**Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour (Parent Version)**

For children and young people (CYP) this time can be extremely difficult especially as there are a number of changes to their routine, being at school or home and they may be cut off from seeing their friends and socialising. Having open and honest conversations with your child/ren can be helpful as well as acknowledging that you know they are frustrated. Listening to your child and validating their emotions will really help during these uncertain times.

Social media may be a big part of their lives at the moment as this could be their key to keeping in touch with their peers. Encourage this particularly at certain times of the day when you notice your child becoming bored or frustrated. It is important as a parent or carer, to keep your CYP safe whilst they are using online activities. You want to ensure that they are not over-exposing themselves to potentially anxiety-provoking information and they do not experience any type of intimidation whilst they are online. There are a number of apps that you can access in order to monitor their usage but having a conversation with your CYP and being honest with them so they understand the risks and what to do if they do start to feel uncomfortable in any forum may be the most straight-forward.

One of the best tools to support your CYP in leading a happy and safe life online is having an open conversation about the method they are using to keep in touch with friends and what to do if they are experiencing any bullying online.

Try your best to keep to a routine, of sorts, especially with diet, exercise and sleep as this will have an impact on the mood of your child and how they approach the day ahead. Do your best not to let children sleep in too late in the morning, although a lovely lie-in is tempting to anyone ☺

**Maintaining Positive Wellbeing**Research conducted by The New Economics Foundation (2008) suggested five actions we can all take to improve our wellbeing:

**Connect:** Research suggests connecting with others helps our sense of belonging and overall wellbeing. Make time to talk and listen to your child to help you both feel connected. Social distancing makes connecting with people outside the family a bit more difficult, but consider using technology to help you out. For example, having a video call with a friend or family member can give us the same boost as if we were physically talking to someone else.

**Be active:** Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise. Aim for 30 minutes per day. If the current government advice permits, try to get outside in a place where there are few people. If you can’t go outside, open the windows to get some fresh air and do an online fitness class. Joe Wicks has been doing a live work out for children, each morning at 9am (but you can do previous workouts at any time): <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=pe+with+joe>. For younger children, or those who prefer gentler activity, try Cosmic Kids Yoga: <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=cosmic+kids+yoga>

**Take notice:** When we are busy, we can often go into autopilot and take little notice of our surroundings. Take a break from the news and social media and concentrate on what is happening in there here and now. Notice and appreciate the small things, and encourage family members to do the same. For example, try some mindfulness activities such as mindful colouring together with your child. Or you can both try to notice 5 things in your immediate environment you can see, 4 things you can touch or physically feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste – this is a good grounding exercise for if either of you start to feel anxious. If you and your child enjoy mindfulness activities, you could both try out some of the FREE resources on the Calm website, designed from ages 3 up to adults: <https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath>

**Keep learning:** Learning can help our self-esteem and confidence. Social distancing will bring new challenges, but we can use this time to start something new, for example researching something you or your child have always been interested in, taking up a new hobby, or trying out different recipes together. Try not to feel too much pressure to make everything your child does each day similar to what you think they would do in school – this is a great opportunity for you to help them to develop their life skills and explore their creativity in different ways.There are lots of ideas for how to keep children learning on the Ted Ed website. Videos cater for children of all ages, but we recommend that you watch them first to make sure they are right for your child: <https://ed.ted.com/>

**Give:** Doing things for others makes us feel good. It helps others feel good, improves our sense of belonging, helps us to keep things in perspective and can help us to reduce stress and negative feelings. For example, you and your child could write to or call a family member you haven’t seen in a while to help brighten their day.

**Managing behaviour**

If you notice a change in your child’s behaviours try to think about the following aspects:

* What is their behaviour trying to say? Do they need positive attention, sensory feedback (lights, sounds, textures, physical touch), something physical (food, drink, sleep, etc.)?
* Think about the A, B, C (antecedent, behaviour, consequence)- What came before the behaviour? Were there any triggers? What are the actions you are trying to encourage or discourage? What follows the behaviours?
* Has there been any change to the environment?
* Are your expectations clear to your child?
* Are they frustrated and want to communicate something?
* Is there the right balance of choice and control (where possible and appropriate)? At this time of uncertainty, help your child to focus on things they are able to control or influence.
* Are you using positive language and praise as much as possible? Focusing on the positive rather than the behaviour can be difficult at first but the more you practise it, the quicker you will see the positive impact it can have.
* Use of distraction and reminders about routines and structure can help young people to feel safe.
* Think about your child’s coping strategies- would they walk away/go for a walk, take a time out, talk to someone? Do these strategies need to be adapted? Can you support them to think of what they can do to help themselves?
* Stay as calm as possible

If your child has a diagnosis of ADHD you may want to think about:

* Setting up a realistic structure or routine for the day- it can be flexible but having one will help your child to feel safe and know what is going to happen next
* Try to include some learning, fun activities, chill out time and maybe some house jobs/life skills
* Set short bursts of activities. You know how long your child is able to focus on a task for so play to their strengths and don’t make your expectations too high
* Include as many movement breaks and snack breaks as your child needs
* Use their areas of interest to maintain their attention- games and learning through play is a great way to keep children occupied
* Use of screen and non-screen time- talk to your child about the best way to decide on this; there may be certain times when they would like to be online or watch their favourite TV programme
* There are websites which offer guidance and recommend apps to help keep young people focussed <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/apps-to-help-kids-stay-focused>

**Helping your child to cope with Anxiety and Worry**

Anything can be a trigger for worry but there are particular situations where worry becomes even more common. Strong triggers for worry are situations that are:

• Ambiguous – open to being interpreted in different ways

• New – so we’ve not experienced things like it before

• Unpredictable – we don’t know what will happen next

The current pandemic ticks all of these! Therefore, it makes sense that lots of children and young people are experiencing a lot of worry. We are in an unusual situation with lots of uncertainty.

*Top tips for helping your child cope with anxiety and worry:*

* **Support them to identify whether their worry is a 'real problem' worry or a 'crystal ball worry'**. A real problem worry is one relating to something that is happening right now and that we need to do something about. There are often practical solutions to these, e.g. if a child is missing their grandparents think of ways that they can still stay connected using Skype or sending letters in the post. A crystal ball (or hypothetical) worry is often phrased as “what if?” and is something that is not happening in the here and now but is something that *might* happen in the future. Crystal ball worries are not things that we can do something about and so it is important that we support young people to find ways to let the worry go and focus on something else.
* **Help them to practise postponing their worry.** Worry is persistent – it can make children feel as though they have to focus on it and talk about it right now. Helping children to postpone their crystal ball worries can help them to take control of them. This means deliberately setting aside time each day to let them worry (e.g. 30 minutes at the end of each day). It can feel like an odd thing to do at first! It also means that for the rest of the day they need to try to let go of the worry until you get to your 'worry time'. Worry monsters can be a great way of supporting this strategy with younger children – feeding the worry monster the worries throughout the day and setting a time each day where the worries are discussed**.** Twinkl has some instructions to make your own worry monster: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-l-54049-the-making-of-milton-worry-monster-activity-sheet>
* **Distract them with fun activities,** what you/ they choose to do will depend on the age of your child and their interests but could include: reading their favourite book, watching a funny film, drawing, playing with pets, listening to music, giving them/ giving themselves a hand massage, cooking their favourite meal with them, writing a wellbeing journal about what has happened that day and what has helped them cope.
* Show them how to use **relaxation and breathing** techniques: for example; breathing in for 4 and out for 4, noticing their body relax as they breathe out and repeating this. Mindfulness is a really helpful relaxation strategy and there are a number of FREE resources available to support your child to practice mindfulness based activities such as the calm website mentioned above, also for the next few weeks, Mindful Schools will be offering free live mindfulness classes for children. These might be helpful anchors to give the day some routine and structure.  
  <https://www.mindfulschools.org/free-online-mindfulness-class-for-kids/>
* Model **self-soothing** techniques: Self-soothing will help your child to relax and when they are relaxed they will be better at thinking of different solutions to help them cope. It is helpful to think about using the different sense, for example:
* *Smell:* Burning a scented candle, baking something to make the house smell nice
* *Taste:* Eating their favourite food but doing it slowly to help them enjoy the taste
* *Sight:* Go through magazines and cut out pictures they like to make a collage, look at old photos of fun times/ loved ones
* *Hearing*: Listen to soothing music or an audio book
* *Touch:* Having a hot bath or stroking a pet
  + You might want to support your child to create their own ‘coping box’ which includes items relating to the self-soothing techniques they have identified. Papyrus provide instructions about how to create one of these which they call a ‘hope box” [www.papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Hope-box.pdf](http://www.papyrus-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Hope-box.pdf)
* Help them **visualise** their safe place. If your child is feeling scared or worried, you can help them imagine that they are in a safe, calm place; by doing this their body will also feel calm and relaxed. Turn off the TV, mobile phones, radio, etc. and be in a quiet place. The safe place might be somewhere they have been on holiday or somewhere made up. Encourage them to imagine they are in that place and prompt them to think about their senses in relation to that place, e.g. *“What can you see? What do you hear?*” etc. Get Self Help provide guidance about how people can do this, younger children may need more support to think of ideas: <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/SafePlace.pdf>
* Encourage them to use **positive self talk**. Instead of focusing on the worry, get them to use coping statements to help soothe their emotions when they are feeling anxious. These are statements that remind them of their strengths and the people/ things they have around them that can help them, e.g. *“This is difficult but I am strong and know I can cope”* *“I can do this” ”I know that this feeling will pass”.*
* Encourage them to practise **letting go of the worry thoughts**, e.g.
  + *“Imagine you are sitting in a field watching your worry thoughts float away on clouds”* Mindfulness activities can also help with this.

**Useful websites/ resources:**

*General*

The Partners in Salford website has recently added a list of helplines that are available for children, young people and their parents in relation to their mental health

<https://www.partnersinsalford.org/media/1385/ehwb-helplines-april-2020.pdf>

The Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership have recently collated helpful resources relating to Covid-19 for anyone to use

<https://hub.gmhsc.org.uk/mental-health/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources/>

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) have collated helpful resources from across the internet for young, people, carers and professionals

[www.camhs-resources.co.uk](http://www.camhs-resources.co.uk)

*For parents/ carers*

The NSPCC has advice for parents whose children may be worried about Coronavirus and may be struggling with their mental health. They have tips for how you can support your child and keep them safe

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxiety-mental-health/>

*For younger children*

As mentioned in the ‘maintaining wellbeing’ section above, Cosmic Kidsprovides free online yoga and mindfulnesssessions. This Owl and the Guard Dog video clip on YouTube produced by Cosmic Kids is helpful for explaining anxiety to younger children <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so8QN9an3t8>

*For young people*

Young Minds provides helpful guidance for young people who may be experiencing anxiety relating to Coronavirus

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

Mind provides a comprehensive list of contacts that young people can use if they are looking for advice or support relating to a range of issues relating to their mental heath

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/useful-contacts/>

For young people who have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) who have worries relating to contamination fears, OCD UK has some helpful tips to help them cope at this difficult time <https://www.ocduk.org/ocd-and-coronavirus-survival-tips/>

**Supporting your family to stay safe**

There is currently a lot of information in the media about COVID-19 and the government has given guidance about how we can all stay safe during this challenging time. However for some children and young people, staying inside is difficult to understand and accept. This may lead them to engage in “risky behaviours” in order to socialise and be outside.

A key conversation you will likely need to have with your child is why they can only go outside once a day for exercise and what this should look like. Help your child to feel some control of the situation by agreeing as a family when you might go out together. Some young people are going outside to meet friends or going into public places in order to have “space” from their family. It is important to talk about why they can’t meet friends and what the impact of this could be if they do.

Part of this may be due to the government using the term “social distancing”. It is important to talk your child about what this actually means. It does not mean they cannot have contact with their friends but that this contact will look different. Encourage your child to find creative methods in order to socialise with friends. For younger children, this could be a virtual play date where similar craft activities are brought out. For older children this could be through online games, such as Minecraft and age-appropriate console games.

During this time, children and young people are going to have increased access to the internet and virtual platforms and it is important to monitor this activity in order to support them to stay safe online. As a parent or carer, the best tool to support your child in leading a happy and safe life online is having an open conversation about the method they are using to keep in touch with friends and what to do if they are experiencing any bullying online. The following website gives ideas of how to have these conversations with children of different ages, online safety activities for the family to get involved with and ideas about how to create a family agreement about internet safety over this challenging period.

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/keeping-children-happy-and-safe-online-during-covid-19>

Here are some free virtual meeting platforms that parents can set up and monitor whilst your children socialise:

<https://zoom.us/>

<https://hangouts.google.com/>

The following website is aimed at young people to give them ideas of how to cope with self-isolation

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/coronavirus-and-mental-health/>

**Local services that you can access for support:**

Educational Psychology Service: [eps@salford.gov.uk](mailto:eps@salford.gov.uk) (Office hours: 9-5pm)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS): 0161 518 5400 (the duty team is in every day – **children and young people that are high risk should still go to the PANDA unit at Salford Royal Hospital.**