



King's School Talk (Vanessa Brown 2021) Parent Notes

Slide 1: Welcome.

Slide 2: Our Children and emotional wellbeing Brief background who I am.

Slide 3: (Content Image: Stormy Sea)

This talk falls roughly into two parts, first highlighting some of the issues and difficulties we have been facing and the science bit, followed by a focus on practical things we can do to make ourselves happier, more resilient

This year and Covid-19
What's it like to be young today?
Our 'tricky' brains
Adolescent issues
Positive Psychology - think yourself happy
Social Media
What our teenagers want from us
Recipe for a Happy Home

Slide 4: What have young people struggled with this year? (from Cat's survey) (Image: Pie Chart)
Most of these issues are concerned with loss, which I'll talk more about in the next slide.

Not seeing my friends
Lack of social interaction
No hugs
Loneliness
Lack of emotional support
Lack of motivation to be productive
Difficulty of keeping up a routine
Being cooped up
Difficulty having a positive mindset
Missing activities I love
Bad eating habits/body image

Slide 5: Covid-19 (Image: Collage)

We are experiencing it together as a collective trauma, but we also experience it as individuals. Famous philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote "To live is to Suffer". When I first heard this quote some years ago, I remember being so relieved, oh, so we're meant to find life hard, it's okay, normal in fact, to struggle, to feel unhappy.

So we need to accept that to be human is to suffer.

However, most of us here tonight will never have experienced anything like the effects of this pandemic. Here in the UK there's been a terrifying rise in domestic violence, a clear increase in mental health issues with more people at risk of taking their own lives, and poverty is a huge issue for many of us, through no fault of our own.

Humans don't like uncertainty, it unsettles us, it makes us feel unsafe and threatened, and this year has been plagued by uncertainties both big and small. Fortunately, we humans are resilient, resourceful, adaptable, and all of us here this evening have survived so far. I want to state that I am aware that I don't

know each of your own experiences of this pandemic; some of you will have been more personally affected than others, so please forgive me if I say anything which feels inappropriate - it is a sensitive and personal topic.

Many of the difficulties of the past year are about loss. My online course about loss, in my small 3-person group, the other two adults talked about the losses they had identified as a result of this pandemic. One woman realised she had become more introverted, more isolated, and less able to be tolerant of what's going on in the world, often finding herself feeling angry, resentful, irritated. The other woman said she had lost 'herself', as a result of the home working and the Lockdowns. I myself have lost a brother not to Covid, but I hadn't been able to be with him in his last days and there still hasn't been a memorial service for him. Loss can be massive e.g. someone dies who we care about or small, e.g. not having the chance to say goodbye to our teachers at the end of the year, not having a school prom, not getting to do your GCSEs or A-Levels, not celebrating your 18th birthday with your friends, not having the freedom we are used to. Quote: "A great year of my life wasted". And small losses mount up until stuck together they become massive! If losses are balanced with gains then it is easier to deal with. We can't just cure our sadness relating to loss by positive thinking. We have to allow ourselves to acknowledge it, to feel and experience it, and then we can begin to accept it.

Most of us will agree that there have been some good things for some of us, e.g. those youngsters who struggle with social anxiety have found not having to go to school, or be part of social groups a huge relief, optimal tribe size 150 people (although this relief from social interaction might make it more difficult for such people once life returns to a so called 'normal'); many of us have spent more family time together and have really enjoyed this; have slowed down a bit, and have realised that we can be happy living a simpler kind of life; have spent more time out in nature. Many of us are able to be grateful for what we do have; many people believe that this experience will make us and our children more resilient in the long term.

Slide 6: Our Tricky Brains (Image: Caveman)

Mental health: On a continuum, we all have it
Our 'tricky' brains - evolutionary psychology
Hand model of the brain
Modern life is hard, in so many ways
Social mentality theory

In terms of evolution, our brains haven't a chance to keep up with the modern world. You could say our thinking brain is spiralling out of control. But if our pre-frontal cortex can cause us all these problems, surely it can think its way to solutions. 'The best way out of a problem is through it', i.e. face it

Slide 7: Emotional Regulation Systems (Image: 3 Circles)

This is one model of understanding how our minds work.
It shows our tricky brain in action. Our Threat system tends to be over-sensitive - leads to anxiety
And remember, everything is magnified in the teenage brain.

Slide 8: Adolescent Issues

Unmanageable emotions
Extreme mood swings
Low mood and depression
Anxiety, generalised or specific
Negative body image
Pressure
Uncertainty about the future, both personal and global
Effects of Social Media

Sexuality and Gender
Self-Harm
Eating Disorders

Self-Harm and Eating Disorders can be seen as a behaviour which is a way of coping with a MH issue

Slide 9: Positive Psychology - Physiotherapy for the Mind (Image: Brain Exercising)

Compassionate vs Critical
Tolerance
Empathy - get into my shoes
Acceptance - 'love me for who I am, not for what you want me to be'

Positive Psychology is 'physiotherapy for the mind'. Positive Psychology is how we can help ourselves to happiness. It can help us to be happier, by focusing on happy things, turning negative into positive, letting go of all negativity, finding positives every day in life, focusing on gratitude.

Compassion is 'sensitivity to the suffering of ourselves and others with a commitment to try to relieve it and prevent it'. Compassion is the antidote to the critical mind. Many people who struggle with mental health do so because they are **super-critical** of themselves. They have a voice in their head niggling away, "You're not good enough". This could be likened to a child who has a parent who is better at being critical than nurturing. In fact, if a child is reared in this way, the chances are they will internalise the critic and it will become their way of thinking, often at a subconscious level. The voice becomes their voice to themselves. Science is helping us to understand our minds better. One key concept is that our brains have neuroplasticity, i.e. we can literally change the way our brains work, with intentional practice. We need to understand ourselves, learn to show compassion to ourselves, then we can show it to others.

Empathy; this requires an open mind, and an ability to metaphorically get into someone else's shoes, or see the world through their eyes. It helps us to **understand** ourselves and others.

Tolerance; we need to be able to tolerate things when they don't fit our own model of how it should be. Non-judgement, judgementalism is toxic, when we feel judgemental towards others we don't feel good, when we are on the receiving end of being negatively judged we feel bad.

Acceptance of the things we cannot change is the ultimate healthy mind set. By accepting, there is no conflict, no argument, just peace.

Slide 10: We ALL need to develop... (Image: Poppy and Gigi)

Emotional self-control - based mainly on our ability to calm down in the face of anger, frustration or intensely difficult feelings

Cognitive self-regulation - boils down to our problem-solving abilities

Social self-control - the capacity to refrain from just saying whatever pops into our mind, especially when those thoughts are unkind or negative

Living in the moment

What is anger? A response to frustration, A release of pent up emotion, A calculated action to get a result.

Emotional Coaching:

Recognise the emotion - 'It looks like you might be feeling...'

Normalise - 'I often feel like that too, when...'

Hold and boundary - 'But it's not okay to...'

Find a solution - 'I wonder if it would help if...'

Be calm, curious, not the expert, show a bit of vulnerability

Slide 11: The Good News: Brain Neuroplasticity

- Breathing techniques and mindfulness
 - Thought Challenging – thoughts are **not** facts. Take control of your mind **Group activity visualisation** (to show how we can choose what to think about and how this makes us feel.) Close your eyes. Conjure up a time when you felt happy, joyful. A time when you were angry, upset. A time when you were with a child or young person connecting together in fun. A time when you were apprehensive before an interview or similar. A time when you were on a beach on a warm, sunny day. With the thoughts come feelings. If you found that difficult it might mean you have trouble tuning in to your emotions.
 - Stop the worrying! Worrying can be seen as sitting in a rocking chair – you keep doing the same thing but never get anywhere!
1. Draw two circles on a piece of paper. Put all the things you have no control over in one circle, and all the things you can control in the other. Accept that you cannot change the issues in the first circle so consciously and consistently let go of these thoughts, and change your focus of attention. For the worries in the second circle, consider them separately. Then for each one, think of one or more practical steps you could take, to start the process of positive change.
 2. Appoint a “Worry time” for later in the day, say 10 minutes at 8pm. This puts a boundary around bad things that happen and bad thoughts.
 3. Worry jar.
 - Tune into and challenge your inner critic; develop self-compassion instead.
 - Treat yourself every day. Make a list of small things that make you feel good,
 - e.g. a nice cup of coffee, make your favourite meal, go for a walk, and build one in every day.
 - List your resources, talents, abilities on post it notes and put up all around your bedroom
 - Laugh more
 - Make a conscious effort to tune in and hear what you are saying to yourself, and question it. E.g. I should say yes whenever people ask me for help; I ought to visit my elderly neighbour every week; I must go to the gym 4 times a week. Shout “STOP” to yourself in your head when negative thoughts repeat themselves.
 - Three Kind Acts daily
 - Keep perspective – ‘this too will pass’
 - Look after your body – healthy eating, sleep, exercise.
 - Filter your news feed
 - Practise gratitude – 3 every evening
 - Spend time outside in nature, it is incredibly important, after all, we are part of nature.

Slide 12: Social Media - Make it a Positive Force

Spotify “Everyday Positivity” - excellent short episodes by Kate Cocker

Matt Haig on Instagram

Do a follower’s purge

Create a Kind Messages WhatsApp group

Follow accounts that represent your identity and help you feel positive about yourself

Slide 13: What do our children really want from us (from Cat’s survey) How often do we actually ask our children what they want from us? Perhaps we should consider doing Appraisals like we do in the world of work, after all, this parenting thing is our job!

Listen without interrupting
Make time to do nice things together
Take mental health seriously
Ask us how we genuinely feel, daily
Don't pressurise us to work, we're already stressed enough
Let us have our down time
Reassure us and help us put things into perspective
Allow us to feel safe to tell the truth if we've done something wrong

Slide 14: Recipe for a Happy Home (Image: Adult Dog and Pup)

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF – the lifejacket instruction on an airplane!
Keep communicating – no matter how difficult they may be, they always need to know that you are on their side. Share some of your own childhood worries and fears.
Validate their feelings, by listening, really listening.
Try not to judge. Judgementalism is one of the most toxic behaviours. Try to see the world from their perspective, it might look very different.
Respond vs React.
“Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” (Victor Frankl)
Give them time, be emotionally available.
Don't bear grudges.
Be aware that negative remarks have 3 times the impact of positive. If you have to make a critical remark, try to criticize the behaviour, not the person! i.e. if they do something wrong, don't say 'you were stupid', say 'that was a stupid thing to do.' Maintain boundaries, but do try to be flexible.
Use the “Random Gift” trick. Every so often, offer them a small gift for no reason, it might be their favourite magazine, a packet of their favourite biscuits or some loose change from your pocket. Give a reason for the gift - “this is for you because you make me laugh” or “because I love you”.
Children hear about 8 times as many negative comments as positive from their parents every day - buck the trend!
Help them have healthy sleep patterns, eat healthily, take enough exercise, relax, forgive and accept.
“Love your child for who they are, not for who you want them to be”.
Try not to always have the last word! Remember, you're the grown up, they're the child!
Keep perspective. Remember, they will soon be grown up and no longer your responsibility!

Slide 15: Helpful Websites

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>
<https://www.familylives.org.uk/>
<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>
<https://resilientrutland.co.uk/>
<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Slide 16: Don't worry about giving your child a 'big head' (Image: Self-esteem has gone too far)

Some parents worry that by praising their child, by tolerating their unreasonable and sometimes hateful behaviour, by showing them bucketsful of unconditional love, their child will end up arrogant, soft, big-headed, unable to cope with the challenges of the world. But the opposite is true, it actually sets them up to succeed. If our children have confidence in their abilities, feel good about themselves and who they really are, and know that they are loved, they will be more resilient, successful and certainly happier adults!