



WEBINAR

VULNERABILITY, FRAGILITY AND HOPE

WEDNESDAY 18 MAY 2022 | 4-6PM

**REFLECTIONS FROM
RESEARCH & CHAPLAINS**

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH



ABOUT NICER

The National Institute for Christian Education Research

NICER is a University Research Centre at Canterbury Christ Church University. It undertakes research to inform the contribution of faith to the public understanding of education, to aid the mission of church schools, universities and Christian education in communities, to develop and improve religion and worldview education, and to support the work of Christians in education and leaders in education. It uses qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research approaches in that work, and has developed novel approaches to investigating school ethos, character and curriculum in Christian schooling.

NICER receives funds from charities and other grant-making research bodies, supported by the University's commitment to the centre. NICER collaborates with specialists from other leading institutions, schools and research centres, including institutions of other religions and worldviews, across the country and from around the world. It acts as a hub to promote international Christian education research at the highest level, through seminars and conferences.

For more information about our work and to download recent reports visit our website www.nicer.org.uk

VULNERABILITY, FRAGILITY AND HOPE

Introduction

Vulnerability: The pandemic has impacted everyone; all have been vulnerable to the consequences of this global situation. The pandemic has impacted people's lives with variable magnitude, individually and collectively. Loss in its various forms, whether it is loss of social gatherings, loss of confidence, loss of health or loss of loved ones, has touched everyone's life.

*The effect is greater the closer you are to the "storm."*¹

Fragility: The pandemic has illuminated how important connection is to others and how fragile the connections and relationships that hold a community together are.

Hope: The road to recovery from trauma is fraught with complexity. The "norms" of life have been dismantled, and the 'new normal' is emerging in uncertainty and anxiety. Recovery from trauma is rooted in the relational. It is about having a sense of sustained connection with others, walking beside each other with love and empathy.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

John 10:10

This webinar will focus on vulnerability, fragility, and hope.

- The researchers investigating this issue with the chaplains from our virtual community of practice will provide an update on the latest findings.
- There will be an opportunity for you to share and contribute your perceptions and experiences.
- It is hoped that our collaborative contribution can shape and inform an understanding of the chaplain's role when supporting the vulnerable, restoring fragile connections and bringing the light of Christ into the school community.

For more information about our project, please visit www.nicer.org.uk/spiritual-resilience

1 Mac Manus, J. (2021) Resilience, Trauma and Pastoral Recovery: A briefing for faith communities Adapted and based on "Resilience and coping beyond the pandemic - A briefing for Public Health Teams"

1. WHO ARE THE VULNERABLE STUDENTS IN A PANDEMIC?

There is no conclusive definition of the term vulnerable when referring to the needs of children.² Vulnerability is complex; it usually triggers an 'accumulation of adversity.'³ How often do we encounter a vulnerable child who presents with only one isolated vulnerability?

The pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated the enormous sense of vulnerability. Due to the complex nature of vulnerability, it has been suggested that instead of relating vulnerability to individuals or groups, it may be better viewed as a *universal human condition* linked to life situations.⁴ Vulnerability can manifest in diverse ways. For some, it may be temporary; for others, their circumstances mean they are caught in a continuous cycle of challenge and adversity.

Each person is unique, and by virtue of our human nature, we are all vulnerable and have needs. No one should feel that a characterization or label defines who they are, whatever someone's circumstance. Irrespective of background, culture, capabilities, and beliefs, it is an individual's needs, not labels, that should be prioritised and recognised to enable students to flourish.

Reflective Questions

Has our understanding of vulnerability shifted in meaning with the pandemic?

What does vulnerability look like in your context?

How are chaplains identifying and responding to the vulnerabilities amongst the Year 7 pupils?

2 Children's Commissioner, (2017) Constructing a Definition of Vulnerability –Attempts to Define and Measure. Accessed via <https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/constructing-definition-vulnerability-%E2%80%93-attempts-define-and-measure> on 31/01/2022

3 Bryce, I. (2020). Responding to the accumulation of adverse childhood experiences in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic: implications for practice. Children Australia, 1-8

4 Virokannas, E., Liuski, S. & Kuronen, M. (2020) The contested concept of vulnerability – a literature review in European Journal of Social Work, Vol. 23:2, 327-339. DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1508001

2. HOW ARE SCHOOLS RESTORING AND SUSTAINING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY?

The pandemic has enforced a rethinking of what it means to be a community. Although virtual togetherness during lockdown was a welcomed form of connection, we lost that sense of physical belonging cultivated through person-to-person contact. Virtual communities have certainly gained currency in recent years, fostering convenience and ease of communication. However, they also may give a false sense of connectedness. There is a need to nurture physical communities for better mental health⁵. They can operate as a “social cure,”⁶ positively reinforcing personal identity, nurturing growth through trauma, and nourishing a resilient mindset.

Trauma marks a “new normal” in that there is no possibility of the person returning to who they were before. A radical break has occurred between the old self and the new one.

S. Rambo, 2019⁷

Induction into secondary school engenders a sense of belonging, which is critical for students’ well-being and school learning. Research has shown that in restoring human wholeness, we need to connect with the innate spiritual core present in every individual.⁸ Spirituality is a conduit for meaning-making, providing comfort, hope and support through times of tribulation and uncertainty.⁹ Whilst spirituality need not be expressed through religious belief, for some young people, their spiritual core is expressed through their faith in God. Therefore, providing opportunities for students to engage with the worshipping community and encounter the power of the Gospel is crucial for restoring bonded connections with self, others, and God.

Reflective Questions

How is the sense of community being restored in your context?

What have we learnt from the pandemic about a sense of community?

Is there a role for school chaplains in the induction process to nurture a Year 7’s sense of belonging?

5 <https://www.mercycare.org/bhs>

6 Resilience and coping beyond the pandemic - A briefing for Public Health Teams Jim McManus, Vice-President, ADPH. London (2021): Association of Directors of Public Health.

7 Rambo, S. (2019) How Christian theology and practice are being shaped by trauma studies. Talking about God in the face of wounds that won go away. Accessed via <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/how-christian-theology-and-practice-are-being-shaped-trauma-studies> on 16/04/2022

8 Miller, L. (2015). Why Kids Need Spirituality. Accessed via <https://www.thecut.com/2015/04/why-kids-need-spirituality.html> on 12/10/21

9 Ryan, P. L. (1998). An exploration of the spirituality of women who survived childhood violence. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 30(2), 87–102.

3. HOW ARE CHAPLAINS OFFERING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IN A CRISIS?

The chaplain's role involves walking alongside others in the highs and lows of life. On the journey of life, they can epitomise for others the Gospel teaching, *I was a stranger, and you welcomed me*, (Mt.25:35). Creating and fostering an environment where a climate of hope exists and positive relationships can develop, underpins a chaplain's role. Through witness, worship, and comfort, they can provide models of Gospel truths that help students reflect upon and grapple with their own life experiences.¹⁰

Christian communities can provide what theologian Serene Jones identifies as containers in which experiences of trauma can be held and transformed.¹¹ (S. Rambo, 2019)

Induction into secondary school engenders a sense of belonging, which is critical for students' well-being and school learning. Sancho and Cline (2012)¹² argued that there is a case for '*educational psychologists to become more involved in this area*' to nurture this sense of belonging. Could school chaplains contribute to nurturing a Year 7 pupil's sense of belonging to the school community?

Chaplains are rooted in the wisdom of faith and spirituality and can call upon this rich heritage to support the vulnerable, acknowledging their pain and affirming their worth. They provide opportunities to connect students to their faith, community, and their school traditions' historical and cultural narrative.

Reflective Questions

How are, or can chaplains bring hope to vulnerable students during times of crisis?

What role does the chaplain take in the induction process and welcoming new students into the school community's collective historical and faith traditions?

How are chaplains supported and accompanied in this task by the wider school community?

10 Rambo, S. (2019) How Christian theology and practice are being shaped by trauma studies. Talking about God in the face of wounds that won go away. Accessed via <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/how-christian-theology-and-practice-are-being-shaped-trauma-studies>

11 Ibid, (2019)

12 Sancho, M., & Cline, T. (2012). Fostering a sense of belonging and community as children start a new school. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29(1), 64.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH**
Canterbury Christ Church University
nicer@canterbury.ac.uk
www.nicer.org.uk

