



# A Report on 0-5 years-old children's emotional wellbeing in Oxfordshire



September 2020

## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
1 Background .....	3
2 Summary of key issues raised.....	4
3 What parents and carers told us .....	5
3.1 Understanding mental health and wellbeing .....	5
3.2 What supports positive mental health in 0-5s?.....	6
3.3 How do parents and carers tell when a child is feeling emotionally happy? 7	
3.4 How do parents and carers tell when a child is feeling emotionally unhappy? .....	8
3.5 What are the main things that cause stress in 0-5s?.....	8
4 Seeking and using support .....	9
4.1 What would make parents and carers decide to ask for support? .....	9
4.2 Where would parents go for help and advice? .....	10
4.3 What would stop parents and carers seeking support?.....	10
4.4 Awareness of support services.....	11
4.5 Experience of finding and using support .....	12
4.6 Was the support helpful? .....	13
4.7 What could be better?.....	13
4.8 What would be the most helpful thing to support parents and carers with worries about mental health of 0-5s?.....	14
5 Views from childcare professionals on gaps in support for 0-5s.....	17
6 Experiences of caring for 0-5s through the Covid-19 lockdown .....	17
References .....	20
Acronyms and useful links: .....	20
Appendix 1: Survey questions .....	21
Appendix 2: Summary of key survey responses.....	24
Appendix 3: Additional selected responses from survey for childcare professionals .....	38

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to all who responded to the surveys.

Thanks to The Sunshine Centre, Banbury for working with us to highlight the theme and develop the survey. Also, to Oxfordshire County Council Children and Families Service, Oxfordshire Public Health and Homestart Oxford for their input and dissemination.

# 1 Background

This report focuses on parent and carers view of understanding and support for mental health and wellbeing of pre-school children, age 0-5. We developed this project in response to conversations with both parents, carers, and childcare professionals, who felt there was a gap in awareness, understanding and support for mental health and wellbeing in preschool children.

Mental health and wellbeing in 0-5s is a family affair, with close interconnection and relationship between all involved, as comments from parents and carers in this report indicate. Social and emotional wellbeing is key to supporting development of healthy behaviours and educational attainment (NICE PH Guidance PH 40). Understanding issues in this age group is an important foundation for realisation of Oxfordshire's *Children and Young People's Plan (2018-21) Community around the setting* (Oxfordshire County Council, 2019) and *School Readiness and Lifelong Learning Strategic Plan* (Oxfordshire County Council 2020). Oxfordshire County Council and others recognise that supporting parents to provide a positive home learning environment, is a vital part of improving outcomes for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The significance of understanding mental health and wellbeing support needs for this age group has increasingly come to the fore. Several reports, including *Babies in Lockdown* (Homestart UK and Parent Infant Foundation, 2020) and *Best Beginnings in the Early Years* (Children's Commissioner 2020) have shone light on the need for more focus on this foundational stage of life.

From March to July 2020 we received 63 responses to our online survey, from parents and carers across Oxfordshire, with an additional 16 responses to supplementary questions from childcare professionals working with this age group. The results give a snapshot of parents and carers' understanding about this important issue, including views on mental health, awareness of support available, and views on gaps in provision.

Unfortunately, the survey launch coincided with the Covid-19 lockdown, and as a result it has been challenging for us to distribute surveys and build responses, and reach seldom heard communities, as all childcare settings closed. Healthwatch Oxfordshire had also planned a focused piece of work with families at The Sunshine Centre in Banbury, Ruscote- but this has been delayed. As a result, this report does not contain recommendations, but highlights key points, which we hope will be of use to services that commission and provide support to early years children and families.

Whilst not ideal, we felt that it was important to share responses here, which give insight into some of the barriers faced by parents and carers and highlight current and future mental health challenges exacerbated by Covid-19 itself.

## 2 Summary of key issues raised

- Comments from families support the understanding that mental health and wellbeing of 0-5s is integral to wellbeing of the family as a whole.
- Families highlighted need for clear signposting, central information and advice about mental health and wellbeing in 0-5s, including local services, and online support. There is scope for improving awareness of existing services and resources such as Oxfordshire Family Information Service.
- In addition to clear signposting, and online support, families valued face to face support from professionals, peers and childcare settings in providing a trusted source of advice, help and relationship.
- Families noted that stigma, fear of being judged or not being taken seriously could act as barriers to them seeking help. In contrast, they valued support that was timely, person centred, non-judgemental, and supportive.
- There is room for more support, training and awareness for childcare workers, health professionals and parents on understanding and supporting mental health and wellbeing in 0-5s.
- Covid-19 has had an impact on mental health and wellbeing of both parents and young children in multiple ways- which may continue to become clear over time.
- Health Visitors and GPs are valued for being first point of contact for support, advice and assessment. They provide a route to express worries without feeling judged. Concern noted about impact of temporary redeployment of health visitors during Covid-19, on parents' ability to seek support.

### 3 What parents and carers told us

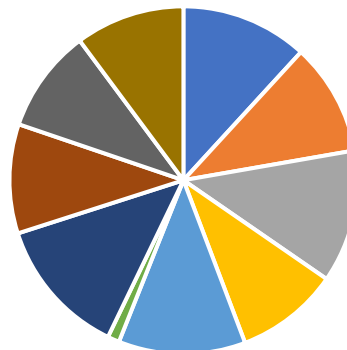
#### 3.1 Understanding mental health and wellbeing

We asked adults what words they would use to describe what mental health meant to them;



We also asked adults to tell us what had the most impact on their own mental health and wellbeing. 62 responses showed an interconnection of multiple life stressors, including work, relationships, and time management.

Main impacts on adult mental health and wellbeing



- Physical Health (43)
- Mental Health (38)
- Work/ Job (45)
- Money (35)
- Relationships (43)
- Domestic Abuse (4)
- Time for myself (47)
- Time for family (37)
- Kids (35)
- Managing a household (37)

*Stress has a huge impact on my mental health, whether it's work-related or family troubles...*

*Access to nature, good food, support from friends and family*

*Political climate and social resources*

Others noted, impacts of daily life such as social media, housing pressures, lack of time, Covid-19 and underlying traumas affecting mental health and wellbeing.

### **3.2 What supports positive mental health in 0-5s?**

(62 responses)

Parents and carers commented on what they felt supported positive mental health in their child. Here, they focused on the importance of providing open, nurturing and supportive environments for their young ones as a foundation for positive mental health.

*A positive loving environment. Quality time spent with her. Attentive to her needs and understanding she is learning to process emotions.*

Supporting children to develop emotional literacy was important, reflected also in role models of wider family relationships

*Parents talking about thoughts and feelings with children- parents having good mental health, having open and honest communication-encouraging children to explore their feelings*

*Freedom to talk and feel, happy home life with support, Good role models of healthy relationships*

*Listening to the things that worry them even if seem small- asking at bedtime what makes them happy, sad, worried and talking it through*

Good mental health and happiness of parents, and within the home was also seen as key to supporting children

*Parental health (physical and mental); secure family relationships; positive peer interactions; positive activities*

*When my husband and I are well and rested we are better parents and better able to provide for our children's well being*

*Good parenting with a good level of parental mental health, with or without support. Obviously, wealth and health affect this too, but is not be all and end all with happy positive and engaged parents (childcare professional)*

Parents and carers also spoke about the importance of routine, good sleep, clear boundaries, and enabling children time to play, explore and be outdoors, and be with friends. Those working in childcare echoed these views- noting the value of providing consistent, safe, supportive childcare settings.

### 3.3 How do parents and carers tell when a child is feeling emotionally happy?

We asked parents and carers to describe the signs that show that their child is feeling emotionally happy. These encompassed outward behaviours, such as communication and engagement, outward affection as well as other signs such as good energy levels, sound sleep, fewer tantrums and tears.



Peaceful, communicative and funny

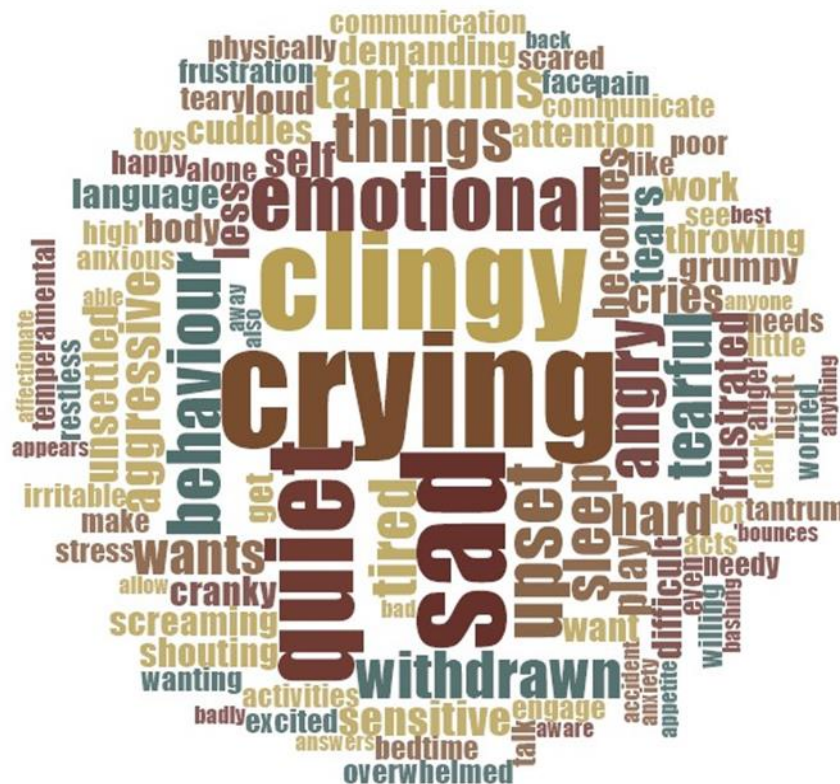
Smiling, relaxed and engaged

*It is in his face, his attitude, his disposition. He sings and dances and tells stories. His play is more imaginative, and he is not interested in watching television...he begs to go outside and run*

*They're happy, fewer tantrums or acting out (e.g. biting), they sleep better, eat better, and are sociable with other children*

### 3.4 How do parents and carers tell when a child is feeling emotionally unhappy?

In contrast, when a child was emotionally unhappy, parents and carers described that they displayed different signs- through body language, expressions, emotional outbursts and anger, or in becoming withdrawn and clingy



*He finds it hard to say what he wants or make decisions, he appears angry or sad, he doesn't want to engage in things, he seeks a lot of comfort and becomes distressed when on his own, quite clingy*

*More quiet and withdrawn, emotional over little things and wakes up in the night, struggles to switch off...*

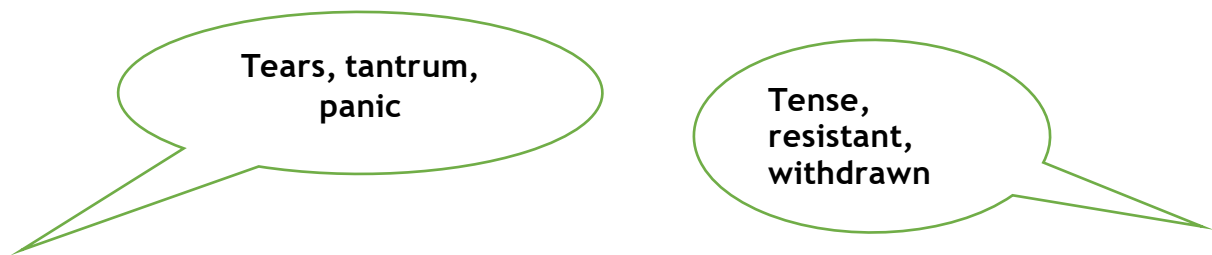
### 3.5 What are the main things that cause stress in 0-5s?

62 responses

Parents and carers told us about what they felt contributed to stress in their young child- noting a range of external world and family-based pressures. Many of these were the inevitable factors of growing up, learning about and navigating the world; including managing change, routines, mealtimes, attending childcare, negotiation between siblings and friendships, feelings of loss and understanding boundaries. Others noted more significant life events, such as impact of bereavement and family illness, or upheavals for example with being in a military family.



*Unpredictability, lack of routine, missing key people in her life, external stresses e.g. family stress caused by finances, the news*



*Big, sudden changes in routines, feeling unsafe e.g. in a new place or environment, worrying that mummy might go away, fear of abandonment, upheaval in general*

It was clear that parents and carers saw close interrelationships between their own mental wellbeing and stress, and that of their child, and this is reflected in responses throughout.

Parents for example, noted the stresses on themselves of balancing work, family, and time pressures.

*Unhappy mummy, travelling (we commute for work)*

*Me being stressed or tired. Possibly uncertainty - e.g. about where he will live. However, I suspect it is more about how I'm feeling about these sorts of things.*

Some also noted the impact on young children being 'cooped up' indoors and with little time outside to burn off energy, as well as frustrations when learning to speak and articulate wants and needs.

## **4 Seeking and using support**

### **4.1 What would make parents and carers decide to ask for support?**

(60 responses)

We asked parents and carers to tell us what would make them seek additional help, advice and support with their 0-5 year old. If worried, beyond the usual ups and downs of daily life, how would they recognise if there was a problem in the first place?

*I guess if it came up with nursery/something was spotted. It's hard to know if there's anything wrong especially as a first-time parent, not know what is 'normal'.*

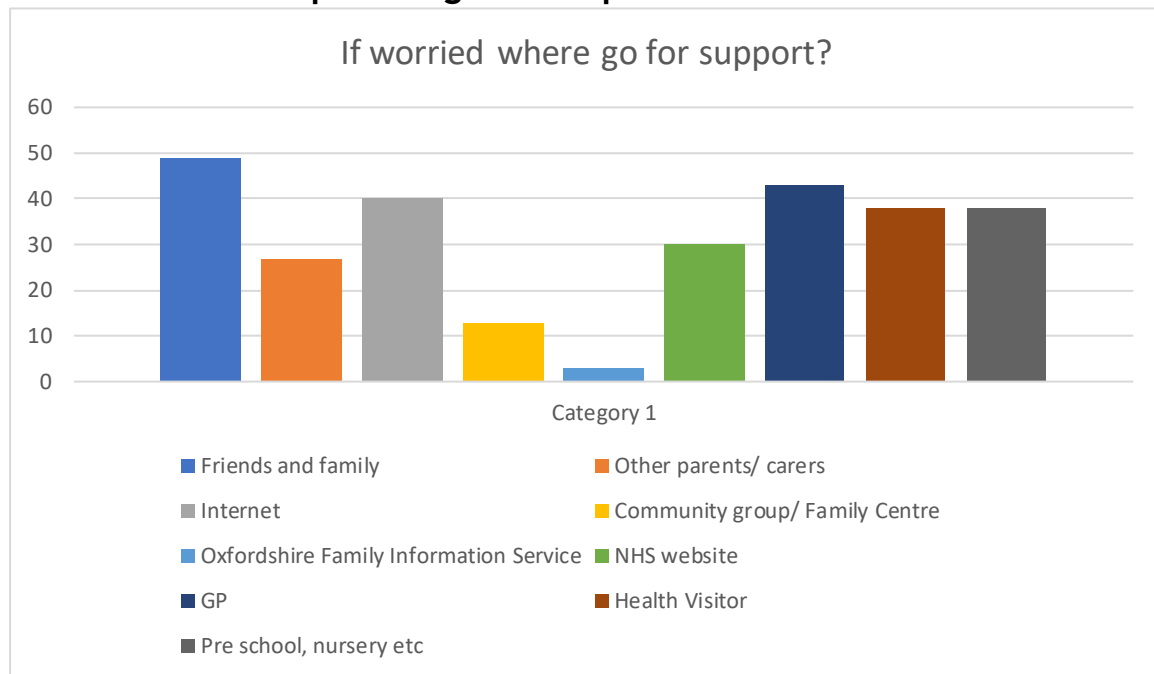
*If I wasn't able to help without seeking advice - i.e. if I'd tried doing things at home and they weren't working. If it was a behaviour I'd never seen in him before I'd definitely speak to family members and close friends*

Here, a number commented they would ask for help if a problem or behaviour appeared to be longer lasting, ‘consistent’ or entrenched, and impacting on child’s ability to enjoy life, relate and play.

*Self-harm, prolonged negative self-talk that wasn’t improving*

*If it took a toll on my own mental health or it seemed out of control and unmanageable or distressing for my child and it impacted their quality of living*

#### 4.2 Where would parents go for help and advice?



62 parents and carers told us where they would turn for advice, help and support if worried about the mental health of their child.

Here, friends and family featured strongly as first port of call (49), followed by GP (43) and Health Visitors (38) along with use of internet (40) and NHS website (30). They would also turn to pre-school, nurseries or childminders (38), and community settings (13) and other parents and carers (27). Only 3 noted use of Oxfordshire Family Information Service. Further comments noted using faith group (1), Pharmacy (1). 3 noted they ‘don’t know where’ to go, and 3 would ‘sort it myself’.

*I would share info with nursery, however I’m not sure how much information they would give me. If I thought he had a neurodevelopmental issue that we needed to address, I would speak to GP for specialist referral.*

#### 4.3 What would stop parents and carers seeking support?

We asked what would stop parents and carers seeking help and support for their child. Here, of 52 responses, whilst 21 felt they would have no problems seeking help, 17 focused on sense of ‘stigma’, fear of being judged as a ‘bad parent’ or

anticipating negative responses from agencies, and at worst, fear of investigation or ‘losing’ a child.

*No. I think I'm good at accessing help and support if I know where to look.*

*If professionals (such as GP etc) minimised my concerns or did not even give any advice/signposting.*

*Yes. I would be worried I would be judged by professionals and that social services would get involved. I'd probably be hesitant to involve a professional unless I really felt that they were required.*

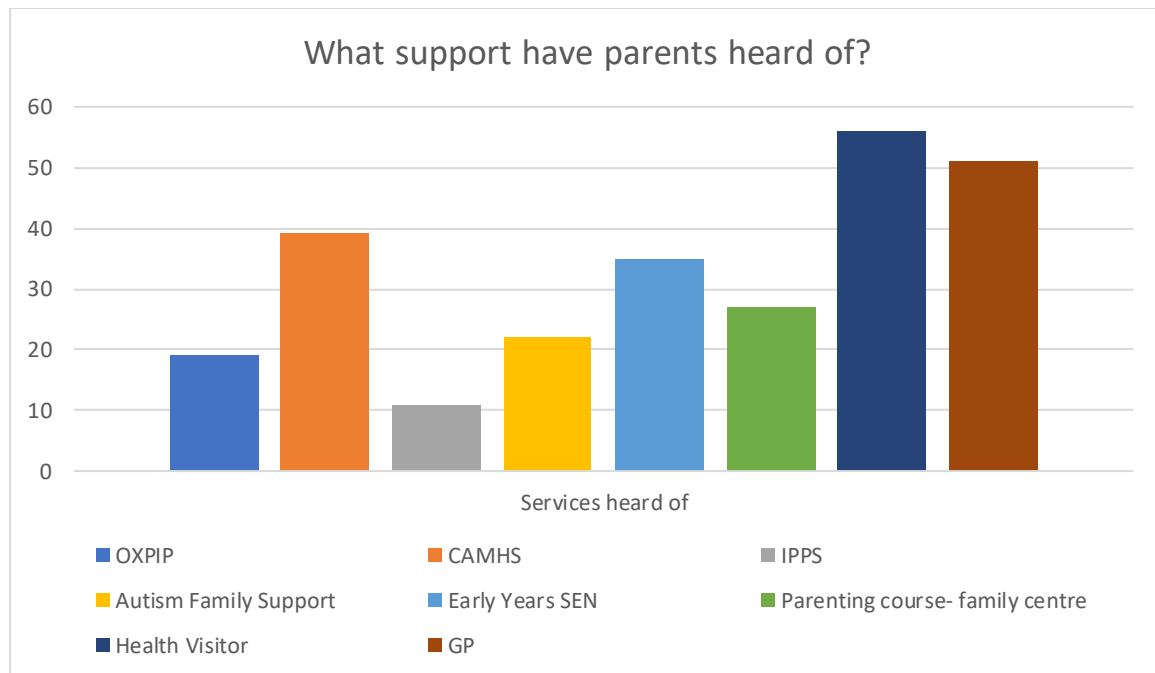
*Embarrassment, anxieties about others' opinions on not coping as a family*

*Lack of information, worry I might be blamed, shame*

Other comments noted concern at bothering overstretched services, and long waiting lists for support, including hearing from others about how this affected support, for example CAMHS.

#### 4.4 Awareness of support services

We asked parents and carers to tell us what specific support service they had heard of<sup>1</sup>. Here we asked about a mix of mental health support, and support for overall wellbeing aimed at early years.



61 responded, with varied awareness across key support routes, as well as noting additional support via Homestart, and mindfulness support. Health Visitors (56)

<sup>1</sup> See appendices for acronyms and links

and GPs (51) were the most well known support, followed by CAMHS (39) and Early Years SEN (35).

*I had some counselling in the first few weeks after giving birth (with CAMHS) due to a diagnosis of PTSD from experiences and circumstances surrounding the pregnancy and delivery.*

*Parenting course by Family Links. Very helpful in helping me have tips on how to deal with difficult toddler behaviour.*

#### **4.5 Experience of finding and using support**

We asked parents and carers about ease of finding and using support, if concerned about mental health and wellbeing of their child, and what that had been like.

Of 28 comments on the experience of finding and using support, there was cross over between comments about support for themselves as a parent, and for their child. 9 noted they had had difficulty finding how to access, communication with and where to go for support they needed.

*Not at all. I had 1 session antenatally and then one session after my child was born. I never received the write up I was promised and have no idea if my GP or HV was informed. Since then I have felt singularly unsupported with the exception of the breastfeeding support group I attended for the first 10 months of parenthood.*

Waiting times and accessing support was noted as difficult by some,

*Advice not consistent. Not as easy for working parents to access*

*Attending the GP and seeing health visitor was good and easy but once in the system there have been long waits, referrals and moved between various specialists and departments which has led to requests to discharge him and being unsure of what support is available and where to go.*

However, others noted the value of support they had accessed.

*I heard about OxPiP from children's centre. This children's centre has now closed down. I heard about the health visitor support from a friend. I was very lucky that I live in the right area to access courses and a friend told me about them. They have made a real positive impact on my parenting.*

Support from Health Visitors featured strongly in comments, although of note is that this support was online during Covid-19 lockdown, meaning face to face, and drop-in support was not available<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/news/health-visiting-service-getting-back-to-full-strength/> Many Health Visitors were redeployed in Oxfordshire into nursing services during Covid-19

*Health Visitors have a fantastic drop-in clinic that was super useful, though now it is closed (Covid-19) and its phone consultations and email instead.*

We also asked people to tell us about where they had received support. Of 28 who noted they had sought support, of these, 16 had accessed Health Visitor support for advice on wellbeing issues, others noted CAMHS and community based support.

*I asked my Health Visitor for support when his brother was born as he was quite aggressive with my parents*

Other services parents had accessed for support included IPPS, local family centre, OXPIP and paediatrician.

*Support from IPPS relating to bonding etc and my own mental health.*

#### **4.6 Was the support helpful?**

25 parents and carers who had accessed support, commented on how helpful it had been in giving somewhere to turn for reassurance, advice, and help. Parents and carers valued being listened to and being able to air worries in an informal way.

*It gave me someone to talk to about concerns or just general information. Was informal so I felt more comfortable talking about things and never felt judged.*

*Having someone to talk things through and seeing things from a different perspective*

*To be listened to. We didn't need further support but nice to know someone would help if needed*

Support from Health Visitors was valued in that it gave somewhere to air daily concerns or questions, at drop-in sessions

*It's nice to know I can drop in to the HV clinic and just ask questions and not feel stupid. At the GP's they are always so busy and I feel like I'm wasting their time if it's not very important. I always feel like I can't see the GP unless something is really serious, but the HV are welcoming and make me feel like there are no stupid questions and I'm not wasting anyone's time if I'm worried about something really small.*

*Having someone alongside during a difficult time to talk things through with a weigh up options, review their impact*

#### **4.7 What could be better?**

22 commented on what could have been better about the support they received. Some comments focused on referral processes, and pathways for communication, essential for building trust, and which when unclear could add to sense of isolation.

*Referral between each department and team. To have an outcome and not be stuck between departments and systems.*

*The counsellor was very kind but despite promising to send my GP a letter and send me a copy I never received anything from her and felt like I couldn't ask for any further help despite continuing to struggle.*

The importance of listening to parents and carers, and taking time to be available for problems to be aired was noted by some

*Them actually seeing the behaviours at home like the old services allowed rather than just on 1 visit at nursery where they were fine and listening to staff over parents. Actually getting support rather than just being left to sort it yourself...*

*I wish GPs weren't so busy and didn't make me feel like it has to be really serious to talk things over with them, but I always come away feeling like I've somehow made up my symptoms or no one believes me.*

Some parents commented on lack of follow up support, which left them feeling isolated, and reticent to ask for more help. Follow up was seen as important in building trust and relationship, and enabling families to feel they were being taken seriously

*I don't feel it was helpful. I was left feeling no different and coping no better and had no follow up with my GP or HV. I was too scared to ask for further help in case they took away my child.*

*It would be nice if they'd followed up 4-6 weeks later to see if we needed more support.*

*Follow up sessions a few months later.*

*Could have been helpful to have been told there definitely WOULD be a follow-up, but in our case, there was no need. However, this could be very important to some families who feel their concerns are not taken seriously or do not really understand child MH issues themselves*

One person noted that they would have liked face to face support during the pandemic.

#### **4.8 What would be the most helpful thing to support parents and carers with worries about mental health of 0-5s?**

We asked parents and carers to tell us what would be most helpful to support them if they had worries about the mental health of their child.

47 responses can be grouped under the following themes-

##### **4.8.1 Information and signposting**

18 comments focused on the need for clear, accessible information and signposting about where to go if they needed support. Having information in one place was

important, such as a central point of access, to avoid having to go to multiple places for support and information.

*Knowing where to go for help*

*A well signposted route to ask for help with plenty of reassurance that it is support and not judgement that you will receive. Perhaps ideas of things you can try at home but always with the confirmation that professional support is available if you need or want it.*

*One central place to access info, guidance and self-help - download of activities, resources and information on how to seek support. Central point instead of referrals and moving between departments and professionals.*

*Dedicated service offering information, phone consultation, regular emails on relevant topics*

Trusted online information about local services and support was seen as a useful source, along with use of social media messaging, to raise awareness and understanding

*More online resources and finding out about more local services (I wasn't aware of any of the ones on your list). Finding a local parents' group where you can ask stupid questions and not feel silly.*

*More information accessible, updates about services via email, annual check-ins even if invited to a group session.*

*More mental health support ideas shared widely via social media like they do messaging re:COVID-19 support.*

*Easy access to services. Social media advertising*

#### **4.8.2 Personal contact**

12 comments showed that parents and carers valued personal contact, via face to face support, peer support, or through knowing there was someone there at the end of a phone

*Face to face meeting with the child to share any concerns to get help*

*Seeing someone and talking face-to-face. Quick appointment times, no long waits.*

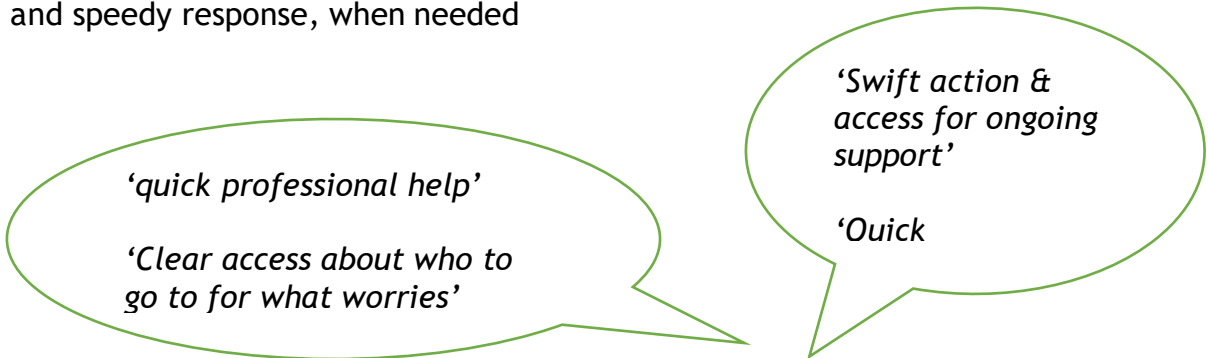
*Parent support- being able to share without judgement. Watching the child/ meeting someone to talk to them.*

*Being able to chat to an experienced professional. It is important to be listened to but then to also be pointed in the right direction of books, tools and strategies.*

*A phone consultation to check e.g. am I doing the right thing for x behaviour? would be really great - quick, light but useful*

#### **4.8.3 Access to support**

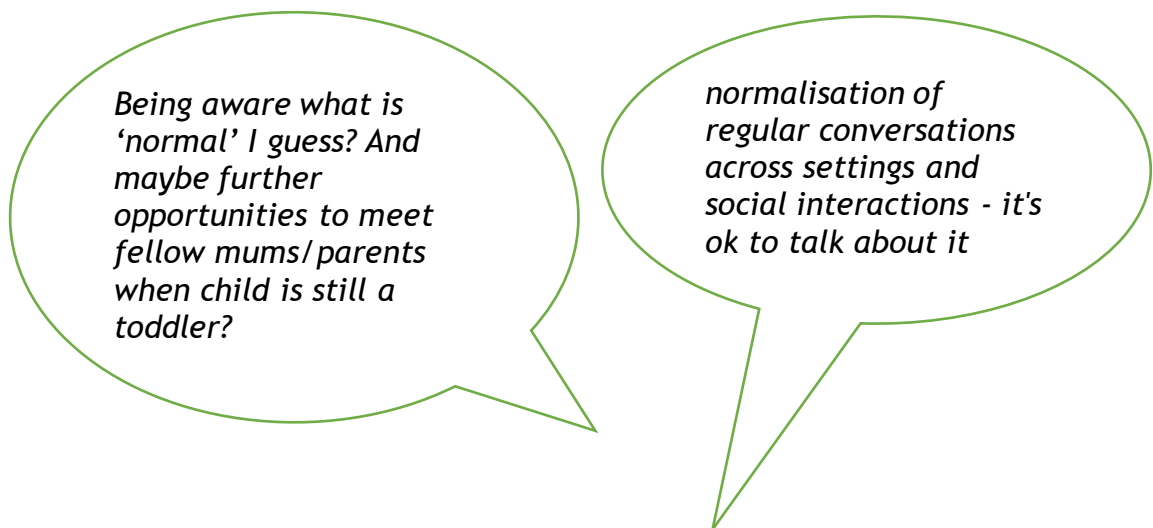
5 comments focused on access to support, including wanting limited waiting times and speedy response, when needed



#### **4.8.4 Other comments**

*Better, quicker intervention. It often shocks me when children remain in family home at risk (Childcare professional)*

7 other comments highlighted the need for parents to understand what was considered 'normal' in their toddlers' behaviour, importantly through meeting others, and sharing, as well as in reducing stigma for speaking about mental health in general





## 5 Views from childcare professionals on gaps in support for 0-5s

Childcare professionals (16) who responded to the additional survey, gave insight into the perceived gaps in mental health and wellbeing support for 0-5s. Getting early support was emphasised, and the need for more focused support to this age group, before problems set in<sup>3</sup>.

*BME families are much less likely to be referred for help with family stress/ parental mental health difficulties. Also, the mental health needs of fathers, and involving fathers in interventions*

*An intensive family support service such as that offered by Family Support Workers, Health Visitors etc, but specifically focused on supporting parents of babies and young children, and any other siblings. The needs of BME families need specific care and attention because of the need for sensitivity to culture and religion*

*General support, if you don't fit the criteria or threshold you are not getting support. There are too many gaps in support. Getting there early and offering support before things escalate is surely the key rather than fixing the door once the horse has bolted scenario*

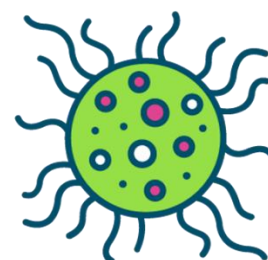
Several commented that there was a need for more training about understanding mental health and wellbeing in 0-5s for those working with this age group, including newly qualified staff

*Lack of training in mental health support in early years. Most is from age 8 and up. Or teenagers and young adults. I have searched everywhere for training in the past as this is an area that I am very interested in.*

*Training. Training for parents and training for staff. This is so badly needed. We all learn about attachment theory during early years courses, but not much else in any detail. What to look for, ideas and resources to use.*

## 6 Experiences of caring for 0-5s through the Covid-19 lockdown

41 people gave comments about the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on their own and their child's mental health. Narratives indicated that whilst for some Covid-19 lockdown had been a positive time, supporting family closeness, for others it had been extremely challenging.



Those who responded spoke of the strains on both their own mental health, and that of their young child. Worries about work, money, maternity rights, and being

---

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 3 for summary

key workers came to the fore for carers and parents, as well as the pressures on relationships, and juggling work and young children. Some, shielding themselves or shielding children with health conditions, felt there was lack of guidance and support for family groups. Some commented on the impact of giving birth leading up to or during Covid-19 and the pressures on coping with a new baby, with little support, in this new environment.

They also spoke of the impact of the lockdown on their young child, with loss of social networks, routine, outdoor activity- some describing behaviour changes in their child, with more regular tantrums and tears, and fears that impacts would be seen in the future.

Some of the comments below, speak for themselves, and bring home the all-encompassing nature of worries, and pressures parents and children were facing at this time.

*“Lockdown has been horrific at times. I am on maternity leave with my 2nd child, born in January. My 4 year old stopped attending preschool in March due to Coronavirus. My husband has also been working from home since March. I have felt isolated, unable to cope, without support, anxious amongst many other things throughout lockdown. My biggest worry at the moment is how I will cope returning to work 5 days a week during the pandemic having been totally traumatised from becoming a family of 4 during lockdown. I am worried about whether my own mental health will be recovered in time to return to work. I am worried how I will cope sending baby into a childcare, vulnerable to other families who may or may not have been following staying safe and alert throughout the virus. I am worried that my baby will not cope with being away from his main caregivers since the only other interaction he has had is with people through a screen. I am worried that my daughter will struggle to adjust to being away from the family home due to being out of preschool for so long. I am worried that if I am forced to take unpaid maternity due to lack of adequate childcare upon my return to work, what the financial strain will be on my husband to support our family. I am worried if I will have a job to go back to, if I am forced to extend my maternity and take unpaid time off to juggle childcare. I am worried that my children have had no social interaction for months now, with the baby having none at all. I am worried that my child and baby will not develop, unable to read social cues such as facial expressions or how to interact with others. I am worried about so many different things and the weight of the whole situation is awful. I know I am not alone, but I am still struggling through this without any means of support”*

*“We had no idea the behavioural issues particularly with our 4 year-old at the start of lockdown were probably related to lockdown. No one provided any info on what the impacts may be, but we had issues with sleep, attention seeking, focus, fighting, tears etc. Knowing health visitors were at a bare minimum service we didn't get advice, just battled on”.*

*“My 4 year-old found lockdown very hard on some ways. He had huge meltdowns daily and was listless at times. We had to have a set routine of the day and it then turned out weekends were harder as we were all together and out of*

*routine. We were lucky we have a garden as outside space was the key to feeling better - whether we could get to a park/ open space. Meet with family with social distancing. The meltdowns are easing off now that he is back at nursery. We didn't want to send him back at first but the fact he seemed so sad really pushed us. He missed the release of playing and company".*

*"My child has definitely felt unsettled and anxious - I've noticed he has become upset about small things much more easily, trying to use controlling behaviour to feel secure. In particular, it has been very hard to encourage him to go outside to do physical activity as he has felt safe at home but worried about both the virus and others' reactions outside of the house. He has also expressed worry that life has changed for good. I have used empathy, talking things through, making efforts to recreate positive activities at home, to try to support him. We have also used a flexible routine giving both him and us control/choice in the days of intense lockdown. But still, this time has been upsetting for us all, especially as our usual support would be time with grandparents who were all self-isolating. Although talking regularly with them through online platforms was helpful it in no way made up for this loss. I've turned to friends to talk things through, which has been helpful".*

*"I had a baby 4 days before lockdown so everything changed for my toddler at once. She was very clingy and demanding at this time and I had to be really calm and supportive with her which was hard when I was very stressed and had no physical support"*

*"I wish there had been more support earlier in the lockdown for single parents, as it was such a struggle and my own mental health suffered massively, but I didn't know we were allowed to get help and support, and by the time they introduced the support bubble option, it was only a week or two before they allowed everyone to see other people and have visitors, so it felt like too little too late"*

*"There is an assumption that most shielded people are either single or elderly and living alone. Very little account has been taken of the impact on children of living in a shielded household (which - if the guidance were followed to the letter - would mean having to live separately from the shielded person, keeping your distance and using kitchens and bathrooms at separate times - for 12+ weeks)."*

*"My own mental health has suffered - my health anxiety is high as a result of having a "medical" child who we need to shield. The fear of the unknown is high. She's been through so much already"*

## References

Best Beginnings, Home-Start UK, and the Parent-Infant Foundation (2020). *Babies in Lockdown: listening to parents to build back better*

NICE (2012) *Public Health Guidance PH40*. Social and emotional wellbeing: early years. 24 October 2012. <https://www.nice.org.uk>

The Children's Commissioner (2020). *Best beginnings in the early years* <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk>

Oxfordshire County Council (2020) *Oxfordshire school readiness and lifelong learning strategic plan*. July 2020. <https://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk>

Oxfordshire County Council (2019) Community round the setting. Oxford Health NHS Trust, Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire County Council. <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/working-early-years/communityaroundsetting.pdf>

## Acronyms and useful links:

Autism Family Support Service Oxfordshire <http://www.afso.org.uk/>  
CAMHS; Oxfordshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service  
<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/oxon/>

IPPS- Infant-Parent Perinatal Support Service  
<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/servicedirectory/ipps/>  
Oxfordshire Early Years SEN (Special Educational Needs) Team  
<https://fisd.oxfordshire.gov.uk/kb5/oxfordshire/directory/service.page?id=ezijsMIND7rA>

OXPIP Oxford Parent Information Project <https://www.oxpip.org.uk/>

Oxfordshire Family Information Directory  
<https://fisd.oxfordshire.gov.uk/kb5/oxfordshire/directory/home.page>  
database of support and information for families  
Oxfordshire Family Solutions Service <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk>

Oxfordshire Children and Family Centres  
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/children-education-and-families/information-parents/children-and-family-centres>

Working with children from birth to three, Oxfordshire County Council  
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/business/information-providers/childrens-services-providers/support-early-years-providers/working-children-0-3>

Getting children ready for school, Oxfordshire County Council.  
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/children-education-and-families/education-and-learning/get-children-ready-school>

## Appendix 1: Survey questions



Mental health and wellbeing- Let's talk about 0-5 year olds! Your pre-schooler..tell us what you think!

Healthwatch Oxfordshire are keen to hear your views as a parent or carer of 0-5 year olds. We want to know about what mental health and wellbeing means to you and your child. How do you know if there is anything to worry about? If you are worried, who do you go to for support? What could be better about the support you have found?

**Please tell us about your experience before Covid19...as there is a question at the end about Covid19 and its impact on mental wellbeing!**

Tell us what you think! What we hear from you will be used to tell those who provide support, what you think, and to help improve things.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire is INDEPENDENT- we are there to help make sure the voice of people who use support services is heard. Contact us if you need help filling in this survey or need it in another format e.g. Large Print, Easy Read or translation.

**1. This survey is anonymous. This means you don't have to say who you are, and you cannot be identified. Healthwatch Oxfordshire will make use of people's comments in reports or on our website- we aim to try and make a difference by representing your views. We need to know if you are happy for your anonymous comments to be used in this way-**

- Yes, I am happy for my direct comments to be used in reports
- No, I don't want my direct comments to be used in reports

**2. Please tell us the first part of your postcode e.g. OX16**

**3. What three words would you use to describe 'mental health' - what does this mean to you?**

**4. What are the main things that have an effect on your mental health and wellbeing as an adult?**

- Physical health
- Mental health
- Work/ job
- Money

- Relationships
- Domestic abuse
- Time for myself
- Time for family
- Kids
- Managing a household
- What else has an impact? Tell us more about this?

**5. What are the main things that support positive mental health of your child?**

**6. What three words would you use to describe when your child is feeling emotionally happy and well?**

**7. How do you tell your child is feeling this way?**

**8. What are the main things that create stress for your child?**

**9. What three words would you use to describe when you child is not feeling emotionally happy and well?**

**10. How do you tell when your child is feeling like this?**

**11. If you had worries about your child's mental health where would you go to find support and information?**

- Family and friends
- Other parents or carers
- Internet
- Community group locally/ Family Centre
- Faith group
- Oxfordshire Family Information Service
- NHS website
- GP
- Health Visitor
- Social worker
- Pharmacy/ Chemist
- Pre-school/ School/ Nursery/ Childminder
- Emergency Services
- Local Council

- Wouldn't go anywhere- would sort it myself
- Don't know where to go
- Tell us more about this

**12. If you were worried mental health of your 0-5 year old, what would make you decide to ask for a bit of extra help, advice and support?**

**13. Is there anything that would stop you looking for help and support? If so tell us about this**

**14. Have you ever heard of any of the support below for 0-5 year olds in your area?**

- Oxfordshire Parent Infant Partnership (OXPIP)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) 'Getting Help' or 'Getting More Help'
- Infant Parent Perinatal Services (IPPS)
- Autism Family Support Oxfordshire
- Early Years Special Educational Needs Team (SEN)
- Parenting courses- local Children and Families' Centre/ Community Centre
- Health Visitor
- GP
- Tell us what other support you have used:

**15. If you have had any support with your 0-5 year old please tell us the name of this support service/ services.**

**16. How easy was it for you to find this support? Tell us about this.**

**17. Tell us what was helpful about this support?**

**18. Tell us what could have been better about this support?**

**19. What would be the most helpful thing for you to support you with any worries about the mental health of your 0-5 year old?**

**20. Tell us about your experience of managing mental health and wellbeing for you or your child during the COVID19 lockdown? What impact has this had, and where have you turned for support?**

**21. Please feel free to give any other comments you would like to share about your experience of managing mental health or getting support with your 0-5 year old**

## Appendix 2: Summary of key survey responses

(not all questions included, as have been included in the text)

<p><b>Q5:</b>  <b>What are the main things that support positive mental health of your child?</b></p>
<p>Reassurance            Love            Guided help</p>
<p>Being able to talk to parents. Having an open mind to anything the need to express.            Parents talking about thoughts and feelings with children            Parents having good mental health            Having open and honest communication            Encouraging children to explore their feelings</p>
<p>Kind compassion teaching. Nurturing. Confidence giving.            Giving them time, cuddles, kisses, knowing you are there for them, taking care of them, buying them gifts but not over indulgence and setting boundaries</p>
<p>Relationships            Continuity            Routine            Needs being met</p>
<p>Listening to the things that worry them even if seem small            Asking at bedtime what makes them happy, sad, worried and talking it through</p>
<p>Friendships            Talking            Routine            Outdoors</p>
<p>listening to him and responding to his needs- at whatever time and in whatever way he needs.            sharing family time            being honest in answering his questions            showing that emotions are normal as is expressing them            allowing him to grow in his own way and explore the world as he wants to</p>
<p>Good sleep, lots of cuddles, appropriate limits, freedoms within those limits, time to be creative, opportunity to learn, undirected time, healthy diet, time for active play, time in nature.</p>
<p>Parents being happy and having good mental health</p>
<p>Safe and loving home environment, healthy routines such as bedtime, bath time, story time, enough time outdoors and enjoying time with friends at nursery</p>
<p>Loving family environment</p>
<p>Getting lots of positive attention            Being listened to</p>
<p>Good relationships at school (no bullying)</p>
<p>Less assessments, testing and lack of confidence in learning</p>
<p>Access to sports, outdoor facilities, socialising and things to do</p>
<p>When my husband and I are well and rested we are better parents and better able to provide for our children's well being.</p>



We don't have financial problems, mental health problems or any other social difficulty and I believe this all contributes to our child's wellbeing
My time and full attention
Routine fun happy times
Attention, love, socialising, happy parents
Contact with friends and family. Happy parents
being open and honest about situations
A safe environment, a caring environment, a fun environment, and seeing these in parents in what they say and do.
Loving parents, exploration through play, learning, singing, good food
Time together, outdoor time, stimulation
Parents Family Teachers
Positive interactions Positive body language Praise
Calm parents Being active Quiet space to go to Hugs Support Food
Caregivers being physically and emotionally available, sense of safety in environment, routine, ability to get outdoors, good sleep, good food, feeling loved and cared for.
Baby/toddler groups, interacting with other children, happy mummy, seeing family, outdoor time, freedom to play and explore
Praise Being physical Eating healthy - healthy body healthy mind
Food Bing
Positivity, love, care and structure/continuity
Patience Understanding Consistency Planned activities Balance
Feeling loved and safe, lots of positive feedback
spending time with them and leading by example. if you have a positive outlook so will they.
Time to laugh, relaxed parents, good relationships with others (peers/ family).
Positive relationships Security Routine Play

I believe my children have a positive mental health, if us parents are happy and healthy.

Nursery, a variety of activities, stability

Love

Time

Security

Plenty of sleep

Exercise and time outdoors

Good nutrition

A positive loving environment. Quality time spent with her. Attentive to her needs and understanding she is learning to process emotions.

Conversation, Physical touch/comfort, Movement / Activity, Imagination and Play, Quiet time, reflection, time outside especially in nature, playing with others.

One to one time, time to explore her interests and finding ways to be less busy and more present.

Love, stability, freedom

Play, reassurance, positive engagement

Routine

Familiar adults

Time for fun

Cuddles

Parental health (physical and mental); secure family relationships; positive peer interactions; positive activities

Spending time with family.

Eating well.

Routine.

Enjoying time outside.

Good mental health of parents.

down time after nursery, running around outside, space for physical play, enough sleep, paying attention to her needs, parents need to have positive mental health in order to model and support positive mental health of child

Talking about our feelings, trying to help her identify and express them. Keeping routines and boundaries as simple and clear as possible.

Freedom to talk and feel

Happy home life with support

Good role models of healthy relationships

Listening to them

more support from education, and attention from professionals to appreciate the child's psychology.

Being able to play with his friends.

Positive role models.

Calm and positive behaviour management.

Sleep

Responsive parenting - meeting their needs

Talking about feelings and sharing ideas of how to express them

Getting outdoors

Routine and clear boundaries in place where possible to help them feel secure

Me being happy

**Q 8: What are the main things that create stress for your child?**

Not being able to speak or fit in  
Being different  
Lack of friendship  
Behind on social skills

School peer pressure exam pressure

Friends, school, worry

Getting told off  
Not understanding

Not getting what he wants. If mum is anxious or unhappy, tiredness, if hungry

Illness  
Changes of routine  
Poor sleep

Upheaval of military life

Ongoing illness in the immediate family & multiple bereavements, not being able to go outdoors and be as active as would like, sudden changes to routine, inefficient communication causing unpreparedness and having to rush when not expecting it, lack of (extended) family support

unexpected change  
tiredness

his sister! Mummy being busy, daddy not listening, watching TV... Not getting enough sleep, being sick.

Separation anxiety

Being misunderstood, being told no, being tired

Uncertainty and new situations

Too much pressure put on her  
Not taking her age and ability into account

Miss understandings, being laughed at and when feels that they are not good at something.

Lack of sleep, lack of attention from us, or when we are stressed and unhappy  
Change, the build up to being left by both parents (even though she is only left with godparents or grandparents and on a rare occasion) or learning something that is difficult for her to do.

Lack of routine not understanding what's going on

Significant change of routine, teething, not being familiar with surroundings or people

Not getting their own way, not being able to see people

worry about things, friendship issues, school

Seeing or sensing parents stressed. Changes to routine or plans without explaining why or without understanding why.

Medicine

Lack of parental time, non-positive interactions with other children, boredom

Change

Mummy being stressed

Nursery/ school

Finding situations tasks difficult

Not being sensory or emotionally regulated Being ill parents ill
Lack of interaction, not being able to do what he wants, feeling ashamed or embarrassed, feeling that he has done something wrong, endings, feeling out of his comfort zone
Unhappy mummy, travelling (we commute for work), Being told no. Not getting fed on time
Change in circumstance and routines, missing positive interactions, and not getting his own way.
Loud noises, changes to routine, not getting what they want, frustration
Not able to do a task well, not seeing friends, limited time with parents, and having to turn off the tablet
not being able to express herself not being understood or responded to if she asks a question
Being told to do things he doesn't want to, feeling restricted.
Unpredictability, lack of routine Missing key people in her life External stresses e.g. family stress caused by finances, the news
not getting their own way, or with us being preoccupied with work
Different routine
Lack of quality time with parents. Being kept indoors. No outlet for energy.
Not getting her way. Physical injury - falling off bike. Tiredness. Lack of understanding or being able to express herself/forgetting what she wanted to say.
Lack of sleep, poor hearing, lack of routine.
Sibling disagreements, struggling with her speech, disappointments.
change, being cooped up, tiredness, sensing others anger or stress
Communication, tiredness, frustration
parents unhappiness Changes in routine
Adult stress, major transitions (e.g. preschool to primary school, pre-covid to lockdown)
Time restraints. Boredom.
Seeing too many people without any downtime. Having a new sibling and the changes that meant in terms of how much attention and support I could give her. When she started nursery. She had a very anxious period when the meaning of 'death' clicked for her. I maybe gave too much information for such a young age but didn't want to make it taboo. Being over stimulated.
Big, sudden changes in routines, feeling unsafe eg in a new place or environment, worrying that mummy might go away, fear of abandonment, upheaval in general.
Change of routine and environment eg lockdown was really tough
New thing or stranger.
Lack of sleep Not having a release/ being outside Not seeing friends and family Watching too much TV
Unexpected change in routine Mismanaged expectations

Me being stressed or tired. Possibly uncertainty - eg about where he will live. However I suspect it is more about how I'm feeling about these sorts of things.

**Q 12: If you were worried mental health of your 0-5 year old, what would make you decide to ask for a bit of extra help, advice and support?**

Crying loads

And lashing out loads

If I couldn't get to the bottom of why. Sometimes a child will talk to an outsider better than parent

Being unable to improve it despite different interventions

Not sure

If it doesn't settle and he starts bullying other children

If I found we couldn't routinely cope and things continued to deteriorate rather than improve

consistent struggling with his emotions, change in behaviour that lasts more than a few days and is concerning in terms of his wellbeing

I'm not really sure what this question means. Do you mean "what in his behaviour", or "what in the services" would make me ask?

Seeing them very distressed regularly, change in personality or behaviour

If I was really worried and did not think her behaviour was "normal" to a child of her age

Seeming unhappy for a long period of time

If she was presenting differently to the way she normally does

Change in behaviour, attitude and interaction over a period of time

Affects to my child's well being - eating, care of themselves, activity and desire to interact with others

If unhappy at school or if reported back that there were concerns

If I was unable to manage the behaviour or if I felt the behaviour was abnormal (ie not in line with what other children are doing)

If she was distressed for longer than the 30 seconds when we leave her. If we didn't have a cause for her being anxious/distressed or if it didn't resolve with some extra care and attention.

Seeing them upset all the time

If I wasn't able to help without seeking advice - ie, if I'd tried doing things at home and they weren't working. If it was a behaviour I'd never seen in him before I'd definitely speak to family members and close friends.

If things do not improve over a long period of time

if I was unable to fix it or sort it out myself after trying a variety of ways

Prolonged behaviour changes, affecting family life. Unable to manage difficult behaviour on a regular basis

Fear I couldn't do enough to support them

If the behaviour continued for mother than a couple of months so wasn't a "phase"

My child's well being

Aggressive behaviours

Unusual behaviour

Withdrawing

If I felt I couldn't meet his needs: if he continued to have difficulties, got worse or it affected his ability to do things
If it led to physical health issues, if it was prolonged.
When I felt I wasn't coping or that other professionals didn't see the behaviours I do at home.
If he starts hitting his head off the floor
I guess if it came up with nursery/something was spotted. It's hard to know if there's anything wrong especially as a first time parent, not know what is 'normal'.
Consistently anxious, down or sad for more than a couple of days
If I saw him exhibiting negative emotions and behaviour frequently or engaging in very destructive behaviour
if it was continued and not resolving
Self harm, prolonged negative self talk that wasn't improving.
If we could no longer cope as a family and it was long-term
I would be worried and would want to do the most for my children and from my understanding they would require proper help from a professional
Discussion with nursery
If it continued for any length of time. If it were making them or family life unhappy.
If she lost interest in the things she normally enjoys, change in sleep pattern, change in eating, change in behaviour (more challenging) that is out of keeping with her normally, loss of potty training, withdrawn.
If I felt it was more than a temporary situation
If her low times were consistent and frequent.
Being unsure what to do for the best and wanting my child to be happy. Need for reassurance and ideas.
If we were not seeing progress
If I think there'll be a long term impact
If his development was significantly delayed; if the MH problems were significantly affecting his ability to play, form relationships, eat, sleep etc.
After speaking with family members and seeking their opinions.
I have previously contacted Health Visitor when my 3 year old was very anxious. They were very helpful. Hearing other people's experiences with the health visitor led to me contacting them.
If her unsettled behaviour or unusual behaviour continued for more than a few days without there being a clear reason (e.g. if she's just started nursery or had a big life change). If she was showing very extreme signs of distress or if I was no longer able to comfort her and calm her down.
If I felt it was tipping over to be a regular issue and not just a few days or short period of problem
Difficulty. Because many of situations do not know how to handle or solve.
If he was struggling with friends and his home life was proving challenging. If he seemed sad and didn't get joy from the things he normally does and this carried on for more than a short period
It took a toll on my own mental health or it seemed out of control and unmanageable or distressing for my child and it impacted their quality of living
If I couldn't make it better on my own, or if I could see what specifically might help, or it was clear where I could get help from.

**Q 19: What would be the most helpful thing for you to support you with any worries about the mental health of your 0-5 year old?**

I think that children should have a 3/4/5 year old review check up with the health Visitor

A support line I could call to chat

Internet advice

Groups

Swift action & access for ongoing support

a well signposted route to ask for help with plenty of reassurance that it is support and not judgement that you will receive. Perhaps ideas of things you can try at home but always with the confirmation that professional support is available if you need or want it.

Some kind of proactive unstigmatised parenting classes - open to all and accessible for all, led by psychologists specialising in the long-term mental health implications of our everyday behaviours and interactions with our children.

Someone checking in again to see how things were going

Knowing where to go for help

One central place to access info, guidance and self help - download of activities, resources and information on how to seek support. Central point instead of referrals and moving between departments and professionals.

No worries

Being able to talk to my GP about it or having access to a child psychologist

Getting the right support

Information!! Information is crucial. We need to remove the stigma around mental health with young children and make it common thing for professionals to talk to you about right from day 0. I would need to know it is ok and can be normal for early years to experience mental health issues and also that I wouldn't be criticised as a parent for my child have mental health issues.

Easy access to services. Social media advertising

Someone to talk through my specific issues

Clear access about who to go to for what worries

Regular contact

Actually having a service that does give information and support and properly funded services!

Access to information and knowledgeable staff for consultations if needs be

More information accessible, updates about services via email, annual check-ins even if invited to a group session.

Face to face meeting with the child to share any concerns to get help

Being aware what is 'normal' I guess? And maybe further opportunities to meet fellow mums/parents when child is still a toddler?

Rest for myself so I am able to keep up with her activities. She hasn't suffered from depression or anxiety but can sometimes take a couple of days to adapt to change.

More mental health support ideas shared widely via social media like they do messaging re: COVID support.

Books to support child not to feel alone.

Health care visitors being more accessible for longer, perhaps more support from preschool (without judgement)

quick professional help
Seeing someone and talking face-to-face. Quick appointment times, no long waits.
Letter - signposting where to get help if needed.
N/A
A website with resources and ideas that you can filter depending on circumstances. A first port of call that can be accessed quickly.
normalisation of regular conversations across settings and social interactions - it's ok to talk about it.
end lock down so I can get peer support at baby and toddler groups
Dedicated service offering information, phone consultation, regular emails on relevant topics
Being able to chat to an experienced professional. It is important to be listened to but then to also be pointed in the right direction of books, tools and strategies.
More online resources and finding out about more local services (I wasn't aware of any of the ones on your list). Finding a local parents group where you can ask stupid questions and not feel silly.
A phone consultation to check e.g. am I doing the right thing for x behaviour would be really great - quick, light but useful
need more attention from organizations, support centre, etc.
Parent support- being able to share without judgement. Watching the child/ meeting someone to talk to them.
Helpline for sign posting
<b>Q 20: Tell us about your experience of managing mental health and wellbeing for you or your child during the COVID19 lockdown? What impact has this had, and where have you turned for support?</b>
Having friends to give me respite, and give him a positive experience with others
Working frontline NHS opposite shifts with partner along with family bereavement have put us under enormous pressure with very limited support from school. Working shifts opposite has put us under a lot of pressure as shielding grandparents who usually help with child care. Very fortunate to have own support network and resilience. Never cried as much as I have in the last 3 months and sure I'm not alone.
Hard work keeping children copied and happy - missing friends
CAMHS no help given
For myself, I have found it very hard. I've had no option but to take unpaid maternity leave as I was not eligible for furlough (key worker). Alongside this, I have been unable to organise any form of childcare within the governments guidelines due to childminders and nurseries already being full and not taking on new children or offering settling in periods. This has left me very anxious about finances and also having to return to work in August. It has affected my anxiety, prior to lockdown I had really dealt with a lot of my own anxiety that came with having a baby however lockdown seems to have undone all my hard work and I feel back at square one - I feel lonely, entirely isolated and mentally exhausted. It feels like people think being at home with a baby is easy and we should be overlooked however i think it's been the most challenging thing I've ever had to do in my life. My child had developed attachment issues which he never had prior to lockdown. He becomes very shy and attached to mum or dad if he sees other people - even if it's through the window and it's people he previously knew well.



It's actually been quite distressing for our family unit to have to go through this with no support from anyone - the focus seems to be on families with slightly older children (pre-school onwards) and pregnant and very new mothers. With respect, I can understand however I haven't seen anything mentioned about us thousands of mums who are on maternity with older babies. It's really enforced a sense of isolation and loneliness during the pandemic.

Coping with simple routine and lowering expectations for each day

It was difficult at start of lockdown. Spending that much time together, I found it very stressful trying to entertain a 2 year old and a 4 year old. I felt bad when they had tablets and TV. Now we are 10 weeks in, I've put in place the techniques I learnt on the course, staying patient, modelling behaviours, talked to them, created a on activity chart and planned our days together so they agree what we will do when. We are now enjoying each others company, mostly getting along and mostly happy. We have talked a lot about who we will see and where we will go when we are allowed. We use video calls to see friends and family. We aren't sending them back to nursery yet as we are happy at home and feel its safer. The children have each other which makes a big difference as they play well together now.

My own mental health has suffered - my health anxiety is high as a result of having a "medical" child who we need to shield. The fear of the unknown is high. She's been through so much already.

3 year old is struggling with lack of structure and usual activities and time with peers. She is not getting as much attention as she usually does due to the demands of homeschooling older siblings

It has nearly ruined my marriage, I had been very tired and sad. I have spoke to my mum.

To be honest they're was minima help support before covid19 so was not really any different we just had to get in with it as always! Used internet advise.

I turned to guidance sent from reputable services via social media. I have made time to talk to my son about what is going on, giving him lots of opportunity to asks questions, gauging his level of understanding and any concerns he has, validating them and providing him with information and reassurance

My son is 21 months so it at an age where he is just enjoying being home with mummy and daddy. We've used video calls to stay in touch with his friends and family. But at a key stage he hasn't been able to play with other children and will struggle when he goes back to nursery. We haven't had any support for mental health.

Mostly positive but still it's the uncertainty and not being able to do the things we used to do,

He is 8 months old so has no idea we are in lockdown

I have the support of the Elms (AMHT) and complex needs, without that it would have been more difficult. Re: my toddler I have sought any support for him. However I have tried to ensure he speaks to family on zoom, maintains contact with them/familiarity, seek interesting learning toys to play with and ensure we get outside once a day when possible. It's been tough though!

My mental health has been impacted by the virus due to lack of sleep, and the former mentioned. I was receiving support however I was unable to continue as I couldn't have remote counselling whilst looking after my little girl

we have tried to keep life as normal as possible and limited how often the new is on.

since having Covid myself my MH has taken a dramatic decline and I am currently at a stage of working out if/what help I actually need. I have found the GP particularly difficult to actually get any assistance in accessing services in the past as they decided I didn't need it even though I was not coping. So I won't ask until I know what I need as being brushed off is not helpful.

We have had increasingly negative self-talk, and introduced new ways of building positive self image, after discussions with school and friends, who had also experienced similar things with their young children during lockdown.

Lockdown has been horrific at times. I am on maternity leave with my 2nd child, born in January. My 4 year old stopped attending preschool in March due to Coronavirus. My husband has also been working from home since March. I have felt isolated, unable to cope, without support, anxious amongst many other things throughout lockdown. My biggest worry at the moment is how I will cope retuning to work 5 days a week during the pandemic having been totally traumatised from becoming a family of 4 during lockdown. I am worried about whether my own mental health will be recovered in time to return to work. I am worried how I will cope sending baby into a childcare, vulnerable to other families who may or may not have been following staying safe and alert throughout the virus. I am worried that my baby will not cope with being away from his main caregivers since the only other interaction he has had is with people through a screen. I am worried that my daughter will struggle to adjust to being away from the family home due to bring out of preschool for so long. I am worried that if I am forced to take unpaid maternity due to lack of adequate childcare upon my return to work, what the financial strain will be on my husband to support our family. I am worried if I will have a job to go back to if I am forced to extend my maternity and take unpaid time off to juggle childcare. I am worried that my children have had no social interaction for months now, with the baby having none at all. I am worried that my child and baby will no develop unable to read social cues such as facial expressions or how to interact with others. I am worried about so many different things and the weight of the whole situation is awful. I know I am not alone but I am still struggling through this without any means of support.

I have had no real support, other than joining Facebook groups related to the petition to extend paid maternity.

I work on the NHS with Covid testing, and I have had to work extra days and longer hours. I am currently working 6 day weeks for the last couple of weeks. Fortunately my husband and children have just got on board. My children are too young to understand about COVID and my husband has been very supportive. I haven't got the time to even think about my mental health. I'm sure this will catch up on me. At the moment I have the support of my husband and my mum to help with the welfare of my kids who seem happy and content.

We had no idea the behavioural issues particularly with our 4 year old at the start of lockdown were probably related to lockdown. No one provided any info on what the impacts may be, but we had issues with sleep, attention seeking, focus, fighting, tears etc. Knowing health visitors were at a bear minimum service we didn't get advice, just battled on.

My child has really missed days out, such as swimming and going to soft play. He does not understand why these places are closed and I have struggled to explain it to him. My child have also missed interaction with other children as he usually attends nursery two days per week, but has not been for 3 months now. I have tried to give him plenty of time and love + we have been for regular long walks together in the fresh air.

I've been lucky and enjoyed a lot more time with my daughter than I would have had as I normally work full time. It has been good. No support needed. Very much enjoyed it, and she seems to have too.

As someone who was advised to shield, there was very little guidance - especially when the schools went back on 1st June - as to what was and was not safe for my child. We have been worried about the impact on my child of his not being able to socialise with his classmates if he does not go back (he has no siblings) but only had incomplete information about the physical risks to the shielded member of the family should a child from that household go back to school. There is an assumption that most shielded people are either single or elderly and living alone. Very little account has been taken of the impact on children of living in a shielded household (which - if the guidance were followed to the letter - would mean having to live separately from the shielded person, keeping your distance and using kitchens and bathrooms at separate times - for 12+ weeks).

On the whole things have been ok, or at least to be expected. She is 3 and normally attends a school nursery in the mornings. With an older sibling unable to access her school place I didn't want my 3 year old to attend nursery as the lack of parity would have been detrimental to my 8 year olds mental health. Both children have struggled with missing school and their friends. My 3 year old has mostly embraced being at home and enjoys having more access to me. I am normally a busy Childminder spread very thinly but have not been working since March which has enabled me to focus on my own children and keeping them as happy as possible. I try to balance work sent from school with baking, playing and regular walks to wooded areas. She has certainly been impacted, she asks to go to school regularly and when we do go out she excitedly proclaims when she sees people. My 8 year old struggles with managing school work and I also have a 19 month old who needs a lot of attention, is active and engaged with a wide vocabulary. As a parent I am exhausted and some days feel very low trying to keep everyone happy. There is a lot it pressure not to let their education slip away and balance that with their mental health when they just don't want to do school work. Physically I am shattered which makes me feel low and it's harder to manage with 3 children while my husband works long days. On the flip side I am thrilled to have this time with my children and will cherish it forever.

Talking openly and honestly with child about what is happening and why (in appropriate language - making it clear and simple. Asking and answering questions. Being consistent and reassuring. Maintaining routine, doing fun and varied activities as a family. Support from nursery. Video calls and stories with family. Looking through photo books. Hopefully this has provided a level of understanding, love and reassurance. Provided structure and as much normality as usual. maintained social connections. Son still very much misses family and is frustrated by not being able to see them. We openly share this frustration with him and talk about what we can do when we feel like this and the hope for the future of seeing them again. make plans for this.

Stuck inside, no socialisation, turned to family with zoom calling

I had a baby 4 days before lockdown so everything changed for my toddler at once. She was very clingy and demanding at this time and I had to be really calm and supportive with her which was hard when I was very stressed and had no physical support

My child has definitely felt unsettled and anxious - I've noticed he has become upset about small things much more easily, trying to use controlling behaviour to feel secure. In particular, it has been very hard to encourage him to go outside to do physical activity as he has felt safe at home but worried about both the virus and others' reactions outside of the house. He has also expressed worry that life has changed for good. I have used empathy, talking things through, making efforts to recreate positive activities at home, to try to support him. We have also used a flexible routine giving both him and us control/choice in the days of intense lockdown. But still, this time has been upsetting for us all, especially as our usual support would be time with grandparents who were all self-isolating. Although talking regularly with them through online platforms was helpful it in no way made up for this loss. I've turned to friends to talk things through, which has been helpful.

My children are 4 and 2. Luckily they are still quite young and so haven't really worried too much about the virus itself. They both missed their family and friends though but understood that we couldn't see them temporarily to keep us all safe. We're lucky enough to have lots of outdoor space, so that has helped greatly.

Thankfully we had a generally lovely time and my child was happy being at home with us. Having my husband around meant that I could give me child one on one support and go for walks and do exercise and support my own mental health.

She has been ok, though she is very conscious that all the people disappeared, and commented on it, asking where all the people went, when we went for our walks (she is 2.5). She now gets worried when she sees other people on footpaths and knows we have to stand to one side out of the way.

She and I were on our own for weeks without my usual support network, and unlike Domonic Cummings I didn't know we were allowed to just go and stay with my mum and seek help.

So there were times when I was exhausted and wept/cried in front of her, which really upset her, and times when we both lost our temper more often than we normally would. Not seeing her friends for so long has made her very shy and we've been trying to re-socialise her around other kids.

She's the youngest of 4 and was left more to her own devices than normal. In usual times, she has nursery 3 days a week and hangs out with me on the other 2 days, going to parks, etc. During covid I've had to homeschool the older ones and therefore she hasn't had as much attention as well as being frustrated to not go to nursery, the park, soft play etc. She's found it confusing and has been much less patient, more angry and shouty at everyone. Much more demanding. Sometimes really melting down and only calming when I held her like a baby on the sofa and let her cry and get it out.

Due to COVID 19, so not much we could do for our child. Because there are many restrictions of law from the government.

My 4 year old found lockdown very hard on some ways. He had huge meltdowns daily and was listless at times. We had to have a set routine of the day and it then turned out weekends were harder as we were all together and out of routine.

We were lucky we have a garden as outside space was the key to feeling better - whether we could get to a park/ open space. Meet with family with social distancing.

The meltdowns are easing off now that he is back at nursery. We didn't want to send him back at first but the fact he seemed so sad really pushed us. He missed the release of playing and company.

The Listening Centre continued to offer me counselling, albeit online, which was invaluable support helping me manage changes and anxieties.

Changing routines had impact on the children feeling settled. Nursery (Flo's Nature Nursery) worked with me to support my child resettling them into nursery and also working to support my child in transitions and boundaries in the setting.

Very tough to work from Home with an under 5 year old at home.

My work were supportive. I got a keyworker nursery place for him a month or so into it and that was hugely helpful.

We were therefore able to go out and about (to the nursery very day) so that kept things interesting for him, plus he had children to play with and other kind adults to interact with. I'm sure it would have been a problem if he had continued to have had only one very overstretched individual interacting with him, and around 6 hours + of tv a day while I attempted to work

## Appendix 3: Additional selected responses from survey for childcare professionals (16 responses)

<p><b>Q5 What could be improved in support offered to 0-5 year olds and their families for good mental health?</b></p>
<p>Training for practitioners, parents and medical services (GP, nurses, midwives etc) that focus on under 5's.</p>
<p>Awareness that everyone has mental health to try and reduce the stigma.</p>
<p>More focus on MH in NVQ courses for newly qualified staff</p>
<p>Parent support</p>
<p>Group sessions run by up to date trainers on parenting in today's society.</p>
<p>Actual support in the community and access to services. No specialist support for under 5's.</p>
<p>more hubs and services. more money in CAMHS.</p>
<p>Training. Training for parents and training for staff. This is so badly needed. We all learn about attachment theory during early years courses, but not much else in any detail. What to look for, ideas and resources to use.</p>
<p>Maybe meet the parents and children with the case workers before they attend the setting</p>
<p>Knowledge and support for parents/carers/families.</p>
<p>Sending parents on courses!</p>
<p>Difficult if all at home But i have just kept in contact Listening to concerns</p>
<p>A safe space to play outside for those who do not have gardens. Someone to talk to about their anxieties. I know it has been a very difficult time and for someone to validate how they are feeling and support the families through this would be useful. Currently families feel as if there is no one to talk to</p>
<p>An intensive family support service such as that offered by Family Support Workers, Health Visitors etc, but specifically focused on supporting parents of babies and young children, and any other siblings. The needs of BME families need specific care and attention because of the need for sensitivity to culture and religion</p>
<p>Supportive caring and knowledgeable staff</p>
<p>Well being for the whole family and parenting lessons.</p>
<p>More local forest school type groups which can be attended as families. More information available to new parents on the importance of children's mental health</p>
<p>Better, quicker intervention. It often shocks me when children remain in family home at risk.</p>
<p><b>Q7: Are there any gaps in support that you have identified?</b></p>
<p>Training</p>

Parents want quick fix or you blame others rather than focus on how they can do better

Health visitor advice and guidance seems outdated. Outside agencies don't offer the full support families require, putting increased pressure on settings.

There doesn't feel like there is any support unless you are in Oxford city.

Lack of training in mental health support in early years. Most is from age 8 and up. Or teenagers and young adults. I have searched everywhere for training in the past as this is an area that I am very interested in.

Ongoing support with the creche staff once the 8/10 week creche has finished as most parents do not attend the play & learn sessions which are the next steps if not attending a Nursey or childminder.

General support, if you don't fit the criteria or threshold you are not getting support. There are too many gaps in support. Getting there early and offering support before things escalate is surely the key rather than fixing the door once the horse has bolted scenario

BME families are much less likely to be referred for help with family stress/ parental mental health difficulties. Also, the mental health needs of fathers, and involving fathers in interventions

Training for early years staff

No support given to parents when their children start school.

Information on children's mental health to new parents for example getting out for a walk with a new baby.

Lack of health Visitor visiting home. Easy to hide abuse or mental health issue.

This report is available to read online at  
<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-reports/> Healthwatch Oxfordshire

Email: [hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk](mailto:hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk) Tel: 01865 520520

