

COVID-19 Response: Mulberry Bush

UK

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

Approach to residential groups during COVID-19

The Mulberry Bush School has remained open throughout the COVID-19 crisis. The School has devised a modified approach of working therapeutically with much smaller groups of children and staff than it normally would. Children and staff have been divided into three groups and those groups live and work together without coming into any contact with the other groups.

This adaptation to the School's approach followed a challenging period when 15 children were sent home due to a child displaying symptoms of the virus. This represented a significant transition for the children and the School worked hard to maintain connections with the children while they were away and to prepare them for returning to the School.

Support for children's transitions

The School maintained regular communication with the children and their families whilst they were away. They placed a focus upon building the relationship between the home and school settings. They explored with the children what might be the same at home and at school, and what might be different, thus helping to reduce levels of anxiety or fantasy for the children about what they might return to.

An area of particular difficulty for children and their families has been the change to the holiday pattern, with children currently unable to return home for their usual holiday breaks due to the risk of cross-infection. Therefore, the School places emphasis upon frequent contact with families, through any means possible - telephone, social media, letter writing and so on.

SUPPORT FOR STAFF

Mulberry Bush prioritises staff wellbeing, which is so crucial when looking after traumatised and distressed children. Support includes individual and group supervision as well as regular 'Reflective Spaces' for staff to talk about and reflect on the impact of the work on themselves. During social distancing these measures and routines continue, albeit remotely.

Mulberry Bush consider their staff to be one of their main therapeutic tools, and maintaining morale is central to their work. Having fun as a staff group is prioritised and a weekly staff 'taskmaster challenge' helps to connect people.



COVID-19 CONTEXT

The first cases of COVID-19 in the UK were confirmed in late January 2020. The Government's initial response was relatively slow and lockdown was resisted due to a plan to work towards herd immunity. This path changed in mid-March and full lockdown was imposed on 23rd March. As of early June, the UK had seen over 40,000 deaths from COVID-19. Levels of testing were insufficient until a significant increase in late April. Plans to ease the national lockdown were shared in early May.

ABOUT MULBERRY BUSH

The Mulberry Bush School provides specialist residential therapeutic care, treatment and education for children aged 5-13 from across England and Wales, made vulnerable by their severe social, emotional and behavioural issues. The staff work closely with the children's families to support them with the changes they need to make to enable them to live together as a family.

The Mulberry Bush share their knowledge of therapeutic residential and foster care and promote therapeutic childcare and trauma-informed practice through their International Centre for Therapeutic Care.

Find out more: www.mulberrybush.org.uk

MULBERRY BUSH APPROACH

1 The School comprises five residential homes, an on-site school, a clinical therapies and networks team and a training and research team.

2 Individualised care, treatment and education plans are overseen by a multidisciplinary Treatment Team, including a team of therapists.

3 'The Burrow' is a children's home which can host 38 week and 52 week therapeutic residential care.

4 High quality education is developed to meet the specific needs of each child in the school.

5 Psychotherapy, drama and music therapy, group work, family therapy and Video Interaction Guidance are used with the children.



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