



## **Looking after yourself, looking after your children**

There is a lot of uncertainty around the current COVID-19 outbreak. 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. 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 consider both our physical and mental health during such challenging times. It is normal to feel worried, stressed and anxious when we face uncertain situations. If we can 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.

## Top Tips: *Looking After your Wellbeing*

Taking care of our mental health and checking in on others is something that we can all do. Good mental health is a state of wellbeing in which we can fulfil a number of key functions, cope with everyday stressors and manage our feelings. By looking after our own mental health, we'll be better placed to look after our children. 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.

### 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.

## Top Tips: *Looking After your Children's Wellbeing*

### Stick to what we know:

For the most part, children will need what they've always needed; love, attention, and opportunities to learn and play.

### Routine:

Try and keep to a structure and routine that suits you.

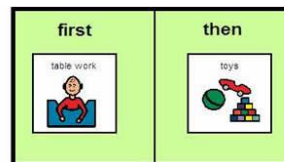
Keep bedtime and morning routines close to existing ones to promote a sense of normality that children will find reassuring.

Encouraging them to get up and dressed at the same time during the week will help to maintain some difference between weekdays and weekends.

### Use visuals:

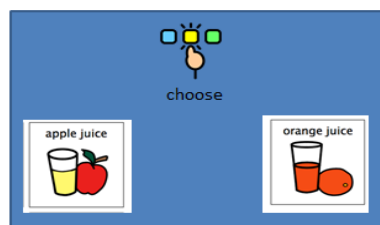
This will be supportive for all children and young people in the household. Knowing what comes next helps children to feel secure and settled.

Intersperse less favoured activities with breaks and preferred activities.



### Opportunities for choice:

Give your children opportunities to have a say in what is happening. For example, use a choice board to allow them to make a choice between activities.



### Learning time:

Support children to do some learning every day. Continuing with learning helps to promote a sense of normality and purpose.

### Active time:

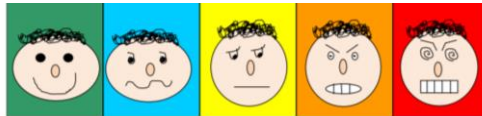
Make sure they get some time to burn off energy every day.

### **Social opportunities:**

Contact with peers and family members remains important. Technology provides opportunities to connect with key people. You can also schedule in social play with you and / or with siblings e.g. group water play.

### **Feelings check in:**

Start the day with a feelings check in for all the family (e.g. point to the face that matches how you feel). Some children and young people may need you to help them or do this for them. The exercise will support the whole family to be more aware of how each other are feeling.



### **Co-regulating activities:**

Try out some activities which you can do with your child to support them to regulate (i.e. manage their emotions and feel calm), such as:

- Breathing exercises
- Massage
- Blowing bubbles together
- Jointly listening to gentle music
- Jointly lying down
- Jointly gentle swaying of the body
- Jointly exploring some fiddle toys
- Jointly engaging in water play
- Jointly colouring

### **Regulation boxes:**

Gather a box of favoured activities which tend to be calming and motivating for your child, ready to use when you notice the early signs of them becoming unsettled. Ideas for regulation boxes include:

- Blanket
- Lego
- Doodle pad
- Bubble wrap
- Colouring book
- Stress ball
- Mini massager
- Favourite books

## 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. It is likely that your children will have noticed something is happening.

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

- Take time to talk and listen.
- Manage your own feelings. Understandably this is a worrying topic for lots of adults too. Before discussions with your children, discuss your worries with trusted family or friends. This will enable you to discuss the topic more calmly.
- Keep explanations developmentally appropriate. Consider your individual child's age and ability when you are deciding what to say. You might want to simply say that there are some nasty germs around and we need to make sure we are washing our hands well.
- Some visual resources have been created which can support the conversation, for example:
  - A short book: <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>
  - A social story by Carol Grey: <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>
- Give your children 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-elefriends/>

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

## General – for young people

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

[www.keep-your-head.com](http://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](http://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](http://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.

# 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=IwAR3CyZq5rzXVoyGCgWjipx6YqoetuZ1tP16y7wMjUR6uwqWyhRmf0aFTrAs>

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

## 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/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](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>