

At Godalming Junior School, we want children to understand that we all have mental health, just as we have physical health. If you ask your child how they can stay physically healthy, they will all (hopefully!) know that we should exercise regularly, eat well and get enough sleep. However, there are also things we can all do to keep mentally healthy. We use the HAPPY acronym explained below to teach the children 5 steps to positive mental health. They are useful steps to take during the Coronavirus outbreak, when anxiety levels may be higher than normal, but also a good reminder at any time in our lives.

H - Help other people. Helping others makes us feel good by creating positive feelings and giving us a sense of purpose and control. Ask your child to think of ways that they can help you, relatives that they cannot visit, the community or a charity. What can they do that will make someone else smile?

A - Active. There is a strong link between how much we move around and our mood. Exercising lowers the stress chemicals in our body, and boosts endorphins (chemicals that make us feel happy). It is trickier to stay active while we are in lockdown, but while we are still allowed out to walk, run or cycle, getting out for fresh air and movement will boost children's mood. In the garden, skipping, trampolining or any activity that raises your heart rate will be good for both physical and mental health. If you are indoors, try the Joe Wicks workouts or the BBC Sport Website to find athletes own home workouts. Asking children to note their mood before a workout and then again afterwards will help them realise that exercise makes them feel good, giving them a coping strategy that they will remember through life.

P - Present moment. Our minds can easily start to dwell on things in the past or worry about the future - particularly at the moment when everything is different and unsettling and we are surrounded by alarming news on the media. Worrying thoughts make us feel anxious, so keeping our minds busy by focusing on the present (also known as mindfulness or grounding) gives us a break from those worries. Your children may be familiar with some of these techniques from school:

5,4,3,2,1 senses - <https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/2016/4/27/coping-skill-spotlight-5-4-3-2-1-grounding-technique>

Star breathing - <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/5-star-calm-breathing-exercise/>

Hand breathing - <https://childhood101.com/take-5-breathing-exercise/>

(Controlled breathing exercises have an immediate calming effect on your body when you are feeling anxious)

P - People connections. Relationships are important because they make us feel like we belong, and are a source of support and fun! Being separated from their friends will be hard for children, so video-calls, emails and letters will help them stay in touch. What activities can you do as a family to have fun and strengthen your connections? Could children write letters to elderly relatives that they cannot currently visit?

Y - Yearn to learn. Mastering a new skill gives us a feeling of accomplishment and control, boosts feel-good chemicals and lowers stress. Your children might like this video of rats learning to "drive", which was shown to make them less stressed! <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-50167812> . What new skill would your child like to master while we are in isolation? Break it down into smaller goals so they have the satisfaction of reaching milestones.

There is a poster and template for the HAPPY 5 a day on the ELSA website - <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/godalming-parents/> password godalmingparents.

These 5 steps are a child-friendly version of the NHS '5 steps to mental well-being' - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/>

Keep smiling! From Mrs Farrow 😊