

PROTECT OUR FUTURE

A HARMFUL FOR YOUTH

Picture: KENSINGTON PALACE



TAKE CARE TOO: In a new video, mum Kate urges parents not to neglect themselves

Kate reaches out to parents

THE DUCHESS of Cambridge has urged parents and children to find an outlet for their thoughts and feelings to cope with lockdown pressures.

To mark Children's Mental Health Week, which begins tomorrow, she has recorded a video message highlighting the need for parents to look after their own wellbeing.

Kate, 39, has made it her mission to encourage a national conversation that helps improve the life chances of every child in Britain by focusing on the vital first five years.

Last year she commissioned research to accompany a landmark survey on the early years, which found the majority of parents struggled to make time for their own needs.

In the video she says: "This year's Children's Mental Health Week is all about expressing yourself – about finding creative ways in which to share your thoughts, ideas and feelings.

"So whether that's through photography, through art, through drama, through music or poetry, it's finding those things that make you feel good about yourself."

The Duchess has admitted struggling with home schooling her children – Prince George, seven,

By **Richard Palmer** ROYAL CORRESPONDENT

Princess Charlotte, five, and two-year-old Prince Louis – and to cutting their hair in lockdown.

She is an enthusiastic amateur photographer and enjoys art with her young family.

It was her idea to launch, with Princes William and Harry, the Heads Together campaign in 2016, encouraging people of all ages, but especially the young, to help remove the stigma around mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

She has encouraged parents to do the same.

In her message, she goes on: "And while this is Children's Mental Health Week there has never been a more important time to talk about parental wellbeing and mental health too.

"Last year you told me just how important this was, that many of us find it hard to prioritise.

"This is a hugely challenging time for us all so please look after yourself too."

She added: "Find those ways in which to share your thoughts and your feelings or find someone to talk to because we really do need to be the very best versions of ourselves for the children in our care."

We have a mental health crisis...get kids in school

ANALYSIS

By **Professor Ellen Townsend**

PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

YOUNG people are not OK. Parents are telling me their children don't want to wake up in the morning because they say life under these restrictions is so bad. Long-lasting damage to the mental health of our young people is occurring.

Suicide is already the leading cause of death in young people in England and we need to prioritise them now to prevent further tragedy.

Policy makers must do what is right by children and get them back to normal as soon as possible, or Generation Lockdown will suffer unnecessarily for years to come. It is incontrovertible that young people are suffering overwhelming harm to their mental health in this crisis.

Half of young people aged 16 to 25 report deteriorating mental health, with one in four feeling "unable to cope".

The number likely to have clinically significant mental health problems has increased from one in nine in 2017 to one in six in 2020 after the first English lockdown – that's five children in a class of 30 likely

to need clinical support. Young people are lonely – lonelier than their parents. Loneliness is as damaging to health as smoking and obesity, and is associated with

suicidal thinking and impacts on mental health up to nine years later.

Children are at an extremely low risk from Covid with not a single death of a previously healthy child. To Matt Hancock,

I say there are issues other than Covid in the world and public health must be more balanced.

We now have a mental health crisis on our hands which must be addressed urgently. Mental health awareness programmes and support for those struggling must be available in schools as standard. To Gavin Williamson I say get children back to school urgently and support their social and emotional wellbeing. Act now or be the Education Secretary who failed a generation.



The young have suffered so much...they'll need our help

COMMENTARY

By **Justine Roberts**

FOUNDER OF MUMSNET

THE EXPERIENCE of this pandemic has been appalling for everyone: the small-business owner seeing years of work go down the drain, the exhausted frontline worker facing another shift, those shielding who've barely been able to see or touch anyone outside their households for almost a year.

And of course the grieving loved ones and relatives of so many people who have lost their lives.

On Mumsnet we know all too well that the completely standard experience of families with small children has been incredibly stressful, especially when parents are trying to homeschool while holding down jobs.

So it can feel unfair to focus on the difficulties of just one section of the population.

But when it comes to children's mental health we have so much ground to make up. Before any of us had even heard of Covid, specialist mental health services for young people were already on their knees. On Mumsnet we

saw heart-rending conversations among parents of distressed young people who could not access the care and support they needed, even when they were speaking openly about self-harm. The evidence we're seeing now is frightening:

78 per cent of our users say lockdown has been harmful to their children's mental health, and 73 per cent of those homeschooling say their child is more disengaged and demotivated than on a normal school day.

Children and young people have suffered so much in the past 10 months.

We've had to separate them from their friends, forbid them from seeing their grandparents, cancel their birthday parties and confine them to barracks.

The very least we can do for them – the absolute minimum – is build a world-beating system of mental health support. It looks like they're going to need it.

