



# Top Tips for Allied Health Professionals and Clinical Psychologists

Building resilience and positive self-image in the COVID generation

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Children and young people have undoubtedly been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr Helen Care, a leading Clinical Psychologist who works with children, teens and families, shares ten top tips on how you can build resilience and positive self-image in the COVID generation.

- 1. Ask, not assume.** Be aware that your clients may have had mixed experiences during the COVID period with significant disruptions to school, family life and 'normal' routines. Their lockdown might have been good, bad, weird or all the above. We should not pre judge, but should let them tell us about it. Try "How was it missing school?" rather than loaded phrases such as "Bet you loved all that time off."





**2. Choose your words carefully.** Our adolescents are at a developmental stage of having to explore who they are, so it's important we pay attention to how we reflect back to them with our words. Talk to your client about resilience and not failure – for example, “What did you learn from the experience?” or “What has been the biggest change for you?” and not “What was the worst part?”

Focusing forward can also help build optimism. Ask clients what they are looking forward to, and what things that have changed that they might like to keep doing.

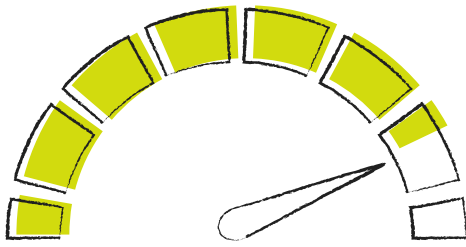
**3. See the bigger picture.** Similarly, don't assume that your clients' issues are all COVID related. Pre-existing conditions may have come to light more during lockdown, or alternatively been masked by lockdown, and so now are becoming obvious. Check out Pearson Clinical's portfolio for some great resources that can help you establish what is going on, such as the [Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition \(BASC-3\)](#) and [Millon™ Adolescent Clinical Inventory-II \(MACI-II\)](#).

**4. Re-strengthen social skills.** Many people feel that their social skills have suffered over the last year, and young people are no exception. Go gently and give your clients space to speak. Young children in particular may not have been speaking to many strangers, so they may be shy, or need reinforcement around engaging in social interaction.

Older children may have got out of the habit of socialising, and need time to reintegrate. As psychologists, we can be explicit when explaining how these social interactions work. Offer conversation starters, and they will speak up when they have something to say, e.g. “It might feel difficult to talk sometimes, but is there anything you wanted to mention?” or “Is there anything that has been playing on your mind or bothering you recently?”







**5. Talk about risk-taking.** A major part of growing up and being an adolescent is learning how to take and manage risks. Many risk-taking behaviours over the past year have been blocked, or socially frowned upon. Even seeing friends could have been something for which teens were criticised.

Now they may be flexing their risk-taking muscles more, though in less skilled ways than a year ago. Anecdotally, accident rates and A&E visits are higher than this time last year, and, possibly, this time pre-pandemic. Talk about risk explicitly and ask: "How are you going to keep yourself safe in the future?"

**6. Address health anxieties.** Many young people, like many adults, will have had anxieties triggered by stories of COVID, viruses and spreading of disease, etc. Ask explicit questions about fears and anxieties and take these fears seriously.

Provide factual evidence, and help your client acknowledge and fact-check their worries. I find it helps to use a Narrative Therapy technique to externalise the worry in discussions. For example: "Has your worry been making you think about getting ill?" This helps to make the worry feel separate from the young person and provides some space for them to consider it.

Another way of using this technique would be to ask more general questions about anxiety first, e.g. "When your worry is around, what does it make difficult? What does it have you worrying about?"



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### **7. Notice how they're moving on.**

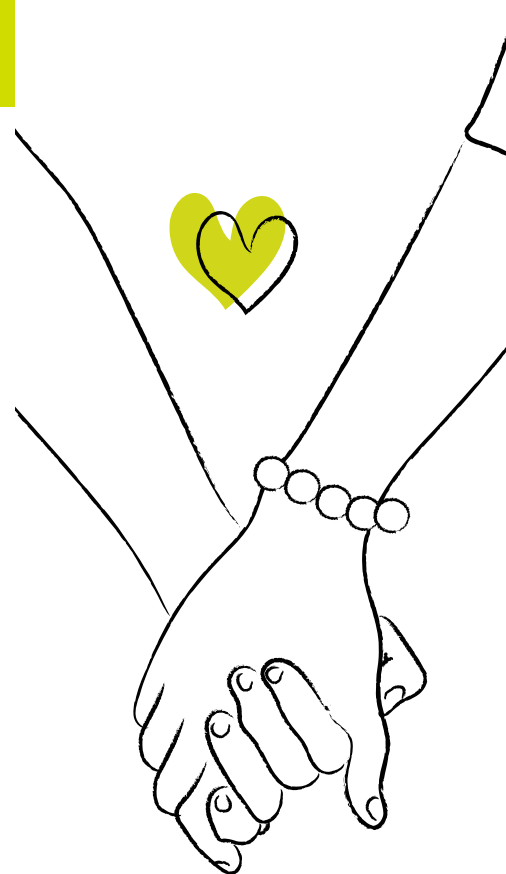
The pandemic has taken up a far greater proportion of young people's lives than our own – and the younger they are, the greater the proportion of their life has been spent living with it.

Very young children won't necessarily remember 'pre-pandemic' life. Older kids will, but life didn't stop for them – and many resent the suggestion that it has, particularly when, for GCSE students, a fifth of their school time has been disrupted. Ask your client what else has gone on for them, not least their friendships and achievements.

**8. Focus on friendships.** In their teenage years, young people move away from their most significant attachment figures (parents/carers) towards shared attachment with peers. During COVID, friendship groups fluctuated significantly. Some friendship groups got stronger while some grew apart. For some young people this was, and still is, a genuine trauma. For others it is an opportunity for change and growth.

Young people connecting with professionals, particularly in health care settings, might be there because they are ill or experiencing other difficulties. Their friends can be an important source of support to get them through.

Focus on which friends have been important to your clients, ask them how they have kept those friendships going, and explore who might be around to support them now.



## Dr Helen Care

### Clinical Psychologist

Dr Helen Care is a Clinical Psychologist who works with children, teens and families. Together with her team at [A Confident Start](#), she creates guides and resources to support her clients. Helen has also worked with Pearson providing advice for anxious and worried children and teenagers as part of [Pearson's Wellbeing Zone](#).

For further information, visit [www.aconfidentstart.com](http://www.aconfidentstart.com)

*'Top Tips for Allied Health Professionals and Clinical Psychologists'* has been created by Dr Helen Care for Pearson Clinical, 2021.

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