

Family Support Pack



Looking after children's wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak – a resource from Swindon Educational Psychology Service



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Introduction

During the coronavirus outbreak, people across the whole world are facing challenging times. The pandemic brings uncertain times and changeable impacts on people's lives.

There is a lot of stress and worry at this time. This is especially true when children and young people are at home rather than school, and parents/carers are juggling working from home and/or caring for their families. Feeling worried, concerned and stressed is completely normal in these unusual circumstances.

Taking care of our own wellbeing and that of our children and families is important in coping with these challenges and worries. This guidance has a range of information, links and resources to help with this. It has been compiled by Swindon Educational Psychology Service and is intended to be useful alongside updated information from Swindon Borough Council's Local Offer (<https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk/home>)

Looking After Yourself

Looking after your own wellbeing is the first and best thing you can do to help yourself look after others. To help with this, try to do one thing from each of these categories every day.

Be active

Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise every day. YouTube has lots of exercise videos for children and adults. Get children involved in planning their own 'indoor PE'.
If you can, try to get outside once a day either into your garden if you have one, or to a place where you can remain a safe distance from others. 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

Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present (called 'mindfulness') directly enhances your wellbeing.
Take a break from the news and social media, and concentrate on what's happening in the here and now. Notice and appreciate the small things. There are lots of good mindfulness apps to try. However, just getting into something you enjoy e.g. cooking, drawing etc. and really focussing on it can be just as good as specific mindfulness apps.

Connect

Social connection is one of the most important ways that we can look after our wellbeing. Social distancing is making that trickier, but we're lucky enough to have technology to help us out.
Social media is great, but if you can, try to have phone calls or video calls. Arrange to Facetime/Skype a friend for coffee, and telephone 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 local social media for ideas.
Many of us will not be in a position to offer practical support, but we can still offer mutual support to friends and family by checking in with them regularly.

Keep learning

Whilst we're busy learning, we're less likely to experience anxious thoughts and worries. Plus, learning a new skill or honing an existing one gives us a sense of purpose and achievement.
Social distancing will bring new challenges, but it could give some 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

The most important things for looking after children at this time are the same things they always need: love, attention and opportunities to learn and play. The following areas of consideration will also be helpful over a longer period.

Reassurance and understanding

Remember that stress and anxiety are normal at this time – for you and your child. Reassure your child that you are helping make sure they are okay and safe. This is important because children sometimes feel responsible for things beyond their control. Normalise your child's situation. Children and adults feel better when they know that lots of other people like them are experiencing something similar to them.

Contact with friends

Help your child stay connected to their friends. Friendships are a key resiliency factor for children and young people, especially for teenagers, and most children see their friends nearly every day of the week.

See if it is possible for children to talk on the phone. Maybe they could have a group Skype or WhatsApp call? Maybe they could write letters or emails to each other? Consider whether this needs to be supervised based on your child's age.

Structure and routine

Try and keep to a structure and routine that suits you. Having a plan for the day can be very reassuring as children and adults like to know what is going to happen. You could display the routine using a timeline, pictures and visuals.

Keep bedtime and morning routines close to existing ones to promote a reassuring sense of normality. Encouraging children to get up and dressed during the week will help maintain some difference between weekdays and weekends.

But, don't worry if the routine isn't perfect, as this isn't a 'normal' situation. If sticking rigidly to a routine is causing more stress or conflict, then it may be more helpful for your family to be more 'free-flow'.

Boundaries and expectations

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 children, which helps children to feel safe.

Give your child opportunities to have a say in plans and new routines. Encourage them to develop independence by referring to their own routine/plan themselves. Remember that they may have had a lot of their freedoms and choices removed for a while and may feel powerless or angry. Children 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. The following link describes more on this: <https://bristolchildparentsupport.co.uk/ready-family-meetings/>

School-work

Expect children to do some learning every day. This will promote a sense of normality and purpose, and keep them up to date for when they are back at school. It is expected that schools will be setting the learning that they feel is appropriate. However, there are many resources (a list is provided further below) to help you.

Don't try to replicate a full school timetable for a variety of reasons. Giving yourself and your children permission to accept this can be a big weight lifted. Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work – home isn't school and parents/carers are not usually teachers. Focus on relationships and shared activities too.

Try to keep school-work in one place so that it doesn't spread out all over your home. This helps to maintain a work/home boundary. This might be easier for some than others, because of different living situations. Try other ways to 'signal' the end of working, e.g. enjoying a favourite song or dance when work is put away.

It is likely that your child will be using screens more often at the moment. Try to ensure your child still has a balanced range of activities each day. When using technology, be wary of giving unsupervised access to platforms that you would not normally allow your child onto, since the internet still poses the same risks as normal. Ensure appropriate content filters are active.

Other activities

Balance school-work and screen time with other activities. Make sure your child can play, as play is fundamental to children's wellbeing and development.

Challenge children to learn new skills, for example tying their shoe laces, juggling, baking. Older children might want to set their own goals.

Encourage plenty of physical activities, to help your child stay fit and burn off energy. If you don't have a garden, try and go for a walk, a bike ride, kick a ball around, play 'it' or hide and seek. If you have to stay indoors, try hula hooping or skipping.

Younger children will enjoy household assault courses, discos etc. Older children and teenagers might respond better to fitness videos.

Example Daily Timetable

Get ready for the day	<input type="checkbox"/> Have breakfast, have a wash, get dressed
9am Activity 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Online learning from school OR a craft activity (cutting and sticking, painting, baking)
10am Activity 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Online learning from school OR some writing or maths - write a story, count coins
11am Get active!	<input type="checkbox"/> Play in the garden, do an exercise video
12 Lunchtime	
1pm Help about the house	<input type="checkbox"/> Help tidy up, Hoover, wash up
2pm Quiet time	<input type="checkbox"/> Do something calm, like reading or colouring
3pm Activity 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Online learning from school OR be creative – make some music, design an outfit
4pm Have some free time	<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy toys and tech
5pm Dinner time	<input type="checkbox"/> Help prepare dinner – help tidy up too!
6pm Family time	<input type="checkbox"/> Play a game, watch a movie, spend time together
Get ready for bed	<input type="checkbox"/> Have a bath, get pyjamas on, read a story

Home Education Resources

It is expected that schools will be setting the learning that they feel is appropriate. However, there are many resources to help you, including some of the examples below.

Useful home schooling resources

<https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk/content/send-local-offer/landing-pages/education/useful-home-schooling-resources-for-parents-teachers-and-sencos/>

This page of Swindon's Local Offer website includes helpful links for social stories and support related to coronavirus, plus activity ideas available in the following areas:

- Early Years
- General Education
- SEN Resources
- Maths
- Science
- Sports
- Drama

Twinkl

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/home-learning-hub>

This 'Home Learning Hub' has activities, live lessons, worksheets and suggested daily schedules for different ages.

BBC Learning

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/coursesearch/>

This site is old and no longer updated, but there's still lots available. No TV license required except for the content on BBC iPlayer.

National Geographic

www.natgeokids.com/uk/

Children's section of the National Geographic website.

www.nationalgeographic.org/education/classroom-resources/

Resources, lesson plans etc.

Virtual museums

mcn.edu/a-guide-to-virtual-museum-resources/

A guide to virtual museum resources, e-learning, and online collections for art, culture, history and science.

<https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours>

Virtual tours of some of the world's best museums.

Big History Project

<https://www.bighistoryproject.com/home>

Aimed at secondary aged students; multi-disciplinary activities.

PE with Joe

<https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1>

Fun exercise sessions for children of all ages, 9am every weekday.

Duolingo

<https://www.duolingo.com>

Learn languages for free; either web-based or app.

Scratch

<https://scratch.mit.edu/explore/projects/games/>

Creative computer programming.

Scouts

www.scouts.org.uk/the-great-indoors/

A resource for indoors activities. Each activity also has 'change the level of challenge' and 'make it accessible'.

Paw Print Badges

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

Free challenge packs and other downloads. Many activities can be completed indoors. Badges cost but are optional.

The Imagination Tree

<https://theimaginationtree.com>

Creative art and craft activities for the very youngest.

Ted Ed

<https://ed.ted.com>

All sorts of engaging educational videos.

Talking to Children about Coronavirus

Allow discussions and for your child to ask questions

Try to take time to talk and listen to your child. Be clear that you are happy to answer any questions they have. Be led by your child – they may not be that interested or they may want to know everything all at once.

It is tempting to try and protect children from difficult topics, but they are more likely to worry when they're kept in the dark. Most children and teenagers will be aware of what is happening but may not have all the facts they need to understand it.

Be truthful but remember your child's age / level of understanding

Try to answer 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".

As a guideline:

- Young children up to about age 7 will need very simple explanations that relate to their own experiences. For example: 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 will be a bit different for a while.
- Most children older than 7 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.

Be aware of your own feelings

Manage your own wellbeing as much as you can, as described earlier in this resource. This is important so that you can manage your child's worries.

Help your child label and name their emotions by labelling and naming yours. Talk about what you do to help with your feelings. It is often adult instinct to 'make it all better', but children need to know it is normal to feel scared, sad and angry about what is happening. Tell them that the situation is not normal, but their feelings are.

Focus on practical messages

Reassure your child that their own risk is very low, but they can help look after other people. Give practical guidance e.g. how to wash your hands. Make sure children know how helpful they are being by following the rules about hygiene and social distancing.

Help your child to know about all the work people around the world are doing to find treatments and a vaccine. Talk about what other people are doing to help. When upsetting situations happen, everyone benefits from knowing they can help and from noticing the good others are doing.

Sources of help for talking about coronavirus with children

British Psychological Society

<https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/advice-talking-children-about-illness>

This leaflet is designed to help adults talk about ill health in a way that is developmentally suitable for children. It is broken down into four age categories: developmental characteristics that define each age group, what children may do or say in reaction to illness at each age, and tips on how to help them.

Unicef

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

8 tips to help comfort and protect children

Childmind

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Advice and a video from the Child Mind Institute

Zero to Three

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus>

Tips and guidance on supporting preschool children

Brainpop

<https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/>

Information video on coronavirus for primary age children

World Health Organisation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOV1aBVYKGA&feature=youtu.be>

Information video on coronavirus for older children/adults (WHO)

Stories for children

There are a number of stories, social stories and videos that have been created to explain coronavirus and its impact on children and young people. These can be found free online. The following are a good sample for children of different ages, with different strengths and needs, and with different 'themes'.

What is the coronavirus?

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

A very simply social story by Amanda McGuinness

Simple coronavirus social story

<http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

Another simply social story by STARS (Specialist Training in Autism and Raising Standards) and the link is the first in the list of resources.

Dave the Dog is worried about coronavirus

<https://nursedottybooks.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/dave-the-dog-coronavirus-1-1.pdf> A picture book written by a children's nurse about the coronavirus situation.

YouTube video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GNRc5RrV-l&fbclid=IwAR15ZMqDnHqp7vpuHapCY11kDkaFJOPaJUJBbmHHBlvrfQiA97Mkrs hu3k>

A YouTube video described as a “coronavirus social story by an Autistic dad of autistic kids”.

Our school is closing for a while

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/School-is-closing.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2HfaQor0iDGRz86oXpBMrDnOO90AEwMkyM2im pIntPj1P GNILcYkLB1U>

A social story by ELSA Support (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant). It talks about why school is closed and what you can do at home instead.

The Stay Home Superheroes

<https://www.sophiesstories.co.uk/stay-home-superheroes?fbclid=IwAR3-mOrwcV25Mg53T6GSBPcTbb5gsA7Kgjj3kkOXdw69gyMFLJdR Dv Qtl>

A typed story (no pictures) that describes a little boy being a superhero by staying at home to solve the ‘Big Problem’ (it does not name coronavirus). Two versions can be downloaded: one that includes the boy’s “mummy” and another that includes the boy’s “special person”.

Carol Gray social stories

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/pandemic-social-stories-direct-access/>

A number of social stories with different focuses: ‘Pandemics and the Coronavirus’ is more descriptive and technical; ‘Watching a Pandemic on Television’ talks about what children may see on the TV, and the difference between reality and TV; and ‘COVID 19- I Can Help!’ focuses on the virus itself, e.g. it’s size, and how children can help just by washing their hands.

If your child seems particularly worried

The stories, social stories and videos available online (like those listed above) are useful for providing children with simple, appropriate and manageable information that will hopefully reduce their worries.

It is also important to reduce access to rolling news. Whilst it is important to keep up to date, it can be overwhelming for adults and children to have a constant stream of news from TV and social media. Try to protect children from distressing media coverage.

It’s worth noting that children may include aspects of what is happening in their play, drawings, etc. It is quite usual for children to play out scary or unusual events, even though it can seem worrying. But children need to play through feelings, just as adults need to talk. If this becomes repetitive or distressing play, or a child seems unable to think about anything else, then they may need some help to play something different.

For children who are particularly worried, it may be useful to talk about and create a list, poster etc. of things they can control and things they cannot control. An example is included below (from ‘Thrive Counseling’, an American children’s counselling service) – this example oriented to older children and adults but may be good for ideas for a similar activity with younger children.



For children who are particularly worried, it may be helpful to create a simple 'Worry Plan', to help them discuss and write down a worry in a structured way.

Worry Plan

What is the worry?

How big is the worry? (1 = really really small, 10 = huge)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Who can help me with the worry?

What strategies will make the worry get smaller?

Sources of Support & References

Support for parents and carers

Swindon Local Offer

<https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk/home>

Local Offer is an information and advice website for children and adults in Swindon who have support needs.

Family Links

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

Family Links is a national charity and training organisation dedicated to the promotion of emotional health at home, at school, and at work.

Government guidance

<https://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 people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak. Plus, an 'easy read guide to looking after your feelings and your body'.

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

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 related to the coronavirus.

Support for children and young people

Kooth

<https://www.kooth.com/>

Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people.

Anna Freud Centre

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

Guidance for young people (and parents/carers) to support mental health and wellbeing during times 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.

SEND related support

Swindon Local Offer

<https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk/home>

Local Offer is an information and advice website for children and adults in Swindon who have support needs.

<https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk/content/send-local-offer/landing-pages/coronavirus-updates-for-send-local-offer/>

Coronavirus updates for SEND Local Offer

Swindon SEND Families Voice

<https://swindonsendfamiliesvoice.org.uk>

Swindon SEND Families Voice are a group of parent and carers who enable families to support themselves and each other, working with Swindon Borough Council, Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group (Health) and other agencies.

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>

For the latest guidance and an “Easy Read Guide” for young people and adults with learning difficulties.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to the sources listed throughout this document, for helping shape this resource.

Particular thanks to:

- Wiltshire Educational Psychology Service
- Buckinghamshire Educational Psychology Service
- The British Psychological Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychology