

**March 2021**

## **Reflections of a counsellor**

There are four key areas:

### **Dealing With Loss**

Young people know they should appreciate their youth and be grateful for the fact that COVID is unlikely to be life threatening to them personally. The reality that “others have had it worse” can though mean that young people feel unable to acknowledge their own personal losses. The seemingly minor milestones they expected to have, that would have formed memories to shape their development, and to reminisce about in adulthood, have been taken away.

Major events such as exams, school socials, sporting events and concert performances have been cancelled, never to be repeated. The relief of the exam paper completed, the excitement of the prom photo snapped, the elation of the goal saved. Those important memories of milestones are now lost to our young. Beyond that, seemingly trivial daily events like walking home from school with a friend dissecting the day, going to a party, meeting up with a crush. Simple moments, that will hopefully take place once again as we come out of lockdown, have been lost.

In the counselling room this sense of loss can present as low mood and feelings of deep sadness, or as anger, without really knowing why.

The focus on resilience and positivity is understandable and necessary for us all to “get back to normal”. However allowing space to acknowledge the losses young people have endured is an important part of them moving forward in a healthy way.

### **An Uncertain Future**

Young people further up the school have had exams cancelled and their untested replacements are understandably leading to feelings of confusion and anxiety. This coupled with economic uncertainty and a fragile job market is leading to feelings of despair in some that can make young people wonder “what’s the point?”. Not a new feeling, but one that is being accentuated amongst the young in response to COVID.

### **Who Am I Now?**

The lockdowns we’ve all have experienced have also allowed time for reflection and personal growth. Maybe some have enjoyed the solitude more than they imagined, maybe anxieties that weren’t noticeable before have developed, maybe changing family or friendship dynamics have rocked self-confidence. This will have undoubtedly affected a sense of self.

In addition, a year is a long time in the life of a young person and they will naturally have matured both physically and emotionally. These micro changes might have gone unnoticed within the daily routines of school and groups would have shifted and evolved together. During lockdown though they’ve done a lot of that maturation alone and now have to re-present themselves to their peers. This can lead to difficult feelings around group identity.

“Who am I?” Is a natural question amongst the young that is being brought into sharp focus with the reintegration into school. This can lead to feelings of uncertainty around where they belong in the world and within peer groups. Friendship groups will need to be re-negotiated and re-calibrated and this is definitely creating tensions amongst young people.



## **Sensory Overload In The Here & Now**

Young people have been confined in their bedrooms in total solitude staring a screen for hours and hours on end for a considerable amount of time. Whilst some will relish in being back in the natural hubbub of school life, for many others the noise and visceral sensations of being around their classmates in a large building will be overwhelming.

This is compounded by the fact that Covid has taught us that “others” can be dangerous, even life threatening. So being in large groups again will feel unsafe, possibly at an unconscious level, that students are unable to name. Sensitivity to this and allowing quiet times and spaces could be helpful for some students.

These are themes that will be affecting us all in the coming months. In lockdown there was a need to stay in the moment to “survive” the experience meaning it was not necessarily safe to dwell on our emotional responses. We all had to get on with it. As we emerge from lockdown it is understandable that these feelings will surface to be processed. This will be uniquely personal with some students needing more support than others.