

Looking after yourself, looking after your children

During challenging times, it is important 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.

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. Even when time is pressurised, try to plan your days or weeks to include something from each of the '5 ways to wellbeing'.

BE ACTIVE

Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise every day. You Tube 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. 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 e.g. cooking, drawing etc and really focussing 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, phone relatives more often than usual. Whilst it can be helpful to share worries, try to find other things to talk about too.

GIVE

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 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. Whilst 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, the following tips might be helpful:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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, inactivity etc. 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. (<https://bristolchildparentsupport.co.uk/ready-family-meetings/>)
- Reduce access to rolling news – It is important to keep up to date with new developments and announcements, but it can be hard to switch off from the constant stream of news from media outlets and social media. Reduce the time-spent hearing, reading or watching news – at the moment it might be overwhelming for adults and children. Try to protect children from distressing media coverage.
- It's a good idea for children to do some learning every day. This will promote a sense of normality. But don't try to replicate a full timetable. Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work.

Some tips include:

- Spending time together, building relationships, enjoying shared activities and reassuring children. Don't feel pressure to replicating the school timetable.
- Get your children to teach you something, anything! You can then model how to learn and listen. Be interested in what they are doing and willing to learn from them.
- Have a regular routine. Think about making, with your child, a visual timetable with pictures.
- Balance screen time with other activities. Challenge children to learn new skills that don't involve screens e.g. tying shoe laces, juggling, baking. Older children might want to set their own goals.
- Ensure children and young people have movement breaks and stay hydrated.
- Give children and young people a boundary between work and home by keeping work in one place so it doesn't spread out. Or signal the end of work, by putting it away and doing an enjoyable activity, e.g. sharing a favourite song or dance!
- Start every day like it's a new day!

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 e.g. "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 & carers

Luton Youth & Families Covid-19 Response Group

The aim of the partnership is to provide young people, parents and school staff with a quick and easy way to access voluntary sector support from their own homes.

The group currently comprises of Autism Bedfordshire, Families United Network, Level Trust, Luton Council, Stepping Stones, Luton Food Bank, Tokko Youth Centre and Youthscape.

How to access support

Parents, young people and school staff can stay in touch with us by simply filling in our online form which can be found here <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/lutonYFCRG> or by connecting with us over twitter or instagram on LutonYFCRG.

Anyone who completes a form will be triaged by a central team. The team will assess which organisation they think is best equipped to provide support and will pass this on to them.

Luton Foodbank

Access vouchers via referral from Luton Council Crisis Support: Freephone 0800 4561673 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm).

Every Mind Matters

NHS advice about how to look after your mental wellbeing while staying at home

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/>

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Protecting vulnerable children is everyone's business, and we all need to be alert, to know what to look out for and where to go for advice, as well as having the confidence to report any acts of abuse safe in the knowledge that they will be acted on.

If you are concerned about the welfare of a child (0 to 18 years old) please call the MASH on 01582 547653. The number to call for out of normal working hours emergencies is 0300 300 8123.

Luton Child & Educational Psychology Service

Futures House, The Moakes, Marsh Farm, Luton LU3 3QB

01582 54 8094/ 8150

Child and educational psychologists who work with children, young people, families, schools and community organisations to support the social, emotional wellbeing/mental health and learning of children and young people. Twitter @LutonPsychology Email: psychologyservice@luton.gov.uk

Telephone consultation service open during the Coronavirus pandemic to parents, carers: 01582 548150, Monday to Friday, 10am-12noon.

Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones is a Luton based charity dedicated to empowering women who have suffered from domestic abuse or are vulnerable due to substance misuse by providing hope, skills and the resources to make positive life choices. They offer group and 121 based emotional and practical support and information, alongside specialist counselling and legal advice provided by volunteers.

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

01582 457114 hello@steppingstonesluton.org.uk

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

The freephone, 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline [0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247)

Domestic Violence Assist

The UK's only registered charity arranging Non-Molestation Orders, Prohibited Steps Orders & Occupation Orders

Call Free on 0800 195 8699

Men's advice line

Domestic abuse affects men too.

0808 8010327

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline

0800 999 5428

Samaritans

Call 116 123

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

Mind UK

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

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

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

General – for young people

Childline - 0800 1111

Free and Confidential Help for Young People in the UK. Call anytime for help & advice about a wide range of issues.

Calmzone from childline. A toolbox of activities such as breathing exercises, coping videos, yoga videos and games that can help children feel calm in a period of disruption.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>

Self-care strategies - the Anna Freud Centre

A selection of self-care strategies that have been developed by young people to help manage their own wellbeing. During a time when access to regular appointments may be disrupted or anxiety might be heightened, it might be helpful to try one or some of these strategies.

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

www.youngminds.org.uk

Parenting pressures

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 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

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

A short book about Coronavirus for children under 7

Newsround video

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51342366?fbclid=IwAR3CyZq5rzXVoyGCgWjipx6YqoetuZ1tP16y7wMjUR6uwgWyhRmf0aFTrAs>

Drs Chris and Xand explain what's happening

British Psychological Society

<https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-highlights-importance-talking-children-about-coronavirus>

Educational & Child Psychologists' Advice about talking to Children and Young people about the Corona Virus

Resources for children and young people with additional needs:

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

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

<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