



Supporting the Emotional Wellbeing of Children and Young People at Home during Self-Isolation

*Advice and Guidance for Families: Pembrokeshire Educational
Psychology Service*

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Foreword

Almost overnight, the world as we know it has temporarily come to a standstill. In an attempt to come together in solidarity and protect those around us, we must now all learn to adapt to a novel situation. A major change is the recent decision for schools to close across the country for most children. Now and in the forthcoming weeks, we are likely to see a surge in levels of stress and anxiety felt by children and adults alike, in response to a crisis that has impacted us all. Though we do not have the power to change what is happening around us, we do have the power to control how we respond and react. This guidance document aims to help parents and guardians elicit a positive experience whilst self-isolating with their children. An opportunity to spend this level of quality time with your children is unlikely to ever present itself again. Use this time to create a meaningful experience for your family. Really get to know how your children learn, how they play and what is important to them. Prioritise activities that support emotional wellbeing using the advice in this document. Most importantly, create memories that long outlive this pandemic.

We can't control everything that happens, but we can change our experience of those things.



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Adjusting to a temporary new way of life: Looking after yourself and your children



For a lot of parents, having children and young people at home full-time (often in addition to working from home themselves) is uncharted territory. Understandably, this novel situation is causing a mixture of emotional reactions in both adults and children. Be reassured that different reactions are normal and ok. It is important to remember (and remind your children) that you are having a **NORMAL** reaction to an **ABNORMAL** event. The following suggestions may help you to navigate the forthcoming weeks and hopefully create a positive atmosphere for you and your children:

- **Take care of your own emotional wellbeing.** Remember when they tell you on aeroplanes that you need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others? It's like that. The oxygen mask theory states that by helping yourself you can help others. If you drain yourself by exerting all of your efforts, you will help very few people and diminish your resources in the process. Make sure you have breaks, time to relax, and ask for help from others if you need it.
- **Avoid being too immersed in media coverage.** Be mindful of the amount of things you are reading and watching, particularly in front of children and young people. Consider scheduling time once or twice a day to look at a few updates from trusted sources. This may be once in the morning and once in the evening.
- **Do not strive to deliver a full teaching curriculum.** It would be both unrealistic and impractical to expect children to receive the same learning opportunities that they would in school at home, especially during the current climate. Teaching staff are working hard to provide materials for pupils to use at home to continue their learning and there are a whole host of online resources you can use already (see 'further information and support' section). However, these activities are secondary to providing your children with love, support and a nurturing environment. Take this as a unique opportunity to allow your children to grow and develop as individuals, away from a busy classroom. This is a great chance to equip your children with essential life skills and opportunities to learn through play, creativity and exploration.

→ **Try to keep to a routine.** Well-known routines in everyday life provide security, stability and reassurance for children and young people. Encourage your children to get up and dressed on weekdays and try to have some rough timetable of events. This will put less pressure on you to constantly be ‘thinking on your feet’ for activities to keep your children occupied. You might consider using a whiteboard (or something similar) to visually break down the day, including snack and lunch times, work activities, physical activities and free time.

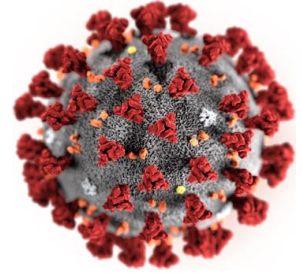
→ **Establish and stick to boundaries.** Boundaries show that adults are still in control and taking care of them, which helps children to feel safe. Agreeing and drawing up some ‘house rules’ together as a family may be a useful reminder for everyone. This may include behaviours that won’t be tolerated and guidance for children on when you need to be left alone to complete your own work/tasks around the home.

NOTE: Children would not receive constant 1:1 interaction from adults in school, so they should not expect this from you at home. Encouraging children’s independence is a great skill to develop. However, it is important that you are reliable and consistent in attending to children when you say you will, for example, if you have responded to your child’s request for help with “I’ll come and see you in 5 minutes”, ensure that you follow through with this to maintain your child’s sense of security.

→ **Allow and support children to interact with their friends remotely.** This is especially important for older children and teenagers. Children are used to having significant levels of social interaction with their peers every day. Ensure ‘connection with others’ is part of your weekly timetable. Technology provides lots of opportunities for older children to connect, chat and game together, but younger children will need to be supervised accordingly using these platforms for their own safety.

→ **Give children a voice.** People feel more comfortable and confident during periods of change when they feel in control. It is important to allow your children to have a say in what happens at home and have opportunities to discuss any issues they are experiencing. Mutual respect between adults and children is often the best foundation for a healthy and calm environment. Hosting ‘family meetings’ where children and adults problem-solve together can be helpful for this. You may have a ‘debrief’ at the end of every week to identify what has worked well and what things need to change to support everyone effectively.

Talking about Covid-19/ Corona Virus with Children and Young People



By now, most children and young people will be aware of what is happening, but may not have all the facts they need to understand it. It is important that you allow and engage in discussions with your children, especially to dispel any myths from unreliable sources. The following constitutes some general advice on how to approach the subject of Covid-19/Corona Virus with children in a healthy manner:

NOTE: a more comprehensive list of 'Tricky Questions' and potential responses is included later on in this document.

- **Take time to talk and listen.** 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. Be clear that you are happy to try and answer any questions that they have. Ask about what they have heard about the virus and the situation so that you can correct possible misconceptions and reassure them. It's okay to say you don't know- there are a lot of questions with no answers at this stage.
- **Be honest, but remember your child's age.** It is better for children to receive honest and factual information, but adjust the level of detail as appropriate. Young children up to about age seven will need very simple explanations that relate to their own experiences and may benefit from visual information/stories to understand (some useful links are included under 'further information and support'). Older children and teenagers are likely to have already encountered lots of information, therefore it will be important to check their understanding based on this.
- **Focus on the positives and what *can* be done.** Talk about all the work people around the world are doing to find treatments and how everyone is doing their best to help people. Remind children of all the positive things you are and can be doing as a family to help e.g. washing your hands to songs, having family time in the house, reaching out to loved ones and cheering them up etc.

Supporting the emotional wellbeing of children and young people as part of a daily routine

Psychological wellbeing is paramount for everybody, now more than ever. During this period, activities focused on wellbeing should be equal to, and sometimes prioritised over, educational activities. To supplement the advice in previous sections, the following guidance aims to support the development of emotional resilience in children and young people at home, based on ideas and evidence from psychology:



- **Normalise emotions.** This is an uncertain and unpredictable situation, stress and anxiety are *normal*. It is important that children are reassured that others are in the same situation and are experiencing the same feelings, they are not alone. Often, behaviour communicates feelings of distress, especially when children find it difficult to identify and explain their emotions. Principles from ‘Emotion Coaching’ are particularly useful in combating this. Emotion coaching involves sharing the experience of a difficult emotion with a child, helping them to label how they might be feeling and coming up with solutions together. For example, “It seems like you might be feeling frustrated at the moment- I wonder if that is because you have not seen your friends for a while? I feel frustrated about not seeing my friends at the moment as well. What can we do to make you feel better right now? Perhaps we could face-time someone from your class?” Allowing and supporting children to navigate difficult emotions is fundamental to developing their resilience and emotional literacy skills. This also allows children to develop a bank of self-help skills and resources that they can utilise during times of distress now and in the future. If your children are particularly anxious, it might be worth dedicating 10-15 minutes a day for ‘worry time’, so they can discuss their worries in more detail and receive reassurance.
- **Be present.** One of the best ways of enhancing emotional wellbeing is to practise being present or ‘mindful’ during daily activities. During times of heightened anxiety or distress, engaging in more structured mindfulness activities may be useful. An example of this is ‘Dropping Anchor’, whereby we compare a tricky situation or set of feelings to a storm. Although it is important for

children to acknowledge that we cannot stop or force out our difficult feelings, just as we can't stop a storm from happening around us, we can 'anchor' ourselves in the present moment and control how we react through '**A-C-E**':

Acknowledge your thoughts or feelings. E.g. "I notice my mind is worrying."

Come back into your body. E.g. notice your breathing or feel your feet pushing into the ground

Engage in what you're doing. E.g. notice three things you can see around you.

There are a whole host of breathing and mindfulness exercises accessible online that you can try and bring into your daily schedule. These exercises are likely to support the emotional wellbeing of everyone in the house, not just the children. However, being present does not have to follow a specific structure, this could mean playing a game as a family, spending time messing around with the dog, doing exercise such as yoga, reading a book, dancing to music, colouring... the list is endless. Becoming in tune with how your children are feeling will indicate when an impromptu exercise like this is likely to be beneficial. Otherwise, having scheduled 'free time' periods where children can play and engage in activities they enjoy will suffice. You may like to make individual 'Calming Boxes' as a family, filled with activities or written suggestions to occupy yourselves when you are feeling stressed or bored. Decorating these boxes would be a nice mindful activity to start.

- **Bring meaning to activities.** It is important to keep up morale and motivation whilst children are at home, as days are likely to become repetitive. It may be useful to have reward systems in place for completing educational activities, to allow children to continue to experience small successes whilst away from school. A key indicator of wellbeing is feeling fulfilled. Use this time to get to know your children more, what are their values and strengths? Identifying these means you can encourage them to engage in tasks that actively build on these character strengths and are meaningful and relevant to their values. You may support children to elicit their strengths and values through mind mapping activities, using headings such as 'what people like and admire about me', 'what type of person I would like to be', 'what makes me who I am' etc. For example, a child's strength might be 'kindness' and they may value 'being creative'. These may both be encouraged by setting the child the task of designing a positive and colourful message to photograph and send to a grandparent.

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- **Connect.** As previously discussed, lack of social contact with others is likely to feel strange for children and young people. Ensure they have opportunities to connect with others regularly through technology. Equally as important is recognising when you or your children may benefit from having some space. Spending large periods of time in close vicinity with loved ones may become intense. A 'house rule' may be that time alone should be respected when it is needed. You may develop a sign or action that indicates to a family member when you need space.

 - **Practise gratitude.** Research has found that regular reflection on what you are grateful for and positives from your day has long-term benefits on levels of wellbeing. Some activities you may wish to incorporate into the day are:
 - '**Three good things**'; encourage your child to write down or say three good things that have happened at the end of every day.

 - '**Happiness diary**'; encourage your child to keep a happiness diary to write down all the things that make them happy. You could also make this a cut and stick activity for younger children. This can be added to regularly and be on display as a positive motivator.

 - **Establish healthy practices.** Now is a great time to spend time you would not usually have on preparing healthy meals as a family. Involve children and young people as much as possible in preparing food, as this will teach them valuable life skills and educate them on what a healthy diet looks like. You may have charts depicting things like 'number of glasses of water drunk today' and 'number of fruit and veg items eaten today' to add a competitive and fun element to being healthier. Identifying an exercise regime that you can all stick to would also be highly beneficial in promoting overall wellbeing in the household. See this as an opportunity to form healthy habits that will hopefully stick once things return to normal.

Responding to ‘Tricky Questions’

Amidst the perceived chaos and rush of information, children and young people are likely to have a multitude of questions about what this pandemic means for them and those they love, both now and in the future. As previously noted, it is okay to admit that adults do not always have the answers to these questions, you might say something like “Even though we don’t have the answers to everything right now, once we know more, we will let you know.” Outlined below are some of the questions you may be asked by your children, with subsequent advice on how you might respond sensitively:



Older Children/ Teenagers:

“Am I/you/people I love going to die?”

Be honest but hopeful. You might say something like “It seems a lot of people might get sick, but normally it is like a cold or flu and they get better. Sadly, some people do die, but most people will recover, and children and young people seem to be much less at risk of being seriously ill”. Focus on what they can do to protect those who may be vulnerable. You might add “We don’t have treatment for Coronavirus yet, but doctors are working very hard on it and we are all working together to support one another”.

“Is the world going to end?”

It is normal for the human brain to catastrophise during times of crisis, for children this may manifest in thoughts of the world ending. You might say something like “I can see why you might be worried about that right now, as things have changed very quickly for us. It is extremely unlikely that the world is going to end, things will return to normal once everybody is well and safe to see each other again.” Tell them that what is happening is not normal but that their feelings are and remind them that you are there to reassure them whenever they need it.

“Are we going to run out of food and/or supplies like toilet roll?”

Children will pick up on what is happening around them, if they have accompanied you on a shopping trip, they may have questions such as these. An example response might be “It is very unlikely that we will run out of food and supplies. Some people are trying to

buy lots of things to last them a few weeks whilst they are staying at home, so the shops look a bit bare. We will buy what we need for the next few days and wait until the shops get more things delivered”.

“Is the virus x, y or z’s fault?”

The outbreak of coronavirus has brought with it numerous reports of racial discrimination around the world, so it’s important to check that your children are neither experiencing nor contributing to bullying. You might say “Coronavirus has nothing to do with what someone looks like, where they are from or what language they speak. Bullying is always wrong and we should each do our part to spread kindness and support each other during difficult times.”

“What does ‘lockdown’ mean? Are the police/army going to be patrolling the streets?”

Some of the language being used in the media could be easily misconstrued by children. They may relate the term ‘lockdown’ to a video game/film/TV programme. It is important that you are transparent in explaining these terms and update what they mean when new information is released. For example, a current explanation might be “Being in ‘lockdown’ means that we have to stay inside as much as possible to keep each other safe. We are still allowed to go and get food and exercise with the people we live with. Sometimes the police may stop people to check that they are going out for a good reason, like getting food, to check they aren’t putting other people at risk unnecessarily.”

“Will I ever go back to school/see my friends again?”

This may be particularly concerning for children nearing the end of their primary or secondary schooling. You might say something like “We don’t know when schools will be back open yet, they might be closed for the rest of the year. As soon as it is safe to see other people again we will make sure you see your friends. As soon as schools are safe to be open again you will go back. In the meantime, we can keep in touch with our friends through our phones and we will still be able to learn new things at home.”

“What will happen if you get sick- will I be on my own/taken away from you?”

Children may worry about being left alone in a worst case scenario. You might reassure them by saying “If we get sick, it is most likely that we will still be in the same house but will need to keep apart from you. In the unlikely event that we need to go to hospital, someone else in the family will look after you until we are better.”

“What will happen about my exams? Has all my work been for nothing?”

Teenagers approaching important exams are likely to feel concerned about the potential impact of not attending schools and exams this year. Reassure young people by stating “The Prime Minister has said that all children and young people will get the qualification they worked towards. The government and Department for Education are working on a plan and I will keep checking the latest information so I can let you know of any updates.”

NOTE: It’s important to know that we’re not leaving children in a state of distress.

- Remind your children that they can have other difficult conversations with you at any time.
- Remind them that you care, you’re listening and that you’re available whenever they’re feeling worried.
- There are also likely to be many “what if…” questions that arise. Whilst important to acknowledge children’s concerns, sometimes, redirecting them to a task that brings them back to the present moment will be helpful to ease some of this anxiety.

Younger Children:

“Why are those people wearing masks/costumes?”

Younger children may be fascinated by/ make assumptions about visual safety precautions such as masks. It’s important to keep explanations simple, like “Sometimes people wear masks when they aren’t feeling well.”

“Will I get sick?”

An easier to understand explanation might be “Everybody gets sick sometimes. If you get sick, we will take care of you until you are all better. The doctors will help you, too.”

“Why do I have to wash my hands so much?”

“To keep them clean.” You don’t need to explain more than this, young children may not understand the concept of germs/infection transmission yet.

“Why can’t I see Mummy/Daddy/Grandma etc.?”

If an adult in a child’s life needs to be separate from them, children may feel confused

about it. Don't worry your young child by talking about sickness or quarantine. You can say, "Mummy needs to be away for a little while, but she will be back soon." Consider ways to stay connected even when physically apart, like video between parent and child.

“Why do we have to stay home/Why am I not going to school?”

“School is closed right now. Your teacher and your friends are home too, just like you. When school is open again, you can go back and see your friends. I'll tell you when.” Reassure them that you know it is hard, but following the rules will help keep everyone safe.

“Why can't I play with my friends?”

“Right now, there is a rule that families need to stay home for a little while and be together. That helps us and our friends stay healthy. I know it can be sad when we can't see and play with friends. But there are lots of fun things we can do together at home!”

Further information and support: Useful links, resources and contacts

Talking to children about Coronavirus

Talking to children about Coronavirus (British Psychological Society): <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus>



Talking to Children (Childmind):

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

How to talk to your child about coronavirus (Unicef):

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

Tips and guidance on supporting preschool children (Zero to Three);

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>

Talking to children (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)

Stories about Coronavirus for younger children

ELSA: Coronavirus Story for Children:

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/coronavirus-story-for-children/>

Hello! Story about Coronavirus for young children:

https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf

A comic exploring coronavirus to help young people understand:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?t=1584464333506>

Information Videos for children about the Coronavirus

Information video on Coronavirus for Primary age children (KS2) (Brainpop):

<https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>

Information video on Coronavirus for older children/adults (WHO):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOV1aBVYKGA&feature=youtu.be>

Newsround video:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51342366?fbclid=IwAR3CyZq5rzXVoyGCgWjipx6YqoetuZ1tP16y7wMjUR6uwgWyhRmf0aFTraS>

Talking to children with Additional Learning Needs about Coronavirus

Parent-focused ideas from Special Needs Jungle about how to support children with anxiety around coronavirus, including an easy-read explanation for children and adults with learning difficulties:

<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/calming-coronavirus-anxiety-children-everyone-else/#Update>

A social story about pandemics (Carol Gray):

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-coronavirus.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23zxNlbEumpw4oKIM7Xy3VIKnA25b8Gi53N6YiFleKB9Vx0LQypSPYzzg>

A Social Story about the coronavirus: <https://www.ppmnd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>

A link to MENCAPs most up to date version of their “Easy Read” for young people and adults with learning difficulties:

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

Promoting Children’s Wellbeing

Advice for young people who are feeling anxious about Coronavirus (Young Minds):

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus>

Helping children cope with stress (WHO): https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2

YoungMinds; Branch of Mind for young people:

www.youngminds.org.uk

Keep Your Head; information and support for children and young people's mental health:

www.keep-your-head.com

Kooth; online, anonymous support for young people:

www.kooth.com

Looking after your own wellbeing

How to protect your mental health (BBC):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>

Coronavirus and your wellbeing (Mind UK):

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

Ways to wellbeing (Mindkit):

<https://www.mindkit.org.uk/5-ways-to-wellbeing/>

Samaritans:

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

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

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

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

Mindfulness/Meditation Apps

Headspace; a meditation app with a 'kids' section. Usually a monthly fee but have released free content under the current circumstances. Available on most app stores. More info can be found here:

www.headspace.com

Smiling Mind; a free app developed by educators and psychologists that aims to bring mindfulness into everyday life. Sections for specific age groups of children. Available on most app stores. More info can be found here:

www.smilingmind.com.au

Health Advice

National Health Service (NHS) advice:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

World Health Organisation (WHO) advice:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Useful Learning Resources

General

BBC Learning; this site is old and no longer updated and yet there's so much still available, from language learning to BBC Bitesize for revision:

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

Cbeebies Radio; listening activities for the younger ones:

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

Crash Course; YouTube videos on many subjects:

<https://thecrashcourse.com>

Crash Course Kids; as above for a younger audience:

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

Futurelearn; 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):

<https://www.futurelearn.com>

Kahoot; an online platform where you can challenge others with pre-existing quizzes or make your own. Can be educational or recreational:

<https://kahoot.com/>

Khan Academy; 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.

<https://www.khanacademy.org>

Oxford Owl for Home; lots of free resources for Primary age:

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

Seneca; for those revising at GCSE or A level. Lots of free revision content:

<https://www.senecalearning.com>

Ted Ed; all sorts of engaging educational videos:

<https://ed.ted.com>

The Kids Should See This; wide range of cool educational videos

<https://thekidshouldseethis.com>

Toy Theater; educational online games:

<https://toytheater.com/>

Twinkl; 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:

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

Subject specific/related

Duolingo; learn languages for free, web or app:

<https://www.duolingo.com>

Blockly; learn computer programming skills - fun and free:

<https://blockly.games>

Scratch; creative computer programming:

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

Mystery Science; free science lessons:

<https://mysteryscience.com>

Nature Detectives; a lot of these can be done in a garden:

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

Virtual tours of some of the world's best museums:

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

Prodigy Maths; Is in U.S. grades, but good for UK Primary age:

<https://www.prodigygame.com>

Geography Games; geography gaming:

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

National Geographic Kid; activities and quizzes for younger kids:

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

Red Ted Art; easy arts and crafts for little ones:

<https://www.redtedart.com>

The Artful Parent; good, free art activities:

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

The Imagination Tree; creative art and craft activities for the very youngest:

<https://theimaginationtree.com>