Resource pack supporting Parents and Carers to help Children and Young People during COVID-19

Produced by North Wales Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in partnership with BCUHB Public Health Wales

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**Introduction**

This is a difficult time for everyone, it is not unusual to be worried about the situation we are all facing in the context of COVID-19. Some children and young people will experience higher levels of worry and anxiety than others, and may need more help and reassurance from you as their parent or carer.

This pack has been produced to offer you some suggestions as to how you can support your child at this time. It also contains a list of useful resources and contacts which you might find helpful.

Below is a list of topics that are covered in the pack:

* Emotions and Behaviours
* What Can You Do to Help?
* Coping with Worry about COVID-19
* Further Resources and Support

**EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS**

Different feelings and emotions lead people to act in different ways. For example, when people feel low in mood or depressed, they often have poor motivation and struggle to get going. It is important to remember that lots of the behaviours we see are not about someone being ‘lazy’, not ‘wanting to help themselves’, or just them ‘wanting to pick a fight’, but are actually signs of emotional distress. In addition, it is not uncommon for children and young people to have difficulties talking about their feelings. Sometimes this is because they can’t put their feelings into words, and sometimes it can be because they may not be aware of how they are actually feeling.

Below is a list of common behaviours which can be associated with emotional distress.

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| **Feelings** | **Behaviours** |
| WorriedAnxious | * Avoid situations which cause more worry or anxiety.
* Restlessness, being ‘keyed-up’, or on edge.
* Difficulty sleeping.
* Over, or under eating.
* Engaging in unhealthy, risky or harmful behaviours such as drinking alcohol to deal with worries.
* Limiting daily activities to reduce levels of anxiety. For example, staying in the safety of home etc.
* Becoming overly attached to someone or something and not wanting to leave them.
* Panic attacks.
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| Low in moodDepressed HopelessEmpty/ NumbNo confidenceLow self-esteem | * Loss or increase in appetite.
* Difficulty sleeping or sleeping more.
* Low motivation to do anything.
* Difficulty starting things or carrying them on.
* Tiredness.
* Avoiding social connections.
* Difficulty speaking, thinking clearly or making decisions.
* Difficulty remembering or concentrating.
* Tearful.
* Aches and pains without obvious cause.
* Moving more slowly or being more restless and agitated.
* Using alcohol, drugs.
* Hurting self or ‘self-harming’.
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Changes in a person’s usual behaviour can be a clue that someone is feeling more emotional or worried than usual. By observing behaviours, we can gain clues as to how someone might be feeling, even if they are unable to talk about it. Just as behaviours can give us clues as to how someone is feeling, changes in behaviours can also help alter how someone may feel. For example, listening to classical or relaxing music has been shown to help people feel less worried, less stressed and less depressed. Therefore, by helping your child to do more positive behaviours or activities, you will be helping them to improve their mental wellbeing. Small changes in behaviours can have a big impact on overall wellbeing.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?**

Given the current situation with COVID-19 it is understandable that people will be feeling more anxious and worried. Possible restrictions on social interactions such as meeting with friends and family could also increase feelings of low mood. Although the measures put in place to protect people classed as vulnerable to COVID-19 are important, they may well be difficult for people to manage. Therefore, it is important that people take steps to look after their own mental health and wellbeing as well as that of others.

Below is a list of five types of activity which are known to improve emotional wellbeing for everyone. By encouraging your child to do a range of things in each area, you will be helping them to feel better. Below are some examples of different wellbeing promoting activities which you might want to encourage your child to try, or you may want to use them to come up with your own ideas of what will work for you and your family. These activities are called the Five Ways to Wellbeing.



1. ***Take notice***

Paying more attention to the present moment boosts wellbeing.

**Ideas:**

* Put your phone down and notice what’s around you.
* Be close to nature.
* Have pictures of nature around the house.
* Use your 5 senses (sight, touch, smell, sound and taste) to notice the things around you when you carry out an everyday task like drinking a hot chocolate.
* Open the window and watch and listen to the animals and birds outside.
* Grow some herbs or plants on a window sill.
* Try a new food and notice how it tastes, feels, smells.
* Close your eyes and notice what you can hear.
* Notice the nice things other people in the house do for you and tell them.
* Download a mindfulness app and practice every day.
* Listen to your favourite music.
* Create a box containing activities which your child can go to and use if they are distressed or when they want to calm down. Pick items which use the 5 senses. It might include colouring pens and pictures, stress ball, bubbles etc.

**Write below what else could you try?**

1. ***Connect with others***

Strengthening relationships and feeling valued and close to others is good for wellbeing. It is still important to connect even when we’re socially distancing.

**Ideas:**

* Watch films or a box set (or two) together, with people in the same household.
* Share some funny YouTube clips with someone.
* Play a game with someone in your home.
* Talk to someone in your home.
* Plan activities to do at home with people you live with, or try virtual activities with friends or family who live somewhere else.
* Message a friend to ask about what they are doing.
* Talk to someone on the phone, through SKYPE, FaceTime or similar.
* Do things together with people who live in the same household.

**Write below what else could you try?**

1. ***Stay active***

Being physically active improves mental wellbeing and decreases anxiety and low mood, as does eating healthily and getting enough sleep.

**Ideas:**

* Create a routine to follow every day.
* Plan a household schedule and agree with everyone how the household will run at home every day.
* Do some physical activity in your home.
* Dance to your favourite songs.
* Run up and down the stairs.
* Do some star jumps!
* Clean a room in the house.
* Have a Wii-fit competition.
* Stretch your arms and legs.
* Join or follow a YouTube exercise class.
* Start an indoor exercise challenge app.
* Do some strength training with some tins of beans.
* Create a rota or plan for household jobs and things that need to be done that will benefit everyone.
* Get up at the same time each day and go to bed at the same time each night, and try really hard to avoid lying in bed or on the sofa all day.

**Write below what else could you try?**

1. ***Learn***

Seeking out new things and learning stimulates the brain and helps contribute to wellbeing.

**Ideas:**

* Do something which gives a sense of achievement or mastery.
* Learn a new skill.
* Get creative.
* Try something you’ve never done before.
* Find out about something interesting to you.
* Learn a new word every day.
* Play a quiz with friends or family on line or face to face.
* Take up a new hobby.
* Read a book.
* Paint, draw or colour.
* Make and decorate a cake.
* Decorate a room.
* Tidy or rearrange the furniture in a room.
* Try out a new recipe.
* Memorise the words to your favourite song or poem.

**What else can you try?**

1. ***Give***

Acts of kindness, no matter how large or small, can increase happiness, life satisfaction and a general sense of wellbeing.

**Ideas:**

* If you are going out for basic shopping, put a note through a neighbour’s door asking if you can get them anything while you are out.
* Sort through your things. If there are things you don’t want anymore, put what gets collected into your kerbside recycling bags ready for the next collection, or if not, get them ready to take to charity when all this is over.
* Offer to help someone do a task.
* Bake a cake or cook a meal for someone.
* Give your pet a hug.
* Send a card or write a letter to someone.
* Listen to someone without interrupting!
* Save the last piece of cake or chocolate for someone who is having a tough time at the moment.
* Say thank you to someone for something you appreciate about them.

**What else can you try?**

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-information-advice/5-ways-to-wellbeing/>

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-information-advice/5-ways-to-wellbeing/downloadable-resources/5-ways-resources/healthy-family-challenge-phw-bilingual-download-pdf/>

**Coping with worry about COVID-19**

If your child is very worried about COVID -19 then you can read ‘My name is Coronavirus’, produced by Manuel Molina @MINDHEART.KIDS, with them <http://www.millfields.hackney.sch.uk/uploads/2019/Corona%20Virus%20Info%20for%20Young%20Children.pdf.pdf>

Other things you can try, might include:

* Limit the amount of time spent listening and reading the news.
* Pick two sources of information to get updates from and make sure these are reputable such as the WHO website, BBC News or Mind website.
* Avoid sources which might act as triggers for worry, for example some forms of social media etc.
* Focus on any positives, such as the community coming together to manage this together.
* Talk to your child about what is going on and reassure them that if they catch it then symptoms will likely be mild.
* Make sure what is discussed in front of your child is age appropriate. Not talking about what is happening will increase anxiety, however focussing on people being sick, dying and being in ‘lockdown’ will also increase anxiety. Help children and young people get a balanced understanding so they can get things into perspective.

**REMEMBER** for most people who catch the COVID-19 virus, their symptoms will be mild and can be treated at home with over the counter medication and bed rest.

**What else can you try?**

**FURTHER RESOURCES AND SUPPORT**

Currently people are being asked not go to their GP or to A&E. If medical attention is required, then phone your GP surgery, or the Out of Hours GP Service on 0300 123 55 66. Follow government advice regarding how to manage symptoms and when to seek medical advice.

**Useful Websites**

[www.minded.org.uk](http://www.minded.org.uk) – Lots of information for families and carers on how to support your child.

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) has information regarding mental health.

Specific information relating to mental wellbeing and COVID-19 can be found at [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/) . This page also contains information about looking after yourself and family members.

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) - This site contains information on mental health and tips for young people and their carers.

[www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk) – A website with lots of ideas on how to cope in distress

[www.bullying.co.uk](http://www.bullying.co.uk) – Information and support about bullying

[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org) – UK charity for the prevention of young suicide (support for young people and parents/carers).

[www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk) – National Self Harm Network – resources, advice, support forum

**Helplines:**

Childline: 0800 1111

Samaritans: 08457 909090

Papyrus/HopeLine uk: 0800 068 41 41 or text 07786 209697

C.A.L.L (Community Advice and Listening Line): 0800 132737 or text *help* to 81066

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| **Additional help:**If you are worried about the safety of your child because of their mental health, you can contact your GP surgery by phone, or the GP out of hours service 0300 123 55 66 (Mon-Fri 5pm-9am and Sat/Sun 24hrs) for advice. |