

Some Thoughts For Parents on Encouraging Wellbeing in the Family at a Time of Challenge.

Guidance For Parents

These are some thoughts and ideas which may be helpful to you as you support your young people through this difficult time. Some may be more appropriate for some households rather than others. You may want to consider implementing ideas that sound like they may work for you and your family, within the constraints of other tasks which you may have, such as working from home.

Listen to Your Young People

Children really value their parent/s' time and attention. Do what you can to spend time being available to listen to them, and to any worries that they have, even if you don't have all the answers to their questions. If your young people seem hard to communicate or connect with, try and drop what you are doing when they do want to speak to you. Since you find yourselves spending more time together as a family consider doing things together which you wouldn't do usually. Regardless of their age they may enjoy you reading to them, or be willing to share a book/read to you. Showing an interest in books or information that interest your children can be really beneficial to building relationships. Some older teenagers may prefer to spend considerable time in their rooms using technology to access information, and assessing how their peers are viewing the current situation. If this is the case encourage your young person to discuss their thoughts and any worries with you. If they aren't very communicative consider putting a note under the door of their room from time to time, praising them for all positive steps they are taking, e.g. completing school work, joining the family for meals, and letting them know that you care about them.

Do What You Can to Have Fun Together

Look for activities that you can do together with your young people, e.g. baking or cooking, building lego together, drawing, painting, spending some time gaming together. Many children appreciate engaging in an activity with their parents, and it can build bonds and enhance relationships. Search out and access comedy films which you could watch as a family. Laughter releases emotions and has a hugely positive impact on health and wellbeing.

Kindness and Gratitude/Expressing Worries

Think about having a 'Thank You' box in the home. Encourage members of the family to put notes in thanking others for anything that they have done for them, or to put 'Grateful' thoughts in the box. You could read and celebrate them together. A 'Worry' box would give your young people an opportunity to express what they are finding difficult to say. You may not have all the answers, especially at such a testing time, but your children will feel that they are being listened to, and that you are concerned for their emotional welfare.

Lessening the Impact of News and Media on Your Family

Encourage your young people to avoid over-focussing on the very serious news in the media regarding the COVID19 issue, and suggest to them that they find 'good news' stories of kindness and breakthroughs, and that they share these often. It is important to attempt to balance access to the news and information flooding the media, in order to maintain a positive approach to what is a very challenging situation. Try to avoid expressing your own fears or concerns as parents to your young people, but rather seek support from other adults.

Support for Yourself as Parents.

Remember that young people in the 11 -16 age range often focus on their own needs and development, and struggle to see the needs of those around them at times. Whenever possible adults should seek their own support, [this may be through technology at present], from family, friends, community groups, telephone counselling services. You may be working at home, and trying to juggle work pressures with maintaining family life, in as far as it is possible take time to 'be kind to yourself,' and to rest and sleep well, [good sleep contributes to strengthening the immune system].

Pile on the Praise!

Maintain usual boundaries and expectations in the home, but be aware that it is PRAISE and affirmation that can lead to changes in behaviour, and which will reinforce behaviour which you want to encourage. Whenever possible praise your young people for any positive aspects of their life at home, e.g. getting up at an expected time, or earlier than they managed the day before. Praise them for beginning school work and focus on what they have done rather than what they haven't achieved. Tell them why you are pleased. Specific praise is very effective and will encourage your child to seek out your positive attention again. If you have more than one young person at home and friction is arising at times, praise them for any positive time they spend together, even if this is watching a programme without conflicts arising. This will lead them to expect and seek praise for positive behaviour and lead to a calmer home.

Do You Have a Very Active Young Person in the Home?

A certain proportion of young people are naturally very active and find sitting still challenging. Praise them when they get started on work tasks. Allow them to move about during work sessions, and praise them, in particular, when they return to work. You could suggest that they set themselves goals for how long they will aim to concentrate on a task. They may want to try using an alarm. Praise them when they meet their target, or encourage them to try again when they don't. It can be helpful to intersperse school work tasks with some movement or exercise.

Some ideas for general movement and exercise might include following an online workout, doing a number of star jumps, and doing 'laps' of any outside space you may have. Children might enjoy setting themselves movement targets, and seeing if they could improve them day by day. Daily exercise outside the home will particularly benefit young people who are very active. If they find the prospect of a day inside challenging, make a schedule with them for when you will have exercise/movement breaks. Your active young person will appreciate it if you spend some time exercising with them.

Does Your Young Person Have Autism

If your child has autistic tendencies, or if they struggle to adapt to change or uncertainty, then this will be a particularly challenging time for them. In as far as it is possible keep regular home routines such as mealtimes and bedtimes in order to reduce any anxiety they may be feeling. Listen to your child and answer as many of their questions as possible, praising them for every small achievement which they make during the day. Some autistic young people may be content to spend much more time in their rooms using technology. Encourage your child to come out of their room and spend time with others in the family, even if they prefer to do this in a quieter area of the house. Encourage them to go outside daily and exercise in some way. This might be best achieved by sitting down with them and devising a schedule which includes schoolwork, exercise, and time with or near the family. If possible, attempt to 'enter their world' by joining them in an activity which they particularly enjoy.

