

Helpful Advice For Parents During the Lockdown

From Dr Lynette Rentoul

This can be a worrying time for parents and children alike and, with everything that's going on, it's only natural to feel a sense of unease. Don't fixate on worst-case scenarios. Focus on the known facts and keep things in perspective. Do your best to keep your concerns from your child (but do share with other supportive adults) and tell your child you will do everything you can to keep you both safe.

Here are some helpful tips:

1. Manage your own anxiety

Children and young people are worried by what they're hearing on the news, and the daily updates can be alarming. We can reassure them and help them feel less worried when we talk to them calmly. To save them (and yourself) from unnecessary anxiety, here are a few simple things you do to help keep yourself and your family calm.

- Keep a sense of perspective. Don't dwell on worse case scenarios.
- Remember all the helpful things taking place are to keep us all safe.
- Don't forget all the kind things that people are doing, and how hard our NHS is working to keep us all safe and well.
- Limit your consumption of the news.

2. Listen to your children, take their concerns seriously and show empathy

- Tell them it is normal to feel concerned but help them see that the way the news is reported can make events sound sensational and frightening.
- Listen carefully to your children's concerns and worries and attend to them.
- Help them keep things in perspective; remind them of all the good things going on.
- Be thoughtful about how you talk with children.
- Remind them that Government guidance and health workers keep us safe.

3. Check in with younger children

- Young children may not understand what is happening at the moment, but they may be unsettled by changes in routine or pick up that you are worried or upset.
- Look out for changes in their behaviour – are they having more tantrums or being more argumentative. This may mean that they are worried but don't know how to talk about it or what to do.
- Pick a calm time to gently talk with them about how they are feeling and respond to any outbursts in calm, consistent and comforting ways.

4. Be aware of your own behavior

- It's important that parents and carers understand the effect their own behaviour can have on young people. If you're visibly upset or react in a way that suggests you're fearful, they'll take their cues from you.

- Children manage their fears better if their parents and carers are calm and reassuring. This may not always be easy but do your best to protect your children from your fears, and instead share your fears with those adults who support you.
- Be supportive of family members at home and try and get everyone to help each other. Why not get everyone to help with chores? That way all family members stay busy and no one feels overwhelmed.

5. Keep routines in place

- Get up, get dressed, wash and eat in usual ways and times. Consistency and structure are calming during times of stress. Children, especially young ones, benefit from knowing what's going to happen and when.
- Ensure children do their schoolwork and stay in touch with teachers and school friends remotely. Set out a daily schedule and write it out every day. The schedule can mimic a school day, changing activities and work at regular intervals, with alternative periods of work and play.
- Have regular reminders of when you will change activities –this can head off 'meltdowns'. We may have to relax normal boundaries because these are unusual times; explain that to children. We try to be loving and flexible parents – not perfect ones!

6. Keep children and young people informed; answer their questions

Try and be armed with facts; this will help keep Coronavirus conversations calm, reflective, considered, and constructive.

7. Explain what efforts are being made to contain the virus

Our government is taking significant measures to prevent the spread of the virus. That is why we are staying at home, regularly washing our hands, and travel is restricted. Scientists are working to develop a vaccine, and our NHS is working hard to take care of our communities.

8. Emphasise all the positive things that are happening

Such as people helping each other, showing kindness to each other, shopping for each other, putting fun 'keep fit' routines on the internet, talking to each other remotely using FaceTime, WhatsApp and other ways of keeping in touch.

9. Play together

It is good to play with children and encourage children to play together. Try and discover new ways of playing together. Listen to music. Get out all the craft things: colouring; knitting; LEGO; jigsaws; drawing; cards; watch TV together. Do the cooking together and have some fun with this!

10. Be creative about new activities and exercise

Incorporate new activities into your routine – like doing a puzzle or having family game time in the evening. Enjoy baking together. Ensure everyone gets some exercise. Do a family walk or family yoga or dance to music together. Think together as a family about what your favourite games and activities are a draw up a list. This might include: arts and crafts; imaginary games and puzzles; musical activities;

board games and household projects. Learn something new together.

11. Stay in touch virtually

Keep your support network strong, even when you are only able to call, text or FaceTime family and friends. Socialising plays an important part in keeping us calm, grounded and content. The same is true for children. Communication can help children feel less alone and less stressed when they are away from friends. Remember how important socialising is for teenagers, who are naturally creating a little distance from us as parents. Their peer group gives them the safe space to find their identity, an important part of adolescence. Being separated from friends is tough and social isolation is not good for our mental health so relax and let teenagers socialise virtually as often as possible.

12. Offer practical advice

- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Keep hands clean by washing them often with soap and water or an alcohol-based gel.
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay at home to reduce the spread of the virus, (except for daily walks with someone from your family).
- Stay active at home – you can join in the daily online ‘keep fit’ videos; dance to music at home; play in the garden if you have one. Do things together as a family to stay fit if you can and make this fun.

13. Explain words to them that they may not have heard before

- **Epidemic** – a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time.
- **Pandemic** – an infectious disease, which has spread throughout several country or globally.
- **Virus** – Viruses are a type of germ. Viruses cause colds, chicken pox, measles, flu, and many other diseases. Unfortunately, antibiotics don’t work on viruses like they do on bacteria. Wash your hands often to help prevent the spread of viruses, especially before you eat and after you use the bathroom.
- **Coronavirus** – According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) coronaviruses are a group of viruses, which produce symptoms similar to that of flu. Symptoms can range from a runny nose, cough, sore throat and fever, but can also escalate to pneumonia. Coronavirus gets its name from the word ‘corona’ which means crown in Latin.

14. Keep Positive!

15. Savour the small moments.

Even when we are restricted to home we have small moments we can enjoy: the smell of coffee; a lovely shower; a moment cooking with our family; a funny game or loving smile. When you stop to take in these moments, rather than letting them rush by, you are giving your brain a chance to process joy and pleasure. This is very good for us and helps us stay calm.

16. Strengthen your loving connections.

Enjoy relationships and stay in touch with friends (even if remotely). Talk with your children and loved ones. Enjoy moments of playful connections. Loving moments are very good for us and keep us calm and ward off stress reactions in our body.

17. Look for the good in others.

At these times, we see both the good and bad in others; focus on all the good things people are doing: helping each other; keeping our spirits up through humour and fitness videos. Remember the NHS staff who work long hours; school staff who support us, directly and remotely; shop staff who make sure we have food; those neighbours who check in on the vulnerable among us; those who find positive messages on social media. When we tune into these positive, human aspects of the crisis, we are united in hope!

Here are a few ideas to help keep children entertained:

- [YouTube](#) – as you're probably aware, you can learn pretty much anything on YouTube. Challenge them to find three inspiring videos to share with the rest of the family each day, especially those that encourage them to think of others (altruism is a good protector of mental health), to think laterally, and broaden their horizons.
- [TED talks](#) are a brilliant way of learning about a subject from an expert in their field and there are so many topics to choose from – there's something for everyone.
- [KHAN Academy](#) – find free lessons on everything from maths to African rock art.
- Touch typing is a great skill to have and there are lots of websites they can learn for free. [Typing Club](#) is one – a few minutes a day and by the end of shutdown they will be typing at speed.
- [iMovie](#), [Tik Tok](#) – making and sharing mini films is fun. Challenge them to get creative.
- If you have a musical instrument lying around which no-one has ever bothered to use why not encourage them to download one of the many free apps and get learning. there is [Joy Tunes](#), [Justin Guitar](#) and probably a lot of you have a recorder lying around left over from junior school days.
- Technology is your friend. Encourage them to develop a new skill. Learn piano on the Magic Piano app; coding with [Raspberry Pi](#); try a new language with [Duolingo](#); digital art on [Medibang](#) or introduce them to photography and [make a pinhole camera](#). Spark creativity with the [Dyson](#) Foundation.
- [ART is Fun](#) gives great lessons for all ages and is free – how about having a daily create challenge such as creating something out of paper and it can't be a snowball or anything you have made before. [origami.me](#) is giving me some clues!
- Encourage them to learn to cook. There are so many free online recipes and videos out there. [Lorna Wing Cookery](#) offers teen cooking courses. It's not free but if your child is doing a Duke Of Edinburgh award they get their skill at the end.
- Keep active – apparently two million people have joined [Joe Wicks](#), the Body Coach's first workout video for the Corona pandemic. Have a look around online for all manner of fitness classes you can do from home.
- The last areas to consider are social and community and I am sure they will have plenty of thoughts on how to stay in touch with their friends. [Houseparty](#) is a great app for teenagers but be careful if you are going to let younger ones on it. The safest social media app I have come across for children is [GoBubble](#).

- Get out the cards and board games – for once in our lives we might all have time to stop and play. Current favourites are Monopoly Deal, Dixit and Racing Demon for card lovers.

Here are some useful advice websites:

www.youngpeoplecornwall.org
www.youngminds.org.uk
www.annafreud.org.uk
www.childline.org.uk
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

10 top tips:

- Try not to shield your child from the news, as it's likely they will find out somehow from school, being online or from friends.
- Talk to your child about what is going on. You could start by asking them what they have heard.
- Try to answer their questions and reassure them in an age appropriate manner. Remember, you do not need to know all the answers, but talking can help them feel calm.
- Reassure your child that it is unlikely they will get seriously ill, and if they do you feel ill you will look after them. Your child might be concerned about who will look after you if you catch the virus. Let them know the kind of support you have as an adult so that they don't feel they need to worry about you.
- Give some practical tips to your child about how they can look after themselves. For example, show them how to wash their hands properly, and remind them when they should be doing it.
- Keep as many regular routines as possible, so that your child feels safe and that things are stable.
- Spend time doing a positive activity with your child (e.g. reading, playing, painting, cooking) to help reassure them and reduce their anxiety. This is also a great way of providing a space for them to talk through their concerns, without having a 'big chat'.
- Encourage your child to think about the things they can do to make them feel safer and less worried.
- Be aware that your child may want more close contact with you at this time and feel anxious about separation. Try to provide this support whenever possible.
- Remember to look after yourself too. If you yourself are feeling worried, or anxious about coronavirus, talk to someone you trust who can listen and support you.