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Looking after yourself, looking after your children

There is a lot of uncertainty around the current COVID-19 outbreak, particularly given that the situation is constantly developing and the information about the virus remains incomplete.

Understandably, this is causing a lot of worry and anxiety for people. Potentially coping with isolation, and having children and young people at home, often when people are trying to work themselves, adds another layer of stress. It is therefore important to not only consider our physical health during such challenging times, but also to pay attention to our mental health. It is normal to feel worried, stressed and anxious when we are faced with uncertain situations, but the sooner we acknowledge and learn to take care of our mental health, the healthier and better equipped we'll be to cope with the situation we're having to face.

Looking after yourself

Taking care of our mental health and checking in on others is something that we can all do, and we need to remember that by looking after our own mental health, we'll be best placed to look after our children. Remember when they tell you on aeroplanes that you need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others, it's like that.

We often feel threatened by the unknown, particularly under these conditions. Those that have survived harsh and isolated environments talk about focussing on the positives and actively thinking rationally about their situation. This requires you to determine what the actual risks are and what you can do to minimise them. It might help to think of what advice you would give to somebody who had not experienced the pandemic. It also helps to focus on the moment to short-term future. What are the immediate and/or achievable tasks you can focus on in the next hour, day or week?

Inevitably you will experience slumps. Life will be very different and likely to be less stimulating. Plan for these ebbs in mood but try to take control of the thinking. Focus on what you have been able to achieve during this period. Celebrate that you are coping. Link up with others (virtually) to have celebratory meals: milestones, birthdays, anniversaries, every tenth day since it began could all be reasons to celebrate.

Anxiety UK recommends the 'apple' technique:

- **Acknowledge:** Notice and acknowledge the uncertainty as it comes to mind.
- **Pause:** Don't react as you normally do. Don't react at all. Pause and breathe.
- **Pull back:** Tell yourself this is just the worry talking, and this apparent need for certainty is not helpful and not necessary. It is only a thought or feeling. Don't believe everything you think. Thoughts are not statements or facts.
- **Let go:** Let go of the thought or feeling. It will pass. You don't have to respond to them. You might imagine them floating away in a bubble or cloud.
- **Explore:** Explore the present moment, because right now, in this moment, all is well. Notice your breathing and the sensations of your breathing. Notice the ground beneath you. Look around and notice what you see, what you hear, what you can touch, what you can smell. Right now. Then shift your focus of attention to something else - on what you need to do, on what you were doing before you noticed the worry, or do something else - mindfully with your full attention.

Time is precious, especially when looking after children. However, try to plan your days or weeks to include something from each of the '5 ways to wellbeing' (developed by NEF).

BE ACTIVE

Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise every day. You Tube has lots of exercise videos for kids and adults. Get children involved in planning their own 'indoor PE'. If current government advice permits, try to get outside once a day either into your garden if you have one or in a place where there are few people. If you can't go out, open the windows for some fresh air and take some time to look at the world outside.

TAKE NOTICE

Take a break from the news and social media and concentrate on what's happening in the here and now in your family. Notice and appreciate the small things. Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing. There's lots of good mindfulness apps to try, but if that's not for you, just getting into something you enjoy e.g. cooking, drawing etc and really focussing on it can be just as good.

CONNECT

Social connection is one of the most important ways that we can look after our mental wellbeing. Social distancing is going to make that trickier, but we're lucky enough to have technology to help us out. Think physical distancing, but social connections. Social media is great, but if you can, try to have phone calls or even video calls. Arrange to Facetime/Skype a friend for coffee, phone relatives more often than usual. Whilst it can be helpful to share worries, try to find other things to talk about too. If you are isolated in close proximity with a small number of other people your capacity for tolerance will be tested, whilst also needing to ensure your own character and personality traits are as tolerable as possible! Self-restraint will be required and can be helped by identifying a 'safe space' for each individual to be able to retreat to if they become frustrated or overwhelmed. Agree ground rules for how you are going to communicate, particularly if something is irritating or challenging you.

GIVE

Research tells us that giving back to our community helps people to feel valuable and makes us happier. We might not be able to contribute to our community in our usual way, but many people will still be able to find ways to give back. Lots of community groups are setting up schemes that aim to help vulnerable people at this difficult time. If you want to get involved, check out local social media for ideas. Many of us will not be in a position to offer practical support. We can still offer mutual support to friends and family by checking in with them regularly.

KEEP LEARNING

Learning a new skill or honing an existing one gives us a sense of purpose and achievement. Whilst we're busy learning, we're less likely to experience anxious thoughts and worries. Social-distancing will bring new challenges, but it will give many of us the time to start a new hobby or learn about an area that we've always been interested in.

Looking after your children

For the most part, children will need what they've always needed; love, attention and opportunities to learn and play. If children are home for long periods because of social-distancing or self-isolation, the following tips might be helpful:

Try and keep to a structure and routine that suits you. Keep bedtime and morning routines close to existing ones to promote a sense of normality that children will find reassuring. Encouraging them to get up and dressed during the week will help maintain some difference between weekdays and weekends.

Keep boundaries firm and make it clear that you expect the same standards of behaviour as usual. Boundaries show that adults are still in control and taking care of them, which helps children to feel safe.

Make sure they get some time to burn off energy every day. Younger children will enjoy assault courses, discos etc. Older children and teens might respond better to fitness videos.

Expect children to do some learning every day. In the longer-term schools are likely to provide opportunities for online learning. In the short term, or as extra activities there are a wealth of helpful websites, many of which they will be able to access independently. Continuing with their learning helps promote a sense of normality and purpose as well as keeping them up to date for when they are back at school.

Find opportunities for them to interact with their friends remotely. For tweens and teens, contact with their peers is especially important. Technology provides lots of opportunities for older children to connect, chat and game together. But be wary of giving unsupervised access to platforms that you would not normally allow your child onto; the internet still poses the same risks as in normal times.

Balance screen time with other activities. Challenge children to learn new skills that don't involve screens e.g. tying shoe laces, juggling, baking. Older children might want to set their own goals.

Give children opportunities to have a say in what will be happening. They may have had a lot of their freedoms and choices removed for a while and may feel powerless or angry. Older children and teenagers will be more able to understand the risks in too much screen time, too little sleep, inactivity etc. They are more likely to 'buy in' to new rules and routines if they feel that they have a voice. Family meetings where children and adults problem-solve together can be helpful for this. (<https://bristolchildparentsupport.co.uk/ready-family-meetings/>)

There are some example timetables on the next page. These are just shared as a guide but may be helpful in terms of thinking about how to maintain some structure and routine throughout days at home. Remember to intersperse activities with breaks, and don't forget healthy snacks and drinks!

The last pages in this pack have links to websites with helpful ideas and activities covering a range of topics.

Example Timetables

Get ready for the day	<input type="checkbox"/> Have breakfast, have a wash, get dressed
9am Activity 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Online learning from school OR a craft activity (cutting and sticking, painting, baking)
10am Activity 2	• Online learning from school OR some writing or maths - write a story, count coins
11am Get active!	<input type="checkbox"/> Play in the garden, do an exercise video
12 Lunchtime	
1pm Help about the house	<input type="checkbox"/> Help tidy up, Hoover, wash up
2pm Quiet time	• Do something calm, like reading or colouring
3pm Activity 3	• Online learning from school OR be creative – make some music, design an outfit
4pm Have some free time	<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy toys and tech
5pm Dinner time	<input type="checkbox"/> Help prepare dinner – help tidy up too!
6pm Family time	<input type="checkbox"/> Play a game, watch a movie, spend time together
Get ready for bed	• Have a bath, get pyjamas on, read a story

45 mins Academic learning

45 mins Creative Activities

45 mins Exercise

Have lunch

Downtime

45 mins Academic learning

45 mins Help around the house

Free time

Have dinner

Contact family and friends - phone, Facetime, email

Free time

Get ready for bed

Talking to children about Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Although it's tempting to try and protect children from difficult topics, they are more likely to worry when they're kept in the dark. Children and teenagers will be aware of what is happening but may not have all the facts they need to understand it.

These tips will help you communicate about Coronavirus with your child:

- Take time to talk and listen. Be clear that you are happy to answer any questions that they have. Be led by your child as they may not be that interested or want to know everything all at once. Try to answer any questions honestly but keep things in context e.g. "Sadly, some people do die, but the vast majority of people will recover, and children seem to be only mildly affected".
- Reassure them that their own risk is very low but that we all need to 'do our bit' to look after people who might be very unwell. Underline how helpful they are being by following the rules about hygiene and social-distancing. Knowing we're being altruistic helps us to bear the tough times.
- Give positive messages about everything you are doing as a family to keep yourselves safe. Talk about all the work people around the world are doing to find treatments and a vaccine.
- Keep explanations developmentally appropriate.
 - Young children up to about age seven will need very simple explanations that relate to their own experiences. Explain that, like other germs, Coronavirus can spread between people and make them ill. But because Coronavirus is a new germ that we don't know everything about, we need to take more care and so things might be a bit different for a while.
 - Older children and tweens will want to know more. They may have heard partial explanations and 'filled in the gaps' themselves with their own ideas, so check what they already think they know about it.
 - Teenagers will have a similar capacity to understand what's going on as adults. They will need calm, factual information and opportunities to talk through their worries and disappointments.
- Give them an opportunity to talk about their feelings. Our instinct might be to 'make it all better', but it is normal to feel scared, sad and angry in the face of what's happening. Tell them that what is happening is not normal but that their feelings are.

Sources of support

General – for parents

Samaritans
Call 116 123

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

Mind UK

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/support-community-elfriends/>

UK Mental Health Charity with information and an online mutual support community

General – for young people

www.kooth.com

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.keep-your-head.com

Parenting pressures

Family Action

Telephone: 0808 802 6666

Text message: 07537 404 282

<https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/familyline/>

The FamilyLine service supports people who are dealing with family pressures in a new and innovative way by using a network of volunteers from across the country to support family members over the age of 18 through telephone calls, email, web chat and text message.

Family Lives (previously Parentline)

Call: 0808 800 2222

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/how-we-can-help/confidential-helpline/>

Family Lives offers a confidential and free helpline service for families in England and Wales (previously known as Parentline). for emotional support, information, advice and guidance on any aspect of parenting and family life. The helpline service is open 9am – 9pm, Monday to Friday and 10am – 3pm Saturday and Sunday.

Gingerbread

Single Parent Helpline: 0808 802 0925

gingerbread.org.uk

One Parent Families/Gingerbread is the leading national charity working to help lone parents and their children.

Grandparents Plus

Call: 0300 123 7015

grandparentsplus.org.uk

Grandparents Plus is the only national charity (England and Wales) dedicated to supporting kinship carers - grandparents and other relatives raising children who aren't able to live with their parents.

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Helpful resources for talking to children about Coronavirus

Covibook

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

A short book about Coronavirus for children under 7

Newsround video

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51342366?fbclid=IwAR3CyZq5rzXVoyGCgWjjpx6YqoetuZ1tP16y7wMjUR6uugWyhRmf0aFTrAs>

Drs Chris and Xand explain what's happening

Resources for children and young people with additional needs:

<https://theautismeducator.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/coronavirus> -

contains a link to the most up to date version of their "Easy Read" for young people and adults with learning difficulties

Resources for home education

Many schools will be setting their own learning. However, if you need something else to keep them usefully occupied then this non-exhaustive list might help those affected by school closures due to coronavirus, compiled by home educators:

Khan Academy

<https://www.khanacademy.org>

Especially good for maths and computing for all ages but other subjects at Secondary level. Note this uses the U.S. grade system but it's mostly common material.

BBC Learning

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/coursesearch/>

This site is old and no longer updated and yet there's so much still available, from language learning to BBC Bitesize for revision. No TV license required except for content on BBC iPlayer.

Futurelearn

<https://www.futurelearn.com>

Free to access 100s of courses, only pay to upgrade if you need a certificate in your name (own account from age 14+ but younger learners can use a parent account).

Seneca

<https://www.senecalearning.com>

For those revising at GCSE or A level. Tons of free revision content. Paid access to higher level material.

Openlearn

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/>

Free taster courses aimed at those considering Open University but everyone can access it. Adult level, but some e.g. nature and environment courses could well be of interest to young people.

Blockly

<https://blockly.games>

Learn computer programming skills - fun and free.

Scratch

<https://scratch.mit.edu/explore/projects/games/>

Creative computer programming

Ted Ed

<https://ed.ted.com>

All sorts of engaging educational videos

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National Geographic Kids

<https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/>

Activities and quizzes for younger kids.

Duolingo

<https://www.duolingo.com>

Learn languages for free. Web or app.

Mystery Science

<https://mysteryscience.com>

Free science lessons

The Kids Should See This

<https://thekidshouldseethis.com>

Wide range of cool educational videos

Crash Course

<https://thecrashcourse.com>

You Tube videos on many subjects

Crash Course Kids

<https://m.youtube.com/user/crashcoursekids>

As above for a younger audience

Crest Awards

<https://www.crestawards.org>

Science awards you can complete from home.

iDEA Awards

<https://idea.org.uk>

Digital enterprise award scheme you can complete online.

Paw Print Badges

<https://www.pawprintbadges.co.uk>

Free challenge packs and other downloads. Many activities can be completed indoors. Badges cost but are optional.

Tinkercad

<https://www.tinkercad.com>

All kinds of making.

Prodigy Maths

<https://www.prodigygame.com>

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Is in U.S. grades, but good for UK Primary age.

Cbeebies Radio

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/radio>

Listening activities for the younger ones.

Nature Detectives

<https://naturedetectives.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/>

A lot of these can be done in a garden, or if you can get to a remote forest location!

Oxford Owl for Home

<https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/>

Lots of free resources for Primary age

Big History Project

<https://www.bighistoryproject.com/home>

Aimed at Secondary age. Multi disciplinary activities.

Geography Games

<https://world-geography-games.com/world.html>

Geography gaming!

Blue Peter Badges

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/joinin/about-blue-peter-badges>

If you have a stamp and a nearby post box.

The Artful Parent

<https://www.facebook.com/artfulparent/>

Good, free art activities

Red Ted Art

<https://www.redtedart.com>

Easy arts and crafts for little ones

The Imagination Tree

<https://theimaginationtree.com>

Creative art and craft activities for the very youngest.

Toy Theater

<https://toytheater.com/>

Educational online games

DK Find Out

<https://www.dkfindout.com/uk/?fbclid=IwAR2wJdpSJSelTf4do6aPhff8A3tAknmpaxqZbkgudD49I71>

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Activities and quizzes

Twinkl

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk>

This is more for printouts, and usually at a fee, but they are offering a month of free access to parents in the event of school closures.

Virtual tours

<https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours>

Virtual tours of some of the world's best museums

Reference documents:

The World Health Organisation

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_2
https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2

Mental Health UK

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

NEF – Five Ways to Wellbeing: The Evidence

<https://neweconomics.org/2008/10/five-ways-to-wellbeing-the-evidence>

Wang et al (2020) Mitigate the effects of home confinement on children during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Lancet; Correspondence.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30547-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30547-X)

National Association of School Psychologists

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

Brooks et al (2020) The Psychological Effects of Quarantine and How to Reduce It: A rapid review of the evidence. In The Lancet Volume 395, ISSUE 10227.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30460-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8)

The Child Mind Institute

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Mind Hong Kong

<https://www.mind.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ResponseCoronavirusENG6.2.2020-.pdf>