

Managing Emotions & Behaviour

It is normal for both adults and children to feel anxious with all the uncertainty and changes to daily life. Having children and young people at home, often when parents are trying to work themselves, adds another layer of stress.

Children are sensitive to picking up on their parents' anxiety and stress so it's important that you make sure you're looking after yourself and managing your own feelings in order to support your children.

- Recognise your child's feelings and empathise with them. Acknowledge all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice. When your child is in a relaxed, rational state, problem solve with them, e.g. "let's think about what you can do next time you feel like this"
- Choose something you can do every day for your own enjoyment or relaxation and let other family members know not to disturb you during that time
- Keep up to date with the latest public health guidance but limit your exposure to news, negative stories and unconfirmed information about Coronavirus. If we're constantly exposing ourselves to it, it can feel overwhelming for us and our children
- Try to ensure that you and your family stay active, eat healthy foods and get enough sleep. These all contribute to good mental health.
- Practising mindfulness and meditation can help to stay present in the moment, rather than carried away by worries. Breathing exercises can also help to calm our minds and bodies down. Apps (headspace, calm, smiling mind) and guided breathing/meditation videos on YouTube can be helpful, but if that's not for you, doing something you enjoy and really focussing on it can be just as good.
- Incorporate pleasant activities into your and your children's day and try to look for any small positives. Listen to relaxing music, share things that you enjoy doing and spend some quality time together.
- Social relationships and connections help us to manage stress and feel supported in difficult times. Physical contact might not be possible with all family and friends, try to stay connected through messages, phone calls and video calling. Help your children keep in contact with family and friends via telephone or video calls, and put up photos to help them feel connected and remind them of good times together. As part of your routine, a grandparent or other family member could read a story to younger children. If you don't have a social support system, reach out to community groups and charities for support. See Southwark's local offer for advice and support below.

If you're worried about your mental health or your children's mental health deteriorating, reach out to professionals (see resources below.)

Managing Challenging Behaviour

You may find your child's behaviour more challenging to manage when they have to stay in doors for long periods and their routine is disrupted. Children with certain medical and genetic conditions may find this time particularly difficult. Parents can feel under pressure in this situation and worry about what approach to take.

All behaviours are a way of communicating. Behaviour that challenges can be a way of communicating that a child is unhappy, anxious, frustrated or bored. They may feel angry, be in discomfort, or reacting to a sound, sight, smell or noise. They may not have understood what you wanted them to do.

If you can work out what your child is trying to tell you through their behaviour, then you can look for ways to prevent them becoming distressed and help them find better ways to communicate their needs.

- If you think your child may be anxious and fearful, think of calming strategies and activities you can do with them. For example, counting and breathing activities, colouring, something more physical etc.
- If your child is angry or upset, stay calm and neutral and give them time to calm down before trying to talk to them about what happened. Think ahead of time how you can do this, as it can be more challenging when space is limited.
- Support your child them by talking to them about how they're feeling and communicate reassurance through your calm tone of voice, warmth, posture, eye contact and facial expression.
- Sometimes children can find it hard to talk about emotions, so you might need to guess their feelings and see where that leads, or ask them to draw their feelings out if they can't find the words.
- Use the same tone of voice with children as you would want people to use with you. Talk respectfully to them and about them.
- It can be tempting to criticise children in the hope that pointing challenging behaviour will make them stop doing it, but this often has the opposite effect. Children soon learn that they more get attention by doing things parents do not like. A better way to encourage positive behaviour is to remember to praise them as often as possible, even in small ways, such as, "Pete was really helpful today. He helped me put the shopping away." Make sure to show that you have noticed when your child has done something good! This does not mean never reprimanding them for doing something wrong, but it is important to criticise the child's behaviour rather than the child as a person. Instead of saying, "You are very naughty," say something like, "I do not like what you are doing," or, "We do not allow that behaviour."

Consistent boundaries, structure and daily routines help children feel safe by making their surroundings feel a bit more predictable. Let children know what behaviour is allowed and what is not. Give children clear limits. Be consistent about what is and what is not acceptable.

Resources

Mind UK

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

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

BBC

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

How to protect your mental health

www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwellguide/

www.nhs.uk/change4life

Southwark Educational Psychology Service offers a free confidential telephone consultation service for parents with concerns about their child. You can find further information on the Local Offer and download the parent consultation leaflet:

<https://localoffer.southwark.gov.uk/assets/legacy/getasset?id=fAAxADUANwA2AHwAfABUAHlAdQBIAHwAfAAwAHwA0>

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, providing 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

[www.gingerbread.org.uk/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI7M217MzE6AIVl-](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI7M217MzE6AIVl-FRCh1szQrEEAAYASAAEgKRBPD_BwE)

FRCh1szQrEEAAYASAAEgKRBPD_BwE Advice and Resources for Parents: Covid-19 5

One Parent Families/Gingerbread is the leading national charity working to help lone parents and their children.

National Centre for Children and Families' page on how to support young people's mental health during periods of disruption.

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

Advice for young people who are feeling anxious about Coronavirus.

World Health Organisation

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

Helping children cope with stress.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<https://afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/?fbclid=IwAR3ScDBfuhV51NKyutAG9IPNm4JnjjLOmHxv5w8SR9pBbDDU-8Hhy1QH-L8>

Grandparents Plus

Call: 0300 123 7015

grandparentsplus.org.uk

Grandparents Plus is the only national charity dedicated to supporting kinship carers - grandparents and other relatives raising children who aren't able to live with their parents.

Promoting Children's Well-being

Anna Freud Centre

<https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/anna-freud-learning-network/coronavirus/>

Provide link to family early help duty line, contact for Southwark CAMHS & other Southwark helplines

Samaritans Call 116 123

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

Headspace app, CALM app, kooth.com, smiling mind app

Childline 0800 1111 and childline.org

Resources for children and young people with additional needs

Further information for Parents and Young People: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (ages 0-25) can be found on the Southwark Local Offer at:

<https://localoffer.southwark.gov.uk/information-advice-and-support/guidance-and-information--coronavirus/>

Special Needs Jungle

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

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

Mencap

<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.

Carol Gray

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf?fbclid=IwAR23zxNlbEumpw4oKlM7Xy3VlKnA25b8Gi53N6YiFleKB9Vx0LQypSPYzzg>

A Social Story about pandemics.

The Autism Educator

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

A Social Story about the coronavirus.

Relate.org.uk

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/researchresources/leaflets/positive-parenting/>

'Contact a family'

209–211 City Road, London EC1V 1JN. 020 7608 8700

info@cafamily.org.uk www.cafamily.org.uk

www.facebook.com/contactafamily www.twitter.com/contactafamily

www.youtube.com/cafamily

Free helpline for parents and families: 0808 808 3555 (Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm)

helpline@cafamily.org.uk (Access to over 200 languages)

Contact a family produce information for parents of disabled children in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Their leaflet "Understanding your child's behaviour" includes helplines and links to multiple other resources and organisations that can provide support.

With acknowledgements and thanks to the many Educational Psychology Services across the UK who have collaborated to share resources.