



Looking after yourself, looking after your children

There is a lot of uncertainty around the current coronavirus (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. 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.

You will find more information on York's coronavirus response at york.gov.uk

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.

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

BE ACTIVE

Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise every day. YouTube 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 eg cooking or drawing and really focusing 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 and 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 the links below or 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. While 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:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 or inactivity. 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.

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 eg tying shoe laces, juggling or baking. Older children might want to set their own goals.

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.

Timetables

45 minutes of Academic learning

45 minutes of Creative Activities

45 minutes of Exercise

Have lunch

Downtime

45 minutes of Academic learning

45 minutes of Helping around the house

Free time

Have dinner

Contact family and friends - phone, FaceTime, email

Free time

Get ready for bed

Get ready for the day		Have breakfast, have a wash, get dressed
9am	Activity 1	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!	Play in the garden, do an exercise video
12	Lunchtime	
1pm	Help about the house	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	Enjoy toys and tech
5pm	Dinner time	Help prepare dinner – help tidy up too!
6pm	Family time	Play a game, watch a movie, spend time together
Get ready for bed		Have a bath, get pyjamas on, read a story

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 eg '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

Mind UK

www.mind.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/support-community-elfriends

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

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

NHS

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

Public Health England

Practical steps to support your mental health and wellbeing: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19

Supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak

NSPCC

Advice for keeping your child safe online: www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety

Sport England StayInWorkOut

Advice and tips on keeping active at home for all the family with links to online fitness and apps: www.sportengland.org/stayinworkout

Volunteering

If you would like to offer some of your time to help vulnerable people in York, please contact volunteering@york.gov.uk

General – for young people

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.keep-your-head.com

Parenting pressures

Family Action

Telephone: 0808 802 6666 Text message: 07537 404 282

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

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.

Helpful resources for talking to children about coronavirus

Covibook

www.mindheart.co/descargables

A short book about coronavirus for children under seven.

Newsround video

www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51342366?fbclid=IwAR3CyZq5rzXVoyGCgWjjpx6YqoetuZltPI6y7wMjUR6uwgWVyhRmf0aFTrAs

Dr Chris and Dr Xand explain what's happening.

Stories and visuals for young children

A Carol Gray social story about coronavirus at carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23zxNlbEumpw4oKIM7Xy3VIKnA25b8Gi53N6YiFleKB9Vx0LQypSPYzzg

Other stories:

www.thedadsnet.com/this-free-book-is-great-for-explaining-covid-19-coronavirus-to-your-children

www.ppmid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf

www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus

including an activity guide www.zerotothree.org/resources/3264-at-home-activity-guide

Child-friendly explanation of coronavirus for Primary age students: 660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf

Information video on coronavirus for Primary age children (KS2), by Brainpop: www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus

For older children and young people:

Young Minds: www.mind.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ResponseCoronavirusENG6.2.2020-.pdf

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

youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus

Young minds have a useful blog for young people to access themselves:

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

BrainPOP website and video for young people: www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus

YoungScot website: young.scot/campaigns/national/coronavirus

There is a link for older pupils and adults too focusing on looking after our emotional well-being: afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/?fbclid=IwAR3ScDBfuhV5INKyutAG9IPNm4JnjLLOmHxv5w8SR9pBbDDU-8HhyIQH-L8

Resources for children and young people with additional needs:

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

carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf

www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/coronavirus - contains a link to the most up-to-date version of their 'easy read guidance' for young people and adults with learning difficulties