved one, being able to have the funeral as planned, it's really hard for our young people to not have that sense of closure.

We've also got those children, those students that have had to shield for a longer period of time, maybe due to their own possible physical illness or maybe do due to a family member. But there is this sense of them maybe having, I'm certain you will have heard of it, a FOMO, a fear of missing out. And that too can make students feel extremely anxious about what are they missing out on, because obviously they obviously would think that it's the most incredible things that they might be missing out on. So, they've had a period of time for some students where they may have felt it being hard, or almost being shielded for a longer period of time.

You've got those students with existing social, emotional and mental health needs. And that's the hardest thing is those students that were already struggling. That for some of you they may have been on your radar already. Which is good, because at least we know those students they're going to maybe be that little bit more vulnerable.

There are students that have got special educational needs. Obviously, the hardest thing with certainly those students is that life is already tough with them with regards to certainly learning already, as well as the added anxiety that they're bound to feel with regards a loss of routine. We know how much students with SEN needs, how much they need that routine, they need that sense of a safe place, familiar, and that must be really challenging for them. Certainly, if not from lockdown, during lockdown if that's at the moment, but getting back into the swing of school.

I started school last month, and to begin with it was really, really hard because it's changed. And obviously as humans, we are creatures of comfort. We like our comforts. We like to know what to expect. And obviously with those students, SEN, them not knowing what it is or how the school day runs. And certainly, for us here in England, we have year groups as bubbles or classes as bubbles, so it's just that kind of change which is for some of them.

We've got those students from disadvantaged backgrounds who already are having it tough before the pandemic let alone now. And whether that's with regards to family, whether that's with regards to abuse, whether that's with regards to poverty and hunger, it's just those students that were already at a disadvantage.

And then those students already kind of within the system of us being aware of their needs, and whether they're child protection child in need. That's what we call it over here in England. But those students are already known to children's services, shall we say?

So, what I'd like to do, is I'd like to introduce you to this temple. I love this slide. It's a TPP values. And with that, this temple is what I would like you to imagine is creating a resilient and well-being focused setting of education, so we could just almost imagine that as school. And I think that that's really important that we realise actually the importance that we have with our role within the school. And you almost have to turn your head to the side slightly is you have these three pillars. And these three pillars are what make a really secure and safe setting that would be your school.

So, for relationships that first pillar, that's that providing that compassion and that kindness. And that's what I would call just being there, being present, that professional love. As Doctor Jools Page described professional love in a sense of where you've got your ethical boundaries, where you're there for your students. You're providing that care and attention for them.

That second pillar as you move along, that openness and understanding is providing hope. And I love that word, hope. Hope can mean so much. Hold on pain ends if they're feeling that emotional pain, but with hope it's just letting them know that this isn't going to last forever. This isn't just kind of for us here in England, no matter how hard it would have been for the soldiers and their families back in World War One, World War Two, going back as far as the Spanish flu is it didn't last forever. And it's having that sense of hope that we will get through this, and it's providing that for our students.

And to do that, that's for you to provide boundaries. Students would never admit to this but actually they love boundaries, because they know what keeps them safe. They know what it is if they were to do something again, they know that they're stepping over those boundaries. And that's what's really important. It's just providing that sense of them having a certain amount of control back with regards to their schoolwork and their studies.

And then moving along, you've got that third pillar. And this is the most important one as well as, is because this is the connection and the belonging. And for students that haven't been at school, this is what some of them have really missed. And I want you to think about when you were at school, about how you may have had a favourite teacher or just that teacher that just showed that they cared. Just that teacher that in fairness, most probably inspired you to become a teacher. And that's what some of our students have been missing. They've been missing you as their favourite teacher. They've been missing having that contact, that check-in that somebody cares about them. And that for you is just to provide time, space, a safe place, and also celebrating the sense of freedom that they have in a sense of being back to school, and also providing and celebrating the positives of what they've achieved, what they've overcome already, what's been their biggest most proud moment, and just realising that actually they've come really far.

And for some of our students, they have possibly done a lot of growing up. And for some of them, they may not be ready quite for their final year at school, or their final year kind of a younger school moving up. So, there's this real sense of some of them not feeling quite ready, but it's just you being able to provide that sense of belonging for them which is the most important thing.

This gentleman is fantastic. He's an old theorist called Abraham Maslow, and he has what's known as the hierarchy of needs. If you're not familiar with them, then I'd recommend it because it is brilliant. What he believes, Abraham Maslow, is he believes that we have this pyramid that over a lifetime that we need to work towards getting to the top of that self-actualisation. And for some people, this is a lifelong kind of journey, for some people they can reach it a lot younger,

but what I want to do is I want to take it down and just again imagine that as a teacher, what you can do in helping a student to reach that self-fulfilment. So, in a slightly different way compared to Maslow, but I like this theory in a sense of a motivational theory that actually just your role as a teacher, you can help achieve each and every one of those. And as you work higher, that is you providing that praise, that sense of recognition, and making the student feel that they are doing good enough. That they are trying hard enough. And if they're not, then that's that motivation to help them to keep going. So, it is just those physiological safety, that sense of belonging, that esteem, building their self-esteem, and then getting them to a point where they can see their future, and that's self-actualisation.

It's so important and it's also for us to realise that we can do the little things in life, and that is to simply be there for them. You don't have to be a counsellor. You don't have to be a social worker. You don't have to have a qualification and knowledge and understanding in mental health. You just need to be there. And the most powerful thing that you can do and please never underestimate the power of it, is listening. It's such an important skill that I believe that sometimes we're too busy to actually realise just how important it is, just actually how important it is to help those students feel that they're heard and to provide that sense that you care, and actually that their problems no matter how little or how big, that you're there to listen to them.

The only thing with that active listening and knowing that every intervention, every conversation you have, is actually kind of an intervention itself. So, every interaction you have is an intervention. And with that, what I'd like you to consider is that when you're listening to somebody is just to be aware that actually when you're with that person, maybe not to be on your computer and to be listening at the same time, maybe not to be if you're at home with your family washing up and listening, sometimes it's to actually really be with that person. To really be with them and to do that actually means to not be doing anything else, but being with them. And I know that that's hard, because time is precious.

So, for you is providing that safe space, that safe place, that sense of hope. And I always say to my school kids about how hope can be really, really hard to hold on to, but actually if you were to put your fingers together- I don't know if you can see it, but if you were to put your fingers together, you can only see like a diamond and if you was to look through that right now, you will be able to see the smallest of light. And what I want us to encourage our students to do even in the darkest times, is to actually search for that hope and to hold onto that hope, because taking each day at a time and that's what we need to do sometimes, it's just breathe and get through each day is to just open up that window of hope, that window of opportunity, and for them to realise that not every day is a bad day. So, it's just providing that.

And I am aware that obviously with regards to those schools that are open, there's restrictions with regards to different year groups that aren't allowed to mix with different classes, that aren't allowed to mix. But even if that's for you to provide a lunchtime club, or a gardening club, or just a space in a library, just where you can with a handful of students just be there with them just to let them know that you care, is sometimes the smallest of things that could actually be the most helpful, really the most helpful.

One thing that I would want us to always bear in mind is that for some students, the face covering that we wear can sometimes be an emotional barrier. I've seen those face coverings that actually have like a window where you can actually see the mouth. And I think sometimes that's really important, because we forget how much students rely on our facial expressions of encouragement, of motivation, of just being there. That actually what we're relying upon, is just the eyes when it comes to that face covering. So, it's just being aware that for some students that might be an emotional kind of barrier, but also that as students have adapted to change pretty well.

I certainly know as I said for me starting back at school in September, it was really hard one-way systems. You couldn't go near certain classrooms and things like that. It was really tough to begin with, but like anything it's what we become used to. So, it's just that getting used to it.

And also, it's just about the positives. So, we're going to have a question and answer session in... I've got a few more slides. So, if you have any questions, then please feel free to submit them into that Q & A box, and I know that Paul and the team will be working on them. But I just want us to think about and focus on those positives.

I do believe that there's a sense that children and young people are building on their resilience. Resilience is so important for our students and actually it's going through life experiences that is actually what children can build from that. And at the moment we're all in a whether you want to see it as your country or the world, we're all in a very much of a similar situation with regards to COVID, but we're all living it very, very differently. And that's the same with our students. Is it's the same, same situation, but each very, very differently.

So, I do believe that students will be building on their skills of resilience. I think that they'll be developing a sense of patience, and understanding that actually when you're used to going to the shops and just going in and getting what you want, that actually you have got to queue now. And it's just something that we have to do. I think there's this sense of not just for young people but certainly for adults, is this being more IT literate and prepared for this modern world.

I know with my mum, bless her, she didn't know how to use a computer let alone Zoom, and now we Zoom one another. So, it's brilliant that there's those opportunities where people have learned certain skills.

I also think that it's proving to children that we can adapt to change, as well as having this sense of appreciation for school. Who would have thought it that actually I do believe that there is students out there that have this massive sense of appreciation I say massive, maybe not massive for some of them, but the sense of appreciation that actually they're back at school, they're seeing their friends. And I think that that's been the hardest thing certainly for those that are online learning, or have been that remote learning is that there's this sense of almost normality.

And it's about you. It's about the way that you need to look after yourself. The best way that I can describe it for me personally, is the swan effect. And I'm not too sure if you've heard of this, but it's having the sense of how a swan looks beautiful on the water. They glide, they're carefree. They just glide. And I as adults, we're quite good at sometimes doing the swan effect where we just look like we've got it all together, that we're totally in control, and we've got everything we need, we're okay, we're doing our job fine. When actually just like a swan beneath the surface actually under the surface, you can see paddling like anything to keep afloat, to keep that calm. And I think sometimes that's what us adults are quite used to doing. Is having that we've got it all together and we're fine when actually we might not be. We might be a little bit tired and really pushing it.

So, this is from the Mental Health Foundation which are brilliant. There's also a charity out there called Action for Happiness. They're fantastic to follow certainly on social media. They're really inspirational and uplifting. And the reason that I like this slide is that it's really important that we encourage our students to connect, to be active, to take notice, to keep learning, but also a bit of time out and it's for you to do it as well. It's really important for you to do it, because life's tough and life is tough, and it's just you having that ability to just slow down.

And then when we first started lockdown, I just felt that I really wanted to reach more children and young people, so I created this channel. If you check it out, you'll certainly realise that I am not very good when it comes to technology and editing. I can't edit, but I created this channel which is there to support children and young people from 10 to the age of 19, if not some adults. And it's a professional site where there's videos aimed to not only support these children and young people, but also ideas, professional practical ideas for them to help themselves. Because I think it's important that you have this opportunity to do additional signposting, because you can only do so much. You can only do so much. So, if that helps you, then please feel free to

recommend it and use it. And if you have any ideas of any videos that you'd like me to do in particular, then please just if you go onto that or find me on LinkedIn, you'll be able to email me.

So, I'm going to call in Paul now and I'm hoping he's going to join me. Hi, Paul.

Paul Ellis: Hi Jo, thank you so much for really, really useful and interesting presentation. There's so many good points you just raised.

I must apologise. Just at the very time we're coming on, there's a lorry has arrived outside and might a bit of noise. So, if you can hear that in the background, sorry about that, hopefully it'll go away quite soon.

So, thank you to everybody who's posted questions and comments so far. Some really good questions and comments coming through. I can't promise we can answer all of them, we'll do our best. And what I thought I'd do as I mentioned in the beginning, is try to group these into themes. There's also quite a few people who asked some questions when they registered for the webinar, so I'm going to involve some of those questions well, if that's okay with everybody.

So, the first question is to do with the fact that not all schools have yet returned. There are some parts of the world in India, for example, not all parts of India but some parts of India where schools haven't restarted, term times have already begun, or indeed there's some schools that are half open, partially open. So, the question is, when schools return or when schools are preparing to return, what can teachers do to prepare to support students in their mental health? How can they help students overcome say, some initial anxieties of going back to school?

Jo Morton-Brown: I think the most important thing is to acknowledge their feelings. And I think for some students, certainly younger ones or children that aren't necessarily so capable with understanding their emotions, is sometimes just to talk about it. I think tutor time or just having it like, we call it PSHE lessons. Just an opportunity where you can talk about your feelings.

I think that sometimes, and this is what scares younger ones, is let's take an emotion as a feeling such as anger, is it can scare them, because they feel this roar inside their bodies that they want to lash out or something that it genuinely scares them. So, I just think that if we can actually acknowledge them and to acknowledge that it's okay to feel scared, it's okay to feel these mixture of emotions.

One thing I'd recommend I have a copy, but maybe create a word search even of different feelings, so then the children, the students can go back have a fun activity of a word search, and then what you can do is you can do a class discussion about what is anger? What is sadness? And just trying to, what is loneliness? What is happiness? What is excited? And just trying to get the children to identify what that feeling is and that emotion. And then you can acknowledge that actually it's okay to feel the way that you're feeling.

Paul Ellis: So, it's giving people the opportunity to open up, and as you said earlier on to do active listening as well and the element of professional love that you also spoke about, giving the space, giving the structure, giving opportunities, perhaps for people to talk about things they might actually not yet have been able to articulate in any way.

Jo Morton-Brown: Yeah, and I think leading on from that professional love is that for some children unfortunately in their household, they might not necessarily have that somebody that they can share a worry with. That's what I call it, you know, just share a worry with. And sometimes, and we know how important it is or how helpful it can be actually listening to somebody, or how it can make us feel as well.

So actually, just having that opportunity for that young person to share that smallest of worries, can just be such a huge relief for them. So, it's really powerful that ability that a teacher has as well of just that professional and ethical love

Paul Ellis: It is, it's quite a responsibility of course as well, isn't it?

Jo Morton-Brown: Yeah.

Paul Ellis: I was thinking as well when you're talking about opportunities to talk and to interact with people about going into nature and being with people. And then somebody asked a question about that, some when they registered for the webinar asked about how nature can help us with our mental health? And it reminds me of an article I was reading the other day from the New York Times

where they were talking about what they called it awe walks, A-W-E walks about how you go outside and you try to see nature through the eyes of a child, or as you look at tree as you see it for the first time. You try to find shapes in clouds, or you look at a blade of grass and you wonder how tall it is compared to that, and just little things like that. And just wondering how you think that nature might be able to help students and into teachers with their mental health at this time.

Jo Morton-Brown: See, I love nature. I love it, I love walking. And I think sometimes what we need to do when we're in such a state of, and I say the word anxiety, I don't necessarily mean an anxiety disorder like OCD or Generalised Anxiety Disorder. I'm just talking about general feelings of anxiousness. It's actually the most important thing we need to do is literally breathe, literally breathe.

And I love there's apps on your phones nowadays or you can get these watches, Apple watch, or Fitbits that have the reminders for you to breathe. And I just think that going outside, and I try and encourage my school kids to do what I'd call a mindful walk which is where you go outside. You go from A to B, without their phone which is really, you know, how much our kids are like.

Paul Ellis: They're tough, yeah.

Jo Morton-Brown: They're like that literally. And it's them going out with them putting their phone down, putting their phone in their pocket, and they call it the five, four, three, two, one. And I'm never going to get this right. I'm going to try. Five things that you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. Don't quote me, but the five, four, three, two, one is just grounding yourself.

And I think that's the beauty with nature is just there's this sense of being able to appreciate what can I hear? And certainly, for us as teachers and staff, there's this computer and just our body kind of so actually being able to get outside and lift our head up and almost realise that we've got a neck. I'm going to sit properly now. My posture is going to be better. But just to be outside and to just be with ourselves, I think is really important. So yeah, mindful walks are really good.

Paul Ellis: Thank you.

I'm interested in those you mentioned about the whole online piece, because there's lots of questions have come in and since we expect they might have to do with students working online, various things such as how do we make sure that students interact well? How can we see how well they're getting on online?

Questions such as, if students refuse to put on their cameras is that a good or a bad thing? Some schools are probably insisting on students wearing their uniform when they're online, if they're having uniform in their school? So various questions to them being online, so I'm going to go into one and just ask for any advice and tips you have for teachers who are still either completely or partly working with students online.

How can we help students with their mental health and well-being when they're online from the perspective of a teacher?

Jo Morton-Brown: It's really hard, because as a teacher there's this sense of us having a duty of care, but not being their parent. And sometimes I think that as teachers, we have this sense of passion and caring about our job and about the students that we work with, that it makes it hard for us to actually realise that we can only do so much.

And I actually feel as if certainly during the pandemic that, excuse me, there's this sense of teachers have got more involved in children's lives. And it worries me that parents are less pushy with their children doing their homework or their schoolwork work, because their teacher is on their case anyway. When it shouldn't be like that, it should be a partnership, but I know it's not always like that.

But with regards to online learning, I deliver private counselling and I had a student last night, she's year 13, so she's 17. And she is only back twice a week out of five. She's doing her A levels, but the hardest thing is for her to stay motivated. And I just shared her sense of hopelessness last night. And there is only so much as teachers that we can do. And I get that, that makes it really hard, because actually what we're experiencing is a sense of lack of control.

When a student is in our classroom, we can motivate them, we can encourage them, and we can monitor their work. When actually what we're doing, is we're asking the student to get on with it themselves and assuming expecting that the parent to help. And that's what makes it so much harder is there's this sense of control that teachers can only do so much.

I must admit I like the idea of students being in their uniform. I always try and encourage students when they're finished school to go home and do their homework straight away, be in that mindset that it's school time. And I do think that that would help some students just know that it's school time, because actually what we're asking from students is their comfy room, their comfy house, their comfy place that there's normally when they're there during the days, during the holidays where they can relax, is actually what we're asking them to do is to make that their school. To make their safe place become their school place, and that must be really invasive, I suppose.

So, but it is just checking in with that student. Just making sure that even if then they're not turning on their camera, that actually I'd really quite like to see you or it's to say to them if they're not responding to your emails and if you are worried about them, their mental health, is to just let them know regularly that you're there. So even if they're not replying to your emails, if they're not replying to your work missed calls, that they're at least knowing that you're there, that you're there to listen and you care.

And I think it's quite good if on a school website they can have helplines, additional signposting, you know, the Flourish YouTube just so then people these students can go and get help even if they don't want to show that person or ask that person for help. At least they can go and do it on their own as well.

Paul Ellis: Okay. So, you say being online has actually helped a lot of people. Of course, it has helped us to connect, as you mentioned about connecting with your mom on Zoom and then has been the same with my parents has been so nice. So that if you can't see them face to face, at least you're seeing them regularly.

But there's also some danger of course, and could be a bit addicted to this. We talked about addiction to phones and things like that. So, I've got one question here from Rebecca. Thanks for your question. Rebecca is saying about students getting addicted to the inside during lockdown, and what that might do to them? And therefore, how can we help them always to withdraw from the inside addiction, while I guess at the same time still wanting to connect with us online? So, it's a bit of a difficult thing to do. They have to be online, but we don't want them to be addicted. So, any thoughts on that?

Jo Morton-Brown: I think I must admit, I really do worry about screen time. I think that, if I'm going to be a bit negative, I think that we're going to have students that are growing up in a time where, and this is not just due to the pandemic that they're working online or they're online more, but certainly what they call text neck which is more like that with their phones or arthritis in their fingers. I do worry that there will be these long-term effects from gaming and from being on their phones.

But I think Rebecca has a really, really important point of actually what we're asking them to do is to log on and is to face those distractions. And that's really hard. I'm just thinking I did a video, just trying to encourage students most importantly to have a certain amount of screen time, and to almost try and become aware that they've got two different things and school is what needs to be done. And social media and gaming is almost needs to become, like I'd love for young people to see it as a reward.

So, we're so used to instant gratification nowadays. Certainly, here in England, aren't we Paul that we're so used to supermarkets being 24/7, petrol stations, 24/7. You don't have to just watch one TV program and wait till the next week for it to be aired. You can go and binge watch the whole box set.

And our young people and our students are so used to this instant gratification all the time that actually trying to delay that reward, so trying to get students to actually realise that you can't go on social media, you can't go on your devices, you can't have fun, you can't go on YouTube, whatever it is, but actually it's just getting them to try and prioritise what they need to do first.

And then again, it's having that ideal teacher and parent role which is literally a teacher being a teacher and a parent being their parent. And I just I'd love for these to work together. I just think that there's a lot of expectation on teachers to almost become that role, but that's not their role. Their role is to deliver teaching and to deliver their future and learning. Does that make sense about them? I just feel teachers have got more expectations upon them at the moment.

Paul Ellis: Yeah, that's right. They seem to have a lot of weight upon their shoulders. Don't they? I think I'm sure many people agree. You can become as the chat box if you'd like to. You're here to say how you're coping with that in your own schools, but certainly how do you segregate the two because everything's getting intermingled now. Things have been flipped around, things are not quite so separate as perhaps they once were.

We'll come back to parents in a second. There's a couple of questions that people have raised to which I'm going to answer myself, if I may.

One is to do with, if you're concerned what your child is watching on screen, what should you do? And also, there's some potential instance where you might think that a child is getting spoken to by somebody that shouldn't be online. Some potential abuse even, online. We're not going to cover that right here. So, what I'd recommend you mind want to do is find a really good website which is called icmec.org. That's I-C-M-E-C.O-R-G, I-C-M-E-C.O-R-G They have a great education portal which helps people look through these issues and is particularly useful for schools, but also for parents to look at any issues to do with what might not be going right online, or indeed in other situations which are not online. So, I'll say have a good look there, if you want to explore those kinds of issues.

So back to the points about parents, as there's a general point here that I'm going to ask about it, but also there's a question here to do with, if parents are transferring their anxiety onto a child, but won't admit this. How can we cope with those kinds of things?

There's other questions as well to do with the media is putting lots of pressure on us as you mentioned in your presentation about how you had to stop looking at the news, because there was too much.

So just a general question here around about how can we help students when they're influenced in so many different directions by their family by friends, by media. How can we help students feel safe and secure in these times? So, it's a very open general question but how can we help them work out what they should be listening to or watching or hearing, and perhaps again try to separate other anxieties?

Jo Morton-Brown: I think if you were to Google it, the stress bucket analogy is a really good one to do with some of your students if you felt that it was right for them. Which is basically getting students to realise what it is that they're stressing about in their life. And it's getting children to realise that we all stress and that's okay, but with this particular stress bucket theory is that the stress will build, build, build, and what will happen if you don't deal with it appropriately, is it will overflow.

And this isn't a presentation about those unhealthy coping strategies, but as a teacher maybe what you could do is you could talk about the tap that needs to be on that bucket. And that tap on that bucket is the healthy coping strategies that that student can do when they do feel overwhelmed, and when they do feel as if it's getting too much.

So, Google this the stress bucket, and then may be working with the student to try and get them to realise what it is that they enjoy doing. So, it could be watching TV, it could be talking to

friends, it might be speaking to a charity, it might be doing art, it might be doing crochet or something like that.

It's trying to get the students to actually have an almost a comfort list of things to do that actually when their stress bucket is getting too full, that okay, what do I need to do? Okay, let's go and have a bath. Okay, let's go and have a cup of tea or something like that. That's so British, isn't it Paul? Have a cup of tea.

But it is those things of what you can do for the students to realise that they have control. And in a way one of the positives that I do think about from COVID is that, we are encouraging younger learners to have a sense of independent study, a lot younger compared to those that are I don't know, say 16+. We're asking them to do that independent learning younger, but also there is this sense that they have to help themselves.

And as teachers what you can do is you can lead them so far. There's a saying, isn't there Paul? "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink it." I think it's something along the lines of that. And that's what you can do as a teacher is you can just kind of guide them. Okay that when life is too much and when you are feeling so anxious, or where you are having a panic attack, that this is what you can do. I wish we had longer Paul, because we could talk about panic and what to do in a panic attack, self-harm, and things like that.

Paul Ellis: There is so much, isn't there? Jo, you always speak like loads about this, like the way you sound, and we're going to be encouraging all the participants at the end to answer those surveys just to tell us what more they would want us to have on this topic. I was about to say everybody please do respond to that later. I'll remind you about that later on.

Yeah, I mean so it's actually when you were talking that I was reminded by mindfulness technique that I was given once by somebody which is very simple. Before you go to sleep at night, try to think of the three best things that happened to you that day. That could be really small things such as well, I really enjoyed the taste of that banana that I ate earlier on. I really enjoyed talking to my neighbour across the street or whatever it might be, just something, however, small it might be, because then you're going to sleep feeling positive and you're less anxious in a way. And that really works. I've done that for a couple of years now, I think every single night and it's made a huge difference to me, so I'd highly recommend that to lots of people.

Jo Morton-Brown: And I think that attitude of gratitude is really important because actually certainly with Christmas coming up, young people, students they think that there's so much happiness in the latest gadget, or the latest wardrobe, or the latest body size.

That actually it's trying to get young people to stop and to realise that actually happiness isn't a destination. It's a feeling from within, but also, and maybe they call it the COVID gift, is getting our students to actually realise what is it that you have?

Because I know that one of my students in particular at school, their attitude about school has completely changed. I'm not saying, he's a bit of a cheeky boy, I'm not saying that his behaviour is perfect now, but what has changed is this sense of appreciation for being back at school.

So maybe what we can also do with our students is encourage them to just think about, just think about what is it in life that you're grateful for and also just that COVID gift. What is it that you've realised or learned about yourself during the lockdown or during these current hard times? And making sure that we're providing them with that diamond hope that actually we will get through this, and that we will get there.

Paul Ellis: I like to hear that rhyme there, the attitude of gratitude. I think that's a nice one to remember.

So, I'm going to ask you a couple more questions. I think we'll see how we go, but Antony asked the question really early on. So, thanks you Antony for that, and thanks for your patience as well.

He was asking how to keep students positively motivated at the moment, because there's so much going on? How do we deal with it? And so general tips for motivation, be they online or preferably face-to-face now that schools are really either going back or beginning to go back.

Jo Morton-Brown: I think that's hard. That's a good question. I think the reason I say that is hard is because sometimes we know as adults how it feels to lack motivation, and one thing at the moment that some of our students have got is that lack of purpose.

And I always think that it's important that our students 'keep an eye on your why'. So, it's your sense of purpose, what is your why in life? Why are you here? What do you want to achieve? You know, what do you want to be known for?

And I think that if we can get our students to just keep an eye on their why and their sense of purpose to build them up, I just think that that's the most important thing because if there here and now isn't great, if there here and now is hard and is an emotional battle, I think what we need to do is we just need to keep them focused on the future.

So, I know with one of my students, she did sit her mock exams all being online back in June, and she was so surprised with her results, bless her heart. That actually she's really tapped into this, you know, going to university.

So, it's just trying to give them something to look forward to or something that they can't wait for. And even if that is next year, it's just something to keep them motivated to work towards. And I'm not asking them to work towards the best grades, I'm just asking them to work towards even if it's a project, a family tree, just something, a new hobby that excites them and motivates them, and gives them that sense of purpose.

Paul Ellis: So just something small, something tangible, something where they might get a quick win where they can get something quite quickly which really helps them. That's great, thank you.

My last question for you is going to be about teachers. We have hundreds of teachers online here and other people who've asked a few questions as well. How can we best look after ourselves as teachers at this time, and how important is it for a teacher to look after themselves as well?

Jo Morton-Brown: Teachers are incredible. They really are. And hats off to people that work as doctors and nurses, but what they do is they train for that situation. They become qualified in that job that they know that they're going to go to work, and they're going to save lives. And they know that that's their job.

But teachers are wearing more and more hats. They are becoming counsellors and social workers. They are becoming these parents. They are becoming so many different people within the role of a teacher. But with that obviously becomes, has added expectation and added pressure.

But I'm not too sure if you're familiar with this, but they call it the oxygen mask like analogy, which is when you go on an airplane, and I always wanted to be an air stewardess. If you ever go on an airplane, they do the safety and emergency check. That if your oxygen mask was to fall, you

need to put your own on before you help anybody else. And I remember being a little girl and asking my Mum. I never knew why you had to make sure that you're okay before you help your children. And obviously, as we now know that actually if you put on your oxygen mask first, look after yourself, then not only will you be able to restore yourself and restore a sense of feeling together again, but then you can help other people.

And I think as teachers working from home is hard. Working at home is hard if you've got a family that actually we just need to be kind to ourselves, and actually self-care is really important. It's not selfish. And that actually for you to stay top of your game and to be the best version of you whether that's as a family member or as a teacher. What you need to do is you need to and even if it's scheduling into your diary, time for you to look after you. And it doesn't necessarily have to be a whole hour, even if it's five minutes of just going and sitting outside. The thought of sitting outside today when it's raining, but of course there are other parts of the world, more glamorous than here. It's just having that mindfulness, that breath, just taking that breath and just relaxing. Relaxing, we try and encourage.

Paul Ellis: Exactly. Exactly. And talking of teachers, I know that we found this great cartoon. Do you want to see being on the screen that we can share with everybody?

There's a cartoon that I spotted on social media not very long ago, and I thought it was such a nice cartoon. Can I make it a little bit larger? There we go. So, have a look at this. And Superman saying, "What's your superpower?" and the teachers responds indeed, so many people doing such a super job right now.

So, as we would say as well, don't beat yourself up. If you don't think you can do everything don't suggest that you're not doing well enough, because you are doing so much as teachers right now all over the world wherever you are.

So, thank you so much Jo. We've reached the end of our question time and the end of the webinar as I say. I'd like first of all just to thank all the participants who have asked some really great questions, some really strong ones this time round. So, thank you so much to everybody who's participated in the questions and those who participated in the chat as well.

There's plenty to take away from the answers that Jo gave those questions, and from her presentation as well. As we said earlier as well, we've recorded this, and so you can look back at it again, and I think some of you are asking questions a bit later on. You're asking questions that

we had already answered a little bit further back. So, if you listen back, then you'll probably find the answers to your questions there as well.

So, thanks so much, Jo. Thanks for your presentation, for answering those questions. We're really grateful to you for having joined us today to share your experience and expertise. I'd like to thank also Salyza and Poonam whose names we can see on the screen, for all of your hard work behind the scenes and keeping everything running for us.

So, everybody who's been looking at this, have a good week. It's the recording day and if we get the opportunity, we think we can put it on our website in a section called 'Teaching and learning when school returns'. But have a look in that area and you'll find lots of other resources. Anyway, there's loads of stuff there. There's a couple of other pre-recorded webinars as well to do with social and emotional health at this time. Some great tips again on many of the areas were covered today.

And as I mentioned as well after this webinar, there's going to be short survey for you to complete. First of all, to tell us what you thought about the session, and what you thought went well, what you thought we might do better if we were to do another one. And also, please let us know what else you like to help support you in this area. We're really keen to do more on mental health and well-being, both for students and for yourselves. So please do use that opportunity to put some ideas down for us. So again, thank you everybody and goodbye. Keep safe everybody. Thank you.