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## Children 'refusing to eat over Covid-19 fear,' charity warns

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By Charlotte Sullivan

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## A charity has warned of a new trend of children refusing to eat, for fear of catching Covid-19.

Global's Make Some Noise charity, Kids Inspire in Essex, say anxiety among children between the ages of 8 and 10 has surged since the coronavirus pandemic started, with one of the behavioural consequences from that anxiety being a fear of food and a fear of eating.

Johnathan Reuben's 8 year old daughter Florence stopped eating during lockdown.

He told us "She was worried about everything... about people dying, about her dying, about the people that she loves dying.



A charity has warned of children rejecting meals over Covid-19 fears. *Picture: PA*

"Then she would worry about whether she was going to get poisoned and whether she'd eaten something that would poison her. It got to a point where she just didn't want to go anywhere or do anything. She'd get very worried almost to the stage where she was hyperventilating.

"She stopped eating... a meal that would have taken her 15 minutes, took her an hour... she would worry that she'd eaten something like a bit of plastic plant or flower. She knew she hadn't but she would worry herself into a panic. It's horrible to watch and you feel helpless."

But he says that Florence has been helped by therapy sessions at Kids Inspire, based in Chelmsford, who support children and young people with mental health issues.

CEO Sue Bell, says that since March this year, they've had 607 specific referrals related to young people who are struggling because of the pandemic, with the biggest symptoms being high

levels of anxiety and high levels of depression.

Sue told us “Many (children) have stopped eating and many are imagining that they’re being poisoned, even by drinking water. It’s been really extreme and something that we couldn’t and wouldn’t have predicted when we knew there was going to be an impact on mental health.”

She said “When you just have the odd case, you kind of wonder what else is going on in a particular family dynamic. But when you start to see a trend and you have more and more cases... there’s something about the pandemic and Covid and the virus that I think is really getting into the minds of young people and food is something that we do to survive. So it feels like there’s something around the fact their survival has been threatened.”

The government’s released guidelines on how we can support young people around us.

The advice includes listening and acknowledging concerns, providing clear information about the situation and being aware of our own reactions.

But Sue says it’s important parents also know when it’s time to ask for professional help: “It’s so hard to parent a child who’s going through something like this because it is completely irrational and if we as adults can’t explain it to ourselves, we just feel quite helpless.

“Quite often we are picking up the helplessness and hopelessness of our kids and it’s remembering that we are still able to help but it’s very much about remaining as calm as possible and knowing when to ask for help.

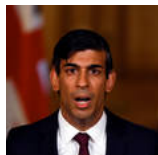
“It is ok to ask for help. When we start saying that (our children’s) anxieties have got anxiety, that’s when we definitely know that they need help.”

Kids Inspire have been holding special online sessions specifically for parents of children with anxiety due to the pandemic.

**For more info visit: <https://kidsinspire.org.uk>**

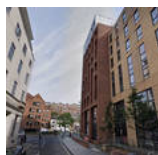
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