



Supporting children and young people through Covid

By Rae Morfin of Transforming Lives for Good (TLG), who has been leading the Emotional Rollercoaster training across our Associations

I think we may all have said at least once in our lives: “Well that was some rollercoaster!” when referring to an event or set of circumstances that have taken us through an array of strong emotions. There’s something about the highs and lows, the fast and slows that we can all relate to as we journey through life.

I have had the joy of spending time with so many Baptist Union leaders, children, youth and family leaders, workers and volunteers on our virtual training tour of the UK, to share with you *The Emotional Rollercoaster* resource. At TLG we are all about enabling local churches to help struggling children. This partnership is a great example of how, together, we can make a difference for those who need to know the love of God and the strength of fellowship for such a time as this. It’s a resource that offers therapeutic

responses, approaches and activities to explore emotional health, it is especially relevant for supporting children who have been impacted by lockdown and Covid-19.

In our chats at the end of each training event, we’ve been hearing about children, young people and families in your communities who are feeling stretched and at the end of their own resources. It is probably of no surprise that a recent ‘large-scale study, undertaken by the NHS in July 2020, found that clinically significant mental health conditions amongst children had risen by 50 per cent compared to three years earlier. A staggering 1 in 6 children now have a probable mental health condition.’ (*The state of children’s mental health services 2020/21* by the UK Children’s Commissioner¹)

At TLG we are constantly thinking about how to

resource and equip the church to step in, to be there for those children and teens who are struggling in our society.

After time spent listening to God, when the pandemic hit last year, I felt drawn to ‘be still’ and listen to his words in the Psalms, and in particular to Psalm 23. I drew such strength from knowing we are connected to the one true eternal God, the Good Shepherd who can lead us all through any ‘rollercoaster’ of the season we may face. As he leads us in this way, may we bring him to others in this way too.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...

It’s a matter of trust isn’t it? If we know he’s guiding, that he can see the end from the beginning, we can put our hand in his and let him lead us, each moment, each day.

¹ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/mental-health-services-2020-21/>

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake...

Our God can only be true to himself and he is love, provider, way maker, powerful and faithful. We get a sense of this when we enjoy his creation, where all our senses are engaged in awe and wonder. Where we can be excited or calmed, energised or find rest and be restored.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for YOU (God) are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me...

When we walk through the toughest ask of our lives, our God doesn't pull back,

he draws near, constantly loving, being there, giving us his truth, which can often bring the right perspective for the trials we face. It's here that our trust in him is realised and his promises are our fortress.

How does he do it?

Through his people loving, enabled by his Spirit. It's when we pray, bring verses to speak his heart, show hospitality, show generosity, creativity in care, by just 'being there'. It's the fruit of the Spirit developing in us, pouring out to each other.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows...

He knows when times are hard, when we feel cornered, when there

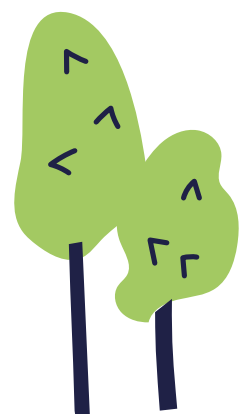
doesn't seem to be a way out. I don't think it's a coincidence that many food banks, holiday meal clubs and community food pack deliveries involve a myriad of churches. It is God's heart to provide for those in need.

I've heard a lot of accounts of gratitude and joy when those who never expected to be in such need, find friendship, generosity and faith on their doorstep from a Christian who carries God's love in word and practical deed.

Surely goodness and mercy (or in some translations – love) shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

We have an eternal hope – an assurance that we can hold on to, that we can point others to. He is the Good Shepherd who knows what we need, who sends his sentinels of goodness and mercy to faithfully follow us. He is our home.

The Emotional Rollercoaster resource was written to demonstrate the heart of God along with known behavioural and neurological understanding.



Here's a little breakdown of our training content:

● **Being leader ready**

What is emotional health and what does it look like to be emotionally healthy? It is important that we understand the need to care for our own emotional health in order to better support others for longer. Before we start exploring how to help others, let's take some time for self-reflection; to acknowledge what stress looks like for us personally and learn new strategies to turn that stress-dial down.

● **How does emotional distress affect us?**

Here we explore the impact of emotional distress on the body and the long-term effect adverse childhood experiences can have on a person's life. We address how emotional distress can affect a person's learning ability, their brain, behaviour, and social/emotional well-being.

● **How to bring support**

Finally, we take a look at how we can support those who are struggling. Bringing our 'three step' approach to equip you for those tricky situations, and taking a look at how to deliver the *Emotional Rollercoaster* resource. It's important to remember that we aren't the professionals and don't need to try to 'fix things,' but we can be well prepared to come alongside those that need our help.

It's time to talk about emotions with our children and teens. To let them know that they are God made. That the spectrum of emotions felt and demonstrated are like the signal-box for how we're doing in body, soul and spirit. That we can do this by following God's commands to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and to love your neighbour as yourself'. Matthew 22:36-40

Let's learn together, showing them how to

govern and navigate the emotional signals we can all feel. For we have heard from thousands of church volunteers, via our TLG programmes, about the power of 'just showing up' and being there for children, teens and families.

My prayer is that this resource will be a practical tool for you to use in supporting children and teens to navigate their God-given emotions. So that when you journey with those who are struggling, they will feel supported, loved and connected in to a God who cares.

May many be drawn to their Good Shepherd by his loving kindness and tender mercies shown through you. Amen.

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As founder of TLG's Early Intervention programme, Rae now has strategic oversight in therapeutic approaches and delivery at TLG.