

# Mental Health in Schools: Building back after Covid-19

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## Aims of Presentation

- There is still a huge amount to learn about the impacts of each country's education policy and child wellbeing response to COVID-19.
- Valuable experiences have taken place however and valuable lessons have been learned, which can feed into planning, reforming and implementing the future responses for future generations.
- The objective of this lecture is to share knowledge and experiences related to concrete actions and best practices we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to mental health in schools.
- During such global crises, there are opportunities for governments/school administrations to improve practices and “build back better”

## Background

- Children around the world are being exposed to large or small-scale traumatic events at a troubling rate.
- In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns were implemented involving school closures and physical distancing measures.
- Approximately 50 million children of pre-primary to upper secondary age (UNICEF) had a very disrupted school term.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on mental health. The first signs of the mental health impact of the pandemic had already become apparent within a few months.



# GLOBAL IMPACT!

# Impact

- 29 studies including **80,879 children** and **adolescents** indicated **depression** and **anxiety** symptoms doubled compared to pre-COVID-19 estimates, the **highest rates** being among adolescents in **Europe and North America**. Further analysis indicated higher rates of depression and anxiety in older adolescents and girls (Racine et al., 2021).
- 16 quantitative studies including **40,076 adolescents** from Canada (2), China (7), Denmark (1), Germany (1), Japan (1), Philippines (1), United Kingdom (1), and United States (2). The findings indicate that, globally, **adolescents during 2019–2021 experienced higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression compared to prior years** (Jones et al, 2021).



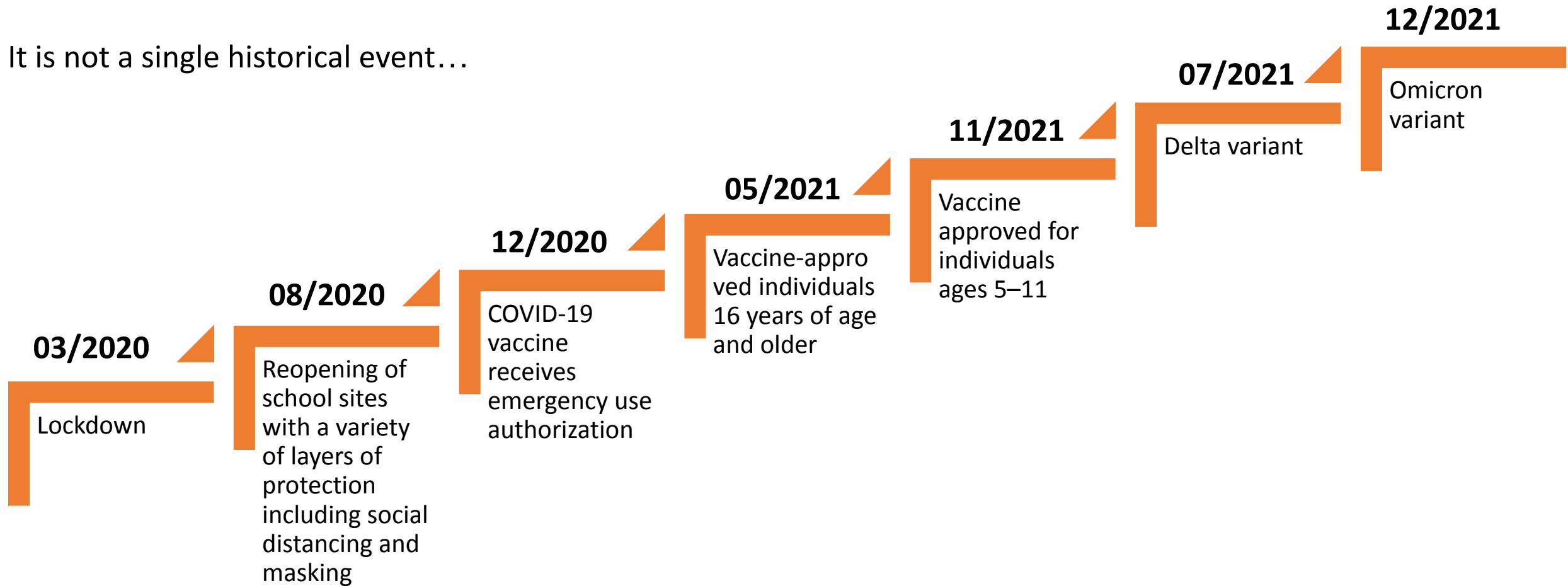
## General Impact

***The COVID-19 pandemic  
represents an immense societal  
change that effected children  
on all levels***



# Ongoing Impact

It is not a single historical event...



## What now?

- Calls for immediate actions to help children cope and adapt to the stressful and ever-changing environments they have had to face
- Also creates a need to design strategies that governments can call upon in future similar crisis.
- Besides family influence, **schools are proven to be a strong protective factor**, especially **for children in vulnerable situations**, providing them **possibilities to develop resilience and life skills needed to achieve academic and career goals as well as healthy and meaningful relationships**.



## What now? (Cont.)

- In trying to address the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, **we have learned important lessons over the last two years.**
- It is crucial now to investigate whether and how the different lessons have been taken forward (i.e. the issues that have been successfully been tackled) and – if not – what are the hurdles and what is needed to make progress.
- This will **enable us to build a Europe that is more resilient and better prepared to face future health crisis.**

## Opportunity

This is the opportunity to reflect on **what positive lessons in education** we have learned from this painful and incredibly disruptive experience

# What is the legacy for schools?

## Lessons learned

- To define mental health and establish its importance in planning and preparedness for future pandemics.
- To address what stakeholders learned about how the COVID-19 pandemic has and continues to affect children and youth's mental health and the mental health of those who care for and educate them.
- To identify and prioritize school-based mental health services for those children and youth who are especially vulnerable—girls, those with disabilities, and/or those who are culturally, racially, and/or linguistically diverse.

## Lessons learned (Cont.)

- The mental health of children and youth was badly neglected before the COVID-19 pandemic and is now of even more concern.
- Looking back on the turbulent years which has passed, it is now safe to conclude that governments across the EU and all over the world as a matter of fact, were caught off guard, with no documented tools or interventions to guide them.

## Potential Benefits – What can we gain?

- A better understanding of how public health crises affect children and adolescents and what is required in preparing for future crises.
- Future pandemics are likely to occur
- Also other public health crises e.g., gun violence, war, and famine but also natural disasters such as hurricanes, cyclones, floods, wildfires, earthquakes, and tsunamis. These may be more local than nation- or worldwide, but they are events and conditions that will affect the mental health of children and adolescents around the world.



# **Resources Developed to Manage Mental Health in Schools**

## *Some schools have devoted special rooms:*

- **Self-Regulation Kit** : Students can rifle through a “self-regulation kit” with tips on deep breathing, squishy stress balls and acupuncture rings
- **Reset Room**: The school plans to build a “Reset Room” part of an emerging national trend to create campus sanctuaries where students can go to decompress and speak with a counsellor.



***The National Association of School Psychologists*** has published a number of resources (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center/crisis-and-mental-health-resources>)

1. Child and Adolescent Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic Research Summary
2. Behavior Threat Assessment and Management in the Virtual Environment
3. Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM): Best Practice Considerations for K–12 Schools
4. Preparing for Virtual School Suicide Assessment Checklist
5. Conducting a Virtual Suicide Assessment Checklist
6. Comprehensive School Suicide Prevention in a Time of Distance Learning
7. Coping With the COVID-19 Crisis: Distance Caregiver Training

## ***Organizations have stepped in ....***

Organizations like The MHTTC (Mental Health Technology Transfer Centre Network) was available to assist the school mental health workforce by providing training and technical assistance to help during these trying times.

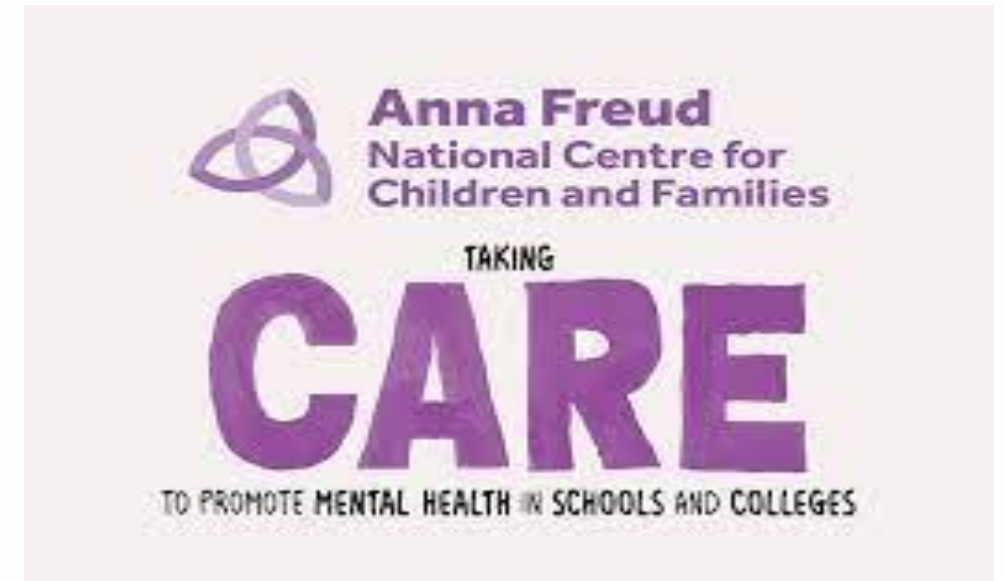
<https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/global-mhttc/responding-covid-19-school-mental-health-resources>

# The Anna Freud Centre (1/3)

As they return to school, pupils may struggle with

- Fear, anxiety, uncertainty
- Transition
- Relationships
- Self-regulation
- Adapting

<https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/supporting-mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-schools/>



## The Anna Freud Centre resources (2/3)

- **Resources Mentally Healthy Schools toolkit:** managing anxiety and improving well-being resources for school staff, parents and carers and children in early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 to help manage anxiety and improve well-being during the coronavirus crisis.
- **Seven ways to support children and young people who are worried:** clinicians at the Anna Freud Centre have developed seven ways that they consider to be best practice in responding to children and young people's fears.
- **Mental health and the coronavirus research bite #1:** a review of research on self management strategies for young people experiencing anxiety. Helping children and young people to manage anxiety: a practical guide to supporting pupils and students during periods of disruption.



# The Anna Freud Centre resources (3/3)

- **Mindfulness calendar:** daily five-minute activities with suggested short mindfulness activities for each day, which school staff can do together with pupils. An anxiety thermometer to help pupils measure their anxiety level
- **Resources Return to school Resources** for primary and secondary schools focused on community recovery, to help school leaders and staff start to bring their schools back together.

# American Psychological Association

## *Student mental health during and after COVID-19: How can schools identify youth who need support?*

How teachers can use existing processes in schools to identify students who may need extra support—especially regarding anxiety and depression, which can often go undetected even under the best of circumstances.

<https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/student-mental-health>



## Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak



It is normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during a crisis.

Talking to people you trust can help. Contact your friends and family.

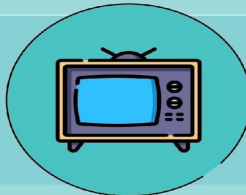
If you must stay at home, maintain a healthy lifestyle - including proper diet, sleep, exercise and social contacts with loved ones at home and by email and phone with other family and friends.



Don't use smoking, alcohol or other drugs to deal with your emotions.

If you feel overwhelmed, talk to a health worker or counsellor. Have a plan, where to go to and how to seek help for physical and mental health needs if required.

Get the facts. Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as WHO website or, a local or state public health agency.



Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting.

Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you to manage previous life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during the challenging time of this outbreak.



New Delhi Office  
Cluster Office for Bangladesh,  
Bhutan, India, Maldives,  
Nepal and Sri Lanka

## MINDING OUR MINDS DURING COVID-19

HELPING SCHOOL GOING  
CHILDREN MANAGE  
THEIR MENTAL HEALTH



# Moving Forward

- During the pandemic, decisions were made under extreme uncertainty due to this unprecedented globally shared experience.
- Few developments in recent memory have rattled the waters of contemporary educational systems as has the COVID-19 pandemic and as such, documenting the responses for future generations is of paramount importance .
- We hope to cash in on such opportunities and use them to develop and design adapted and advanced tools that can be used to support children in classrooms in similar future crisis.

## **OUR GOAL?**

# **Emotionally Healthy Schools**