



Ask The Therapist...

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this is by far the most extraordinary Mental Health Awareness Week ever! Woodbridge High School's clinical lead Melanie Stephenson has been busy answering student questions about mental health over the week as well as student's concerns about lockdown.

'I'm worried my friends will forget about me, we use FaceTime to chat sometimes but it isn't the same- sometimes I worry if we'll still be friends when all this is over. (Student, Yr 8)

It's so natural to feel disconnected from others at the moment, we can sometimes find it hard to imagine that others are holding us in mind when we're not right in front of them. What I can hear though, is that you are thinking about your friends even though you're not with them so is it possible they are doing the same? It's likely you can still see their faces even if you close your eyes or can imagine their voice or what they would say to you, even in their absence. We *can* hold others in mind and when that becomes tricky- especially when a lot of time has passed- technology that allows video/voice calls or text messages or even playing games at distance can be a really valuable way to connect.

'I'm worried about my Mum who is shielding from the Coronavirus, she hasn't been out the house in ages and she seems really down. Also what if she gets ill? Sometimes it's annoying to have

to help her as she can't move very well but then I feel guilty for even thinking that...'
(Student, Yr 9)

It sounds like you've lots on your mind and that circumstances right now are stressful. It's entirely understandable to have mixed feelings including being annoyed with the situation, concerned about Mum and maybe a bit fearful or overwhelmed? I'm sure in just knowing that you've noticed her low mood, Mums feels a sense of being cared for which in itself can be uplifting. There is a great deal of anxious energy in the air at the moment, I wonder if there's something both you and Mum can do at home to unwind and spend some restorative time together. The Redbridge Education Psychology service have set up a [helpline for parents and carers](#) in the borough which Mum might find valuable support. We can't predict what lies ahead but can sometimes manage those fears or worries by staying with present experience, this is often referred to as 'mindfulness' which you can find out a bit more about [here](#).

'I don't know why I just feel in a funk. I'm worried I'm not going to get in to my first choice uni even though I studied hard since mocks. The ending was so rushed and I can't help feeling angry... even my summer trip with friends has been cancelled. It's like it's all been a waste of time.'
(Student, Yr13)

It feels many of us are grieving what could have been over this period; for you maybe it's

especially pronounced since this promised to be such a transformative time that you've had on the horizon for many years. It really is a process of loss, this time period looks nothing like expected and that's hard to make sense of. Firstly, be reassured that you're not alone, students across the country are stunned and many disappointed at what might feel like a missed opportunity to finally demonstrate learning you've been committed to over the course of your school career. Trust that your teachers will be just as determined to shine the best light on that learning that they can. Equally, we are a world learning powerful lessons in flexibility and adaptability so I imagine it's through that same lens that universities will be admitting students. Afford yourself compassion if you can, feeling bereft of the ending you felt owed is legitimate, as is your anger.

John Lennon said *'Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans'*, sadly we can't always control our circumstances and this can feel disempowering but your journey hasn't stalled, it has just diverted. There will be new opportunities, other trips and you will undoubtedly regain a sense of purpose. Allow yourself to feel the spectrum of emotions you've described in the meantime and exercise self-care when possible. Click [here](#) for some helpful self-care ideas from the Anna Freud centre.