

Helping Children Thrive After Lockdown webinar transcript

Webinar Opening from Jacquie Burke

Jackie Burke: Hello and welcome to the Helping Children Thrive after lockdown webinar. My name is Jacquie Burke and I am the the director for safeguarding and family resilience in Surrey County Council. It's an absolute pleasure to welcome our partner in early years setting, school, voluntary and health sectors and especially volunteers who are supporting our families in the community. The aim of the webinar is to help everyone working with young people, children and their families understand some of the potential impact of this most extraordinary year and how together we can help them to thrive and this is a true collaboration between partners working together as part of our Helping Families Early strategy.

Everything you do in your work really does make a difference with children and families and today you will hear from a Home Start volunteer and a leader of a local parent and toddler group. Our health visiting team and maternity services. Surrey's therapy services an early years nursery, a school nursery class and from families themselves about their experiences of lockdown. Dr.Kathryn Hollins who is a consultant parent, child and families psychiatrist and psychotherapist at Surrey and Borders and who is also supporting our first thousand days in Surrey will be leading the webinar today and will be sharing with us some thoughts on the importance on trusting relationships and how this impacts on the wellbeing and resilience on our children and families. I really hope you enjoy.

Webinar opening from Kathryn Hollins

Kathryn Hollins: We have a real treat in store for you, because as each contributor, you will see, will illuminate a different aspect of what the pandemic has been like and all the immensely creative responses that people have had for helping children and parents to recover and thrive. I will be live again right at the very end just to round up with some brief final thoughts and tips. So now I invite you to make a cup of tea, sit comfortably and prepare to actively engage with us and with this topic. How do we help children to thrive after lockdown. So let's get started.

We are going to set the scene by meeting Molly and her mother Melissa talking with Hazel, listen out for what was difficult but also the unexpected positives during the pandemic for this mother and daughter.

Hazel from Home Start in Conversation with new mum Melissa

Hazel: Hi my names is Hazel and I work for Home Start. There are eight Home-Starts across Surrey and we are voluntary organisation who support families with children mainly under 5 and I am here today with Melissa and Melissa is one of our mums who has had some Home Start support over the last year and we met on a group that Home Start was running with another organisation called the Mary Francis trust and we were running some Zoom session for new mums because you had just had Molly.

So you had Molly just before the start of lockdown, and how was that?

Molly: Yeah I mean it was difficult. I didn't expect to have a child and then go into a global pandemic and not being able to take her anywhere or let her meet other people within the family was really difficult and it felt really lonely, so yeah it was really difficult. Which is why I then looked into the Mary Francis Trust to get some support from other mums and to what other support was out there.

Hazel: And then through that we met, didn't we? And you came to a couple of those sessions and I know one of the things that all the mums found really helpful was just being able to chat to each other, so how did you find those Zoom sessions?

Molly: I mean after the first one, the first one was a little bit daunting but after that it felt alright, it felt nice to know that I wasn't the only one. I wasn't the only one struggling with day to day issues or problems with molly, it just felt, I felt safe and I think that is the most important thing that was needed. And, on those sessions then, we were able to just get chatting then and I was able to tell you a little more about Home Start and the type of support that we offer families. It was then a little bit later that that we then reconnected back in with each other.

So, in that in between time what sort of things did you do, to sort of, make the most of being a new mum in a pandemic with a baby when you couldn't really do very much. I think to start with I was very closed off and I didn't really know the correct way to go about things but then I decided to just put myself out there. And I downloaded some Apps on my phone called Mush and Peanut and they're like Tinder for mums. So you could swipe and meet other mums in the area. And that was nice, it was nice to have someone else to talk to and for her to have other babies. That then led me to create a local WhatsApp group where any mums in the area could join the WhatsApp group and we could use it to support each other and then we started meeting up and doing weekly meet ups and then I was also supported by other people at the hospital which gave me more the professional support that I needed rather than just the social support. Then it just kind of just went from there, as my confidence grew I opened up to other routes that I could get support from. Whether it be from my nursery nurse or a life coach or other mums or Home Start.

There is just so much out there, that unless you know about it, it's really difficult, especially when you are a first-time mum. I think it's hard to know what is the norm and what support you should be having. You just don't expect to feel some of the things that you feel when you're a mum and like I think, some people have to deal with postnatal depression and anxiety and all the other mental health sides of it to then have a baby on top of it, during a pandemic, is really hard. But then when I look back on it now I'm like gosh I did that. I had a baby in a pandemic and she's great. And look at her, she's amazing, she's walking, she's talking and, going for the bushes. And she's amazing isn't she and she's doing all the things that she should do.

Yeah, she'll be none the wiser when she is older and I tell her about all what happened in this first year but I think it has definitely been a learning curve but I wouldn't change it for anything.

Hazel: Is there anything that you would say was just like a very big challenge last year that you think, that actually everybody out there who has children, who has babies is maybe struggling with this and how can other people help them.

Molly: It's a difficult one, because last year wasn't all amazing, there were times when it was really difficult. I had extremely bad post-natal depression and I think it's just checking in with people, it's really important to check in with those people who have just had a baby or not necessarily even just had a baby, people who have children and just make sure that they are okay and be that support.

Because we don't always need the professional support we need the social support and just to have someone there I think is really important.

Hazel: The first time that I met you Molly was about this big, on Zoom, laying on you and I know at that time there was some things that you were just a bit worried about, weren't you? About being able just to know what she needed and when she needed it and all those sorts of things and over

this last year, obviously you've spent lots and lots of time with her and she's developed amazingly. She's walking and talking, she's looking around at things. How have you found that, just gradually getting used to who she is as a little person?

Molly: It's really nice, I mean it's nice seeing her develop, at the beginning I was quite worried that she hadn't done any crawling or any rolling over and then she just got up and started walking and I was like OH, okay, clever pants! It was really nice and it's nice to see her develop into a little human being and to know that I created that and that all the stressful days were worth that. I love her to pieces and she has been the best thing to come out of a pandemic and she, she's kept me going. Like when the days have been a bit rough I just have to look at her and see her dancing or see her doing something silly and it just brings me back to reality that I am her mum and that I would do anything for her. And you've done a really good job.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos \(one\)](#)

Kathryn Hollins: Oh I hope you enjoyed that. She really has done a good job, let's celebrate all that parents and children have managed during the lockdowns and well done to each and every one of us for what we have achieved. Did you notice what helped Melissa? Having a safe space to talk with other mothers and share all of her feelings, that really helped her. We also could see the warm relationship that she has developed with Hazel. Now we are going to move onto our next video and this is a presentation that I have prepared especially for you, it's about twenty five minutes so do get comfortable and I hope that you enjoy it, see you on the other side.

[Keynote talk from Dr. Kathryn Hollins](#)

Kathryn Hollins: I would like to invite you to engage with me in thinking about how we help children thrive during this period after lockdown, how do we do that? My role is as a child psychiatrist and Psychotherapist and I have a particular focus in the first thousand days of life. So from conception through pregnancy, through infancy and into the early years and that why I am speaking with you today. So how do we help children thrive, have a look at this photo. I really like the way this child is smiling, looking up at the camera. Clearly confident, energetic, lively. Really thriving, how do we do this?

How do we help children to feel like this child feels. I am going to be talking with you partially about what we do as practitioners, as parents on a day to day level with children in our relationships. I am not going to be focusing on social or economic that might impact or influence the way we help children thrive. So the way that we help children thrive is by paying attention to the needs of everyone. It's the needs of children, it's the needs of parents and families and it's also the needs of practitioners. We are all so inter-connected that it really makes sense to think about the emotional needs of each of us. In this picture you can see some of the interconnection at play. There is the boy who is wanting to move forward in his journey and his father trying to hold on and go with him. There is the mother who is looking back and is encouraging the daughter to take another step and then these two adults are managing to hold onto each other and support each other in meetings these very different needs of these two children.

And that's just four people, there are so many different needs for us to hold in our mind when we are thinking about children. So where do we start? We start by developing trusting and safe relationships. It is that simple and it is that profound. Children grow deep and interconnected roots for healthy developments through their attachment relationships. This is what helps them to withstand change and loss and manage all their feelings. This picture of a tree is a wonderful visual description of how interconnected and rich the life of a tree is, just like a human being. All those different neuronal connections that are firing and wiring when we are forming attachments, when

we are forming our relationships. Children become grounded, confident, trusting and empathic by the process of being with sensitive and responsive adults and this is how they learn and how they grow up. Children grow these strong branches, like the ones you can see in this picture, when they are supported to explore their world. So how do children build trusting relationships? Let's use this map to illuminate what happens between a child and an adult, moment by moment. This map is the circle of security, which is a relationship tool that helps us to recognise and then meet children's emotional needs. It's a way of showing visually how children build secure attachments with their parents and care givers. I am going to take you on a journey around this circle so that you can see what is hidden in plain sight when trying to understand a child's needs. So, looking at this circle. We start with the hands on the left-hand side. These hands are, in attachment language, a secure base that a child forms with their parent or care giver. So, have a think about a baby. At the very start of life, they are showing their feelings. Their feelings of hungry, of discomfort. Being too hot, being too cold.

And when a parent is able to responsive and sensitive the child's needs are met and they feel more secure, more loved. This process enables them to step out on this process, onto and over the top of this circle. Step 1, I need you to support my exploration. This is a picture of a child, walking out, stepping out to explore the world and our job is, as adults, to support and delight and enjoy this child's experience. It's amazingly really, if you think about it, how children develop the confidence to move away and find out what is out there. The next step is coming back on the bottom of the circle and these are the moments when the children need to come back to their parent for reassurance or because they have fallen or they are feeling a bit unsure and what they need from us as the adult is for us to welcome them back. Welcome by coming to you, so this is what children need. I need you to welcome my coming to you. This is a lovely photo too, of a child being absolutely, one hundred percent welcomed back in this moment by mum and being picked up and lifted into the air. So this is step 3, the third stage of this circle that children go around all the time, in fact we all do. Going out, coming back. This third stage is the hands. The hands that welcome a child in when they need to come in for comfort and protection. For being delighted in, or to deal with their feelings and to organise their feelings. I need you to be the hands that hold me. Here is a father absolutely being the hands for his son and holding him whilst he needs to be held, for whatever reason, positive or negative. So when we think about helping children to thrive what is that they need from us so that we can rally be there through their process of forming good trusting relationships.

So what children need from is shown in this statement. Everything I need to know about supporting security. We need to be bigger, stronger, wiser and kind. We need to follow children's needs and when necessary take charge. It's a big job being the hands for children and that's what we do for them. So how do we do that? How do we take on this task of being the hands for children. Well, what parents need from practitioners, from family, from friends in order to meet the emotional needs of children is to hands arounds them so that they can be the hands for the child and this picture shows that really well.

Here are these children going around the circle of life. Here are these hands ready to hold and catch and nurture and here are these great big hands around everything which is supporting parents to do this really important task. This is what we as practitioners needs to do for parents. So what is the impact of the pandemic on children's health and development and what can we do about it. In order to answer the question about the impact of the pandemic I would like to start with thinking about the ordinary everyday experiences and transitions that babies and children experience. The everyday life, comings and goings that children needs support from adults in order to regulate their emotional states. Just have a look at this list. Have a look at what children are dealing with in the morning,

during the day, in the evening if they are leaving the house to go to child care or go to school and then come back again.

There is a lot for children to manage and become familiar with and cope with and when life is settled enough and calm enough children manage a lot of this extraordinarily well with the support of the adults in their lives. Both at home or in different settings. For some children even these are challenge and we need to remember that too, what this feels like for children even in ordinary times. So what happened to babies and young children to manage everyday experiences during the pandemic? Everyday life as we have just reflected on already requires children to be managing many transitions, for some babies and children during the pandemic they will have lost a parent or a close family member and they are needing to come to terms with grief in developmentally understandable ways.

Adults have been profoundly affected by the lockdown, and in many different ways. Some of living with still overwhelming grief and anxieties as a consequence. Children need sensitive, responsive adults, to accompany them through the journey of each day and this is even more so during times of great loss and change. But, as adults we are less emotionally available for children when we are distressed, scared, angry, devastated by what life has thrown our way. This will be true for parents and for practitioners. Children pick up our emotional states, they are really good at it. So this can effect their ability then, to make sense of their feelings and their experiences and it can effect their long term health and development. What we need to remember throughout this presentation is that things can change, it's never too late.

Children's brains are incredibly flexible, malleable, plastic. We can make change happen, so hold onto this whilst we are talking about these difficult things. So what happens to those ordinary transitions when life around a child is stressful? Or difficult? Instead of being manageable through the help of the adults who are interacting to help regulate a child's emotional experience, instead of that it feels rather different. And all these small changes that look very small to use as adults, may feel overwhelming or not so manageable. I guess that is for us to hold in mind when a child presents in ways that we are not expecting about something that seems so ordinary. It all feels too much to manage, perhaps because of what has been happening or what is happening right now. So coming back to the circle you can see that children that have had difficult experience throughout the pandemic, either personally through their parents and families experiences or both may find it much harder to go out in world, over the top of the circle and explore and feel free to be curious. They may really need to be held, they may need to be in those hands much more in order to build up their trust again and build up their sense of security and confidence, and that's okay if that where they need to be then that's absolutely the right place, let them be there and let them build up and recover and gradually find a way of exploring the world again I am now going to introduce you to the still face experiment by Dr. Tronick, this has become a really well known video showing an interaction between a mother and a baby and I really hope you are touched by seeing it.

Whilst you are watching notice how quickly the baby is aware of her mother's emotional availability disappearing, just see what happens. Babies this young are extremely responsive to the emotions and the reactivity and the social interaction that they get from the world around them. This is something that we started studying this thirty to forty years ago when people didn't think that infants could engage with social interaction. In the still face experiment what the mother did was she sits down and she is playing with her baby which is about a year of age and she gives a greeting to the baby and the baby gives a greeting back to her. This baby starts pointing at different places in the world and the mother is trying to engage her and play with her.

They're really working to coordinate their emotions and their intentions. What they want to do in the world, and that is really what the baby is used to. And then we asked the mother to not respond to the baby. The baby very quickly picks up on this and then she uses all of her abilities to try and get the mother back. She smiles at the mother, she points because she is used to the mother looking where she points. The baby puts both hands up in front of her and says what is happening here. She makes that screechy sound at the mother, like come on, why aren't we doing this? Even in these two minutes when they don't get the normal reaction they react with negative emotions. They turn away, they feel the stress of it, they actually may lose control of their posture because of the stress that they are feeling. It's a little bit like the good, the bad and the ugly. The good is that normal stuff that goes on, the normal stuff that we do with our kids. The bad is when something bad happens, but the infant can overcome it. When you stop the still face the mother and the baby start to play again.

The ugly is when you don't give the child any chance to get back to the good, there is no reparation and they are stuck in that really ugly situation. How did you feel when you were observing the baby? What was it like for you? And what do you think it was like for the mother? I am always so moved by the moment in which the mother reconnects and says I'm here and the baby is able to reconnect and they are able to repair this rupture between them. So does everyday distress matter for children's long term physical and mental health? When parents are overwhelmed, stressed or depressed for long periods of time and children don't have other adults that can offer emotional availability this can create toxic stress in children and this can effect long term health and development.

This is why we need to take this seriously. As we showed in the still face experiment there are always going to be moments when we are not in connection with the child. That is ordinary, we don't have to get it right all the time. But toxic stress is about when things go on and on for a child and we want to really prevent this as practitioners and as parents. We want to really think, what is lifelike for this child? Are there things we can do to make changes and how can we do that? Let's really think and share. We need to listen and accept feelings, see what the feelings are. And we need to accompany children, parents and each other through hard times. So that everyone can develop their emotional resilience. What can practitioners do to help children thrive? I have developed and A B C with my colleague Jenny Peters.

A for Anticipate and be curious. B for being with all the feelings and C for celebrate each step. So I am going to take through this A B C and I am looking at this photo again of this child, let's really remember what we are talking about. Helping children to thrive. To help children to feel good, to feel healthy, to feel able to engage with the world. This is A for anticipate. Can you anticipate before you meet with a child or a pregnant woman, or with a couple or a parent what life might be like for them? At what stage of development was this child during the pandemic? What might they have missed? What stage of family life, this mother or father, during the pandemic? What might be difficult this pregnancy, at this stage.

So for example, say for example you are meeting with a pregnant woman. Pregnant with her second child, one thing you might anticipate is that if she was pregnant with her first child during the pandemic should would have had a very different experience than what you can offer her now during more ordinary times. When it is easier to meet each other, it's easier for her to meet other pregnant women. It's easier for her baby, for her partner. What was it like for her during her first pregnancy? Was she alone a lot? Did she feel able to ask questions? When she had her baby was she supported in the way that she had hoped? There might be real grief in her about what it was like during her first pregnancy, during that first newborn experience and she may be excited about this

pregnancy. She may be looking forward to the difference but she may be carrying a mixture of feelings. Grief about how it was before for her first child, but also curiosity and excitement about the second. That's okay, you can hold both as her practitioner. Be curious, what is life like for you right now? You might ask a parent, you might think with a child. What was it like for you and your family during the pandemic? Find out about what happened, what is the story for this child, this parent. What were the losses? What were the gains? What was positive as well. Find ways of listening through stories, through books, through art, through games.

Encourage children and adults ways of remember and marking anniversaries with a special ritual. It is important to make space for grief, we need to make space for grief and sadness and as practitioners we can help parents to do that when they want to and when they are ready. For some that won't be for a while for others you will see an opportunity to allow that. B for Being with all the feelings. Have a look now at all these pictures. There are some really gorgeous expressions on these faces. Both children, adults, parents, babies. All the different feelings of joy, excitement, jumping in a puddle. Despondency, of curiosity, of joy. Can we be with all the feelings that might be there at the same time with a child or an adult. Knowing that's also how we can feel as parents and feel that as practitioners we often have mixed feelings. And that is okay, we can accept all of them. To say a little more about being with, the reason for being with a child's feelings is that it helps them to organise their feelings. It helps them to process them, it helps them to know that the feelings are not dangerous.

They might be really strong, but the feelings are okay. We can help them know that they can get through the other side and feel accompanied and looked after and that is the same for an adult you might meet with. Can you really say, how are you? And really listen to the response and give the feeling to that adult, to that parent. That you are strong enough today. That you are bigger, stronger, wiser, kind and you can hear really how they are feeling. Here is what one mum said to me, as advice she would give to us as practitioners. As a parent I want to meet someone who is not going to give me advice, but is going to listen to me. Someone who will be an ear rather than a checklist. Don't even ask if I am breastfeeding, look at the baby and look at me. Be present and available, do the box checking with the reverse approach. Come at the questions from a different angle. It is a relationship that you are building. It takes time. Don't sign me off too quick, I need to know that you are there. Just in case I need you. So this is C for celebrate the small steps. Each child is unique. There is no right or wrong speed. Can we go at their pace? This is a really big one. Can we go at the pace of each child and accept where they are at with their development and what they need. When we are building a tower of blocks you can't put the third block in before you put in the second, before you put in the first. Can we go one step at a time. Each person has their own life story up to this point. It can take a long time to trust a midwife, a health visitor, care giver or a teacher when we have difficult or traumatic experiences. Can we accept what a particular parent is able to manage. Little by little. If in doubt, take time to listen and build the relationship.

Health and development will follow. It really will. Some mothers and fathers and children will be really struggling. And will need more support, we know that. Reach out and consult with specialist services if needed but always ask and always reach out what might be possible. Things can change for the better with help. There may be things that you are unaware of for a particular parent or family or for a colleague. Reach out and talk about it, see what is there. Finally dear parents and practitioners, good enough is, well, good enough. Always remember, no matter how it feels you are enough as you are, said the horse, more than enough. Sometimes said the horse, sometimes what the boy said, sometimes just getting up and carrying on is brave and magnificent. Good enough

parenting means that we don't need to be perfect, children don't need perfection. They need us as parents and practitioners to be trying, to be creative, to be persevering.

A message particularly to you as practitioners, with all that we have been talking about with this presentation. Remember that your needs, your emotional needs are just as important if you are going to be those hands around a family, around a child. What do you need? Who can support you? Who can be your hands? Who can accompany you with all the feelings that you have in relation to the pandemic? The lockdown and ordinary life. Take a moment to reflect and see what you need for yourself and reach out and see in what ways those needs can be met. Here are some reports and relevant resources that you may be interested in if you want to find out more about the ideas that I have been sharing, thank you.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos \(two\)](#)

Kathryn Hollins: We are going to take you on a journey now. A journey through childhood and parenthood. From when a woman experiences pregnancy right the way through to a child's experience in primary school. When you meet with a child or parent at any stage of this journey, what do they need from you? That is our question. Let's start our journey in pregnancy. Many mums have found it lonely and hard being pregnant during lockdown, especially with first babies. Let's listen to Rachel and Frankie how crucial a good relationship between a mum and midwife is.

[Midwife Frankie in conversation with new mum Rachel](#)

Frankie: Hello I am Frankie and I am a midwife and I am here with Rachel, a new mum who had a baby in the pandemic and we are going to talk to you a little bit about what that has been like. So Rachel, what was it like to have a baby in the pandemic?

Rachel: It was, it was actually better than what I thought it would be. Antenatally I was in and out of hospital for various reasons but everyone was lovely but even though the visiting restrictions were in place and everything was fine even though I was in and out quite a lot.

Frankie: Would you say that you accessed the hospital as you would pre-pandemic or did COVID worry you about coming to the hospital at all?

Rachel: No I think pre-pandemic I used the triage like anyway, which I did for this pregnancy as well and I was told to either come into the hospital or stay put so that actually stayed the same. And then what was it like when you came into have your baby? It was actually unexpected when I had Genevieve, she was born early and luckily my partner was able to come in as it was in theatre. Not much seemed that different as everyone was in PPE when I had previous births, as I have had 2 previous births in theatre. So it didn't seem different, my partner was there and everyone was wearing PPE.

Frankie: And then what about on the postnatal ward? Because obviously that was quite different in terms of visiting.

Rachel: Yeah so, it was strange with my partner having to go home, but it was nice that we were able to facetime when I needed to speak to people at home and my family and the discharge was kept together really well, it was quite quick. As soon as myself and Genevieve were Ready to go home, we had seen all the doctors and we were discharged quite quickly, which was so lovely to get home.

Frankie: And how was it for you? From our point of view it was nice. We saw a lot more women interacting with each other on the postnatal ward, which maybe wouldn't have happened if there

were more people there, partners, some men. Curtains are often closed so that was nice. There was that community feel a little bit more and you would overhear women that had had babies before talking to women that hadn't had a baby and sharing little pearls of wisdom so that was really nice. Initially the masks were a bit of a communication barrier. We use our eyes and our mouths a lot to communicate with women so it was making sure we were using enough words and the right words and smiling behind the mask which you can still see, so that women felt reassured and all the other non-verbal communication as well.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos](#)

Kathryn Hollins: Did you notice for this third time mum, that actually she felt okay and she knew how to ask for help with breastfeeding when she needed it, I also loved the way the midwife Frankie talked about sharing and connecting and giving each other pearls of wisdom. For some families COVID rules have meant difficult separation between parents and older sibling, or parents and babies in special care baby units.

Don't underestimate how traumatic this may have been and this may resurface in conversations with you in the months and years ahead. For other newly forming families COVID will have meant losing a grandparent, just the moment when they are needed the most. Don't underestimate the power of simply listening and being with their pain and grief. So we are moving onto our next wonderful video, let's meet Emily and Jo and hear what health visitors are offering to children and families.

[Conversation between Junior Doctor Emily and Jo Neville from the Health Visiting team](#)

Emily: Hello, my name is Emily and I am a junior doctor with the NHS and I am a mum of two. I am here today with Jo Neville who is a health visitor and we are going to have a quick chat about the role of the health visitor and how they can support new mums. Especially during the pandemic. So Jo I wondered if we could start off with you telling me what a health visitor is and how they can help support families?

Jo: So Health Visitors are trained nurses or midwives and we support families so, mothers who are pregnant, antenatally; and children from birth to the age of 5 (before they go to school) and for mothers and fathers and for all the families emotional health. I think what I found when I had my children is that you sort of expect that all of these answers are going to come to you as an instinct. You know I'm going to know how to breastfeed, I'm going to know when to wean and how to do it and how to encourage them to sleep and it kind of becomes obvious, quite quickly, that those things don't all come naturally and you do have to get help. And I do remember my health visitor being a real wealth of information for me. Certainly for first time parents that transition to parenthood is a huge step.

Emily: So Jo, can you tell me what support is available for parents of children under the age of 5 via their health visitor?

Jo: I would ask parents to call us on the advice line, no question is a silly question, so please we are there to support you. We have our website, lots of information on there. And in terms of face to face home visits are those still happening through the pandemic. During COVID, particular people haven't been aware that we are offering lots of face to face contacts should they need them. So we're offering everybody a new birth visit. So when mum's had their baby we visit 10-14 postnatally that first visit we can just see how mums are coping, how families are coping. Is feeding going well, are babies putting weight on, are babies developing as they should be and giving that support and

reassurance to parents and we also see people face to face in clinics. Our clinics are booked clinics at the moment so we're making sure during COVID that they are safe and we also are using virtual platforms as well for support groups and developmental reviews.

Emily: I didn't know about the advice line, so that is a really good thing to kind of point out and I think had I been aware of an advice line I think I definitely would have used it when my kids were little; so it's really nice to know perhaps, because I think in those early weeks going out the house can sometimes be a bit nerve wracking for you know, lots of different reasons. Sometimes it's easier just to pick up the phone. I'd rather be able to tell somebody that it's absolutely fine than them lying awake at night, at 3 o'clock in the morning and worrying. Just that bit of reassurance, then absolutely, that's what we are here for.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos \(three\)](#)

Kathryn Hollins: How do we show a mum or dad that no question is a silly question? We do it with our calm presence, we do it with our body language. We do it without face, we do it with our warmth. Now we are going to enjoy meeting Damien who is talking with Lucy. Damien shows us beautifully how to go at the pace of a child and the pace of his mother, with wonderful results. I am sure you will enjoy this.

[Conversation between Home Start volunteer Damien and Lucy from the Health Visiting team](#)

Lucy: So, Hello, my name is Lucy and I am part of the Elmbridge health visiting team and this is Damien who is a Home Start volunteer. We see every family universally in a community, we work really closely with Home Start by identifying the families that need more support and we would refer the families that identify to Home Start and they would be allocated a volunteer such as Damien who will support to socialise, speak to them, and lots of other things that we can't probably even put into words.

Damien: So I am relatively new to Home Start and I went through training 2 years ago, I think it was two years ago. It could possibly be three years ago now with COVID lockdown. It's hard to remember sometimes. We went into lockdown sometime ago and it clearly came with a lot of challenges but it was very clear that the families needed us more at that point than they had done before and I suppose we were really quite reliant on our visits to them. Which by this stage, we were calling it walk and talk so we were outdoors. The family that I am supporting, a young lady and her son Hudson they love the outdoors as well so it made it so much easier and we can literally walk and talk.

To talk about some of the challenges that Hudson has, he is only four years old. He has problems with communication, he is the most darling smiley little boy you could come across and he is so much fun to be with and he clearly enjoys being with his mum and me as well. Hudson has just started primary school which he finds difficult. He is very anxious, his communication really is almost monosyllabic so you can ask him a question but he can't answer you. He can smile and he can copy you and sometimes he will just repeat the same words over and over again. Mum tells me that Hudson really looks forward to our visits, which is really gratifying. Because sometimes you wonder whether you are doing the right things and giving them the right support and if it is having an impact and making a difference which is effectively what we are there to do. So it was great a couple of weeks ago, we were out walking, three of us. And we thought about whether we could see if we could separate Hudson from mum because he is with her twenty four seven, she is his world and he gets really anxious when she is not there or when he is faced with a new situation. So when we were

walking in the woods as we generally do, I asked Hudson if he would like to go for a walk with me and he said yes he would. He looked at mum and indicated that she should sit on a log and wait there and then he took my hand and we walked off down the path, through the woods. I stopped with him every now and then and said Hudson do you want to go back and went no, no and pointed forward. So we kept going and we ended up about a quarter of a mile down the track and then it really was time to head back, which we did. But it's those sort of little indicators that tell you that he is becoming more confident, that he can separate from mum and that we are on the right track in terms of supporting him.

His speech is becoming better and he can be quite animated at times. We can always tell how anxious he is at the start of a walk and a talk because he brings different toys with him and depending on which toy he brings that tells us how he is feeling today, which is really sweet. So looking out for all of these little signs helps us to help him and understand how he is feeling. I think what is really lovely is that you have given Hudson a safe place to practice some of his communication skills. You have been a figure for him. Which is really important for his own emotional health as well. It sounds like you have been doing a really good job with him.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos \(four\)](#)

Kathryn Hollins: Isn't that heart warming to listen to. Damien gains the trust of both mum and son. Let's think back to the circle of security and how good relationships form. Hudson is able to go off and explore the world with Damien and he has formed a secure attachment with him. He feels safe, this process with Damien will strengthen the foundation that Hudson has when managing other transitions. Do you remember my long list of hello's and goodbye's that children have to do everyday with so much to navigate. Many children and parents have not had the opportunity to build confidence in new relationships in early years settings because of the pandemic. It will take time, and that is okay.

In fact it is time really well spent to help children to thrive. Did you also notice how Hudson showed how he was feeling by bringing different toys to Damien. Could this help with a child that you are working with to manage the transition from home. We are going to, during this webinar, share a link to Surrey's very lovely Time For Kids principles. Do get involved with those as they pinpoint what children need including a trusting relationship and being able to share your story, just as we saw with Damien and Hudson. We are now going to move on and hear from Sally and she is speaking about the therapy services with lots of useful information and tips.

[Sally Rodgers presentation on therapy services](#)

Sally: Hello, I'm Sally Rodgers and I am speaking on behalf of the paediatric therapies team for children and family health Surrey. We include physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. Like many of you in early years we have been busy during the last year supporting children and families and we have been really lucky and fortunate in Surrey that nearly all of our therapy teams have been able to continue working with families rather than being deployed to other areas of the NHS. This means that we have been offering phone calls and video calls and we have been seeing the top priority children face to face, using PPE.

Thankfully we were already well set up on our children and family health service website with resource packs and advice sheets and links to useful websites beforehand. In the early days of lockdown in speech and language therapy and occupation therapy we put our training slides for parents on YouTube and recorded our voice over the slides. And then we also created some rough and ready therapy ideas and put those on YouTube as well. We offered video calls with many families and these provided a really good opportunity to engage with them in the home setting

where children feel most comfortable with their own toys. Some families found this hard, and some clinicians. They found this hard if they were trying to do activities with children on the call and also if they were juggling homeschooling with older children. So instead some parents preferred to send us videos of how their children were doing, so that worked out well as well.

On our website, which I hope you all know. We have updated our physio advice sheets. Please check these out if you are concerned about a child's development of their physical skills, of their crawling, or if they're a toe walker or lots of other reasons. There is information on the importance of tummy time for babies and what physios think about baby walkers and lots of other information. We have updated our speech and language therapy early years resource packs as well, these have lots of information on how to help children's attention, listening, play, language, speech and social skills. WE have also included a section on speech anxiety on children not wanting to speak and children learning more than one language.

There are also colourful sheets about using approaches like intensive interaction to build a child's early communication skills and using objects of reference to support the understanding of routines. We have also created a new webpage to support with speech and language tips for children starting in reception in September also we continue to offer our occupational therapy helpline on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, please contact us if you want to talk to us about a concern for how a child is functioning in their day to day life. We are happy to hear even about little concerns you have. We have also seen concern highlighted in the news recently about children's speech and language skills being affected by the lockdown. We recognise that every child and families situation is different and we really have appreciated all of the work that the nursery settings have done during lockdown as we can really see how well this has benefited children and families. We know that you all have your developmental checklists regarding typical stages of development for speech, language and social skills and we're very happy for you to direct families to the I can talk in point progress checker website to reassure parents if you feel they need some extra information. And also remember the BBC tiny happy people website if you need some fresh ideas about supporting children's communication skills.

Something else that's positive that has come out of working more virtually is being able to link up so much more easily with our early years partners. We have been able to deliver training via zoom to the voluntary sector on speech language and communication strategies and we are also delivering training to Early Years settings with Pippa Gray's team so look for these, I know one that has happened already so I hope that there are some more dates out there. In some way though we do know that many of us have had enough of relying on technology to share information and make contact with people.

Our therapy teams have also experienced how odd it has been to have regular face to face contact with people on a professional level (using PPE) but not sure people from their own families for important occasions like Christmas and birthdays. We are feeling different about coming out of lockdown and that in order to be our best professional selves, positive selves both with parents and children that we need to look after ourselves too. Our therapy teams have learnt lots during lockdown about different ways that we can work with families and some of those ways we are going to continue with if that works but we definitely want to get back to more face to face, which I know we are doing more of now. We look forward to seeing you again in person if we haven't done so already. Alright, thank you.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos \(five\)](#)

Kathryn Hollins: Thank you Sally and a good reminder that we need to look after ourselves, remember if you are working with a family who has children with additional needs that the pandemic was probably especially difficult for those families and they will still be in the thick of that impact right now. Be kind, make allowances for their frustrations. They will be exhausted and spent. Can you lighten their load in any way? Can you reassure them that things can and will get better? All parents will feel ashamed about how they behaved towards their children at one time or another. Guilt comes with the job title. Can you remind parents and yourself that we can start again tomorrow and that all is not ruined. Now let's move on and meet a toddler group. Imagine a toddler and his or her parents experience during lockdown. We're going to meet Anika and Alex. Listen out for the team's amazingly creative ideas for how to work with families and build relationships.

[Conversation between Anika Wilson at Surrey Youth Focus and Alex Sanderson at St. Mary's church and toddler group](#)

Anika: Hello there, my name is Anika Wilson I work for a local collaboration charity called Surrey Youth Focus. We work with children, youth charities and public sector agencies to help improve the lives of children and young people in Surrey and it is my great pleasure to introduce Alex Sanderson to you. Alex, do you just want to say a little bit about who you are and what you do.

Alex: Sure, so my name is Alex Sanderson and I work for St. Mary's church which is the parish church in Ash Vale. In my role as project officer I have various duties, what's relevant to today is that I run two toddler groups and messy church. Through COVID we have also done food parcels to families that we support.

Anika: And so could you just tell us what some of the challenges have been through this last year. Either new challenges or challenges that were already there but made more difficult because of COVID.

Alex: When Covid hit we were desperate to keep in contact with those families and make sure that they were okay. Keeping in contact was a problem. As you can imagine the families that were the ones who were most financially affected didn't have any kind of safety net. They perhaps didn't even have the technology to Zoom even if they had chosen to do that. Some families we found that the virtual contact really worked, with some it really didn't. So what did you do to help support children and families whether that is practically or emotionally during the last year. Well it was certainly a challenging time and I think immediately what we tried to do was replace what we had had to close and replace it with an alternative.

So we started by replacing the toddler group with a toddler Zoom with stories and songs and actually it was quite interesting as the vicar had decided to call the community together and feel part of something by ringing the church bell everyday in lockdown at 12 and at 6 so we timed out toddler zoom to finish when the bell was ringing so we all joined in. The vicar zoomed in and rang the bell from church and we were all shaking all we had at home, bells, keys, pans, whatever. And the children absolutely loved feeling part of something and I did hear parents on other days that were not toddler zoom days the children would come running in when they heard the bells to tell them it was lunch time.

So it gave us shape to the day and it helped people feel part of something. We replaced messy play initially with a Zoom but it didn't work so well over Zoom. So we then did trials and we did doorstep kits and we have really grown that, I think we gave out about 60 kits at the last one. So I would really encourage people to give that a go if you haven't already. We did a lot of doorstep visits, pastoral

visits, walks up and down the canal just to help parents feel that they were being supported as well. And then having listened to the feedback and gauge what people really were we added a coffee Zoom for parents and carers and they absolutely loved that. In fact they were more appreciative of the coffee chat Zoom than they were of the toddler Zoom.

So that was a really great way to connect. Something that is probably a bit unique to St. Marys is that reverend Neil Lambert built a pizza oven in his garden and as soon as takeaways were allowed again we had people booking time slots for people to come into the garden as part of their trail or their messy church experience to come and have pizza which again was a lovely way to connect with people but also to feed families as well. So yeah we had a lot of fun. And so as things begin to open up again and other groups begin to meet back in person are there any practical tips or ideas that you could share? I think people can really over complicate things and at the moment we are allowed fifteen people either outdoors or indoors depending on what type of group it is and I must admit that even the bookings are very simple.

Text me, book a 6-week slot, you're in. And small is beautiful, we don't need to have a thousand toys that we then need to clean. My little toddler group is having a 6 week garden project to keep things outdoors, keep it nice and safe. There is no shared equipment. I have taught them how to make shovels out of an old milk carton so they each have their own and we are getting involved with planting things outdoors rather than having lots of equipment.

I think if there is one thing that I have learned it's that the depth of conversation and the relationship is the biggest thing. In some ways it's not important what the activity is, what is important is that we give people the opportunity to talk to us and the opportunity to talk to each other and somewhere to just be and reform those connections and those friendships that they have been missing so badly.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos \(six\)](#)

Kathryn Hollins: I love the bells. We all need familiar rhythms to give shape to our days, it helps us and our children feel safe. Did you notice that keeping it simple is good enough, it is good enough. If you want to try something new with parents that you are working with whatever your role reaches out. Give it a try, it is worth it.

Good relationships between parents and practitioners is what helps children to thrive. Our final two videos, which we are going to play one after the other, come from early years settings and a primary school. Listen out for the clear priority given by these teachers to the need to attend the children's emotional and social development. That is the building block for all learning and that is what they are doing, day by day. Also listen to the early years projects which are being developed in response to children's needs after the lockdown.

[Conversation between Horsell Village School and Peter Pan Nursery and Forest School](#)

Tara: My name is Tara May and interim deputy head teacher at the Horsell Village School.

Jane: Hi my name is Jane Reeve and I am the Headteacher at the Horsell Village School.

Sue: Hi my name is Sue Lewis and I am the manager of Peter Pan Nursery and Forest School.

Kathy: My name is Kathy Guy and I am the deputy manager and SENCO at the Peter Pan Nursery and Forest School.

Tara: So one of the first things that I think we noticed was the communication and language from the children and particularly the personal and social emotional development. That has been a big

focus of ours since coming back, particularly for reception, but also for the whole school right up and until year 2 for us. We had a big focus on wellbeing and readjusting back into making friends and what those friendships look like and things that we could do to support them in readjusting back into school life.

Kathy: Yeah I think the biggest thing is to really establish that sense of community we tried to keep it going during lockdown using a variety of different strategies that we put in place. Our well being phone calls and discussions with parents happened quite frequently and through our teacher videos so they could obviously still see us. But now coming back from lockdown it's about looking at how we can establish that sense of belonging, that sense of community. So we planned in quite a long transition to support them coming back in.

Tara: So for us, the only time we were completely locked down was last June, other than that we have been running all the way through but I would say that initially those children came back after that first lockdown they were really excited to be back. And it's only as time has gone have we noticed the differences in the personal, social and emotional development in their need to have adults.

They are seeking that connection. They are looking for adults to be involved in their play and they are less able to play independently with others and they are needing the adult support and that adult modelling.

Kathy: That is definitely true, that first term after the original lockdown it was really joyful, it was really lovely. They were literally skipping and waving and really excited to see all their friends and I think we have seen over time those social skills have needed a lot of work. We have been doing a lot of modelling, a lot of staff needing to be in the play and modelling that social interaction. I think it's that self regulation as well.

Sue: So, as time went on as you say, we found out that children kind of reverted back to being either happy or sad but obviously we know that there is an awful lot of emotions in between all that and actually helping them with the strategies to help them self regulate has been a considerable amount of focus. And there was, which I think is on the same kind of theme, that we had a lot of our little children need to almost constantly check in with adults. Needing validation and needing to have an adult sort of, to comment and see what they are doing and to notice. So because we have kept the parents at arms length they have had to come in and be more independent about hanging up their things, knowing where their stuff is. Putting their wellies on the wrack and all of those sorts of things and they have been able to flourish doing that.

Jane: And the handwashing, and reminding each other about the handwashing. We have done a lot on wellbeing and promoting wellbeing and mindfulness and we have done a lot through our recorded assemblies so our parents could really see how we teach that with the children and they could join in with the language we use with the children so that we recognise feelings and how you can deal with those feelings and I think that was supportive of parents so that they could see the modeling to parents and we have had really good feedback from parents when they have returned to say that what you were doing was really supportive and we could see exactly what you were doing and the focus on mental health and wellbeing which is always very important.

It's only strengthened that link between school and home and home and school but also to be able to teach those children those strategies so if there are moments when they are outside in the playground or in the classroom and they are struggling with those social interactions or even just struggling with a piece of work it is kind of those self help strategies so we have been teaching them

deep breathing techniques. I have used a lot of language recently that there are people to help you but also there are things that you can do to help you and that you're validating their emotion that it's okay to feel angry or that it's okay to feel sad but let's find a way to manage it together.

[Pippa Gray and Wendy Simpson update on Early Years surveys and projects](#)

Pippa: Hello everybody my name is Pippa Gray and I am Surrey County Councils Early Years manager. I lead the early years educational effectiveness team who are responsible for quality across the sector and supporting settings to ensure that they meet the needs of all of their children.

Wendy: Hi, my name is Wendy Simpson and I am the senior Early Years Advisor in the North West of Surrey and I work alongside Pippa.

Pippa: We want to talk to you today about one of the findings that came from one of the surveys that we carried out regarding the impact of COVID in terms of their learning and development. Within the area of personal, social and emotional development practitioners were most concerned about children's ability to manage their feelings and their behaviour and also making relationships. It is unsurprising when they have had limited social experiences throughout two lockdowns at this point. They are also really concerned about children's communication and language with a particular focus on speaking but also on their listening and attention.

As a result of both the Surveys we have managed to secure some funding to provide two projects, the first one being the THRIVE approach and the second one being Early Talk Boost. The THRIVE approach is a whole setting approach that is grounded in neuroscience, attachment theory and child development. It is designed to support babies and young children to develop healthy and secure attachments which provide the foundations for emotional resilience and healthy stress regulation. We are therefore providing training for 56 Early Years practitioners across Surrey to become THRIVE licensed practitioners.

This training will enhance their skills and knowledge to help ensure that the children in their care develop an emotionally healthy start in life and support all children to become confident. But those children who may be at risk of delay will hopefully accelerate their progress and bridge any gaps in their learning. The second project that we are launching is focused on supporting children communication and language.

We have worked with the well known communications charity ICAN to help the whole of our advisory team in talk boost. Early Talk Boost is a targeted intervention aimed at three and four year old children with delayed language. The aim is that will boost their language skills and narrow the gap between them and their peers.

[Kathryn Hollins link between videos \(seven\)](#)

Kathryn Hollins: Oh I hoped you enjoyed those videos, they are doing such wonderful work. Did you notice that the teachers and the caregivers in both school and nursery have found that children are needing adults to be with them more in their play since the lockdowns think back to the circle of security. These adults have recognised that children need to be held more at the moment and that they need to build their confidence and their trust in the hands of the teachers and the caregivers.

And that means that they will then be able to confidently go out and explore their world again. Whilst at home during the lockdown children will have continued to learn many things. Some good, and some difficult. Our role, whatever their role is, is to be interested and to listen and when the time is right help children to make sense of all their experiences during the pandemic, during any time. This sense making is what helps each of us to thrive.

Webinar close

Kathryn Hollins: Just to finish off for the last couple of minutes, and thank you for sticking with us. Of course, all the principles that we have reflected on today apply to older children and young people but that would be another webinar. So, let's remember what matters most about what matters most from our conversations and reflections today. Let's listen to children using all the creative ways that we can in order to understand their needs.

They need us to delight in them and our enjoyment of them and our sensitive meeting of their emotional needs literally fires and wires their brains for the future. Go at the child's pace, one step at a time is good enough. Secondly, listen to parents. Be interested in the story, be non-judgemental and be with all the feelings. Finally listen to yourself and your needs, this matters for everybody. Make space for grief for getting support and for joy, yes you are allowed delight and happiness in your life. Children thrive best when the adults who love, care for and support them are thriving too. Thank you, we reached the end.