



Oldham
Council

Supporting Children and Young People During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Advice for Parents / Carers

**Produced by Oldham Council's
Educational and Child Psychology Service**

25 March 2020

SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

- This is an unsettling and fast changing situation which may be confusing to children.
- It is likely that some children may experience greater feelings of anxiety at this time, particularly related to concerns about:
 - The virus and risks to the health of themselves and others.
 - Change and uncertainty.
 - Loss of social opportunities.
 - Missed learning and transitions (e.g. exams and moving schools / college).
- Anxiety may look different in each person.

HELPING YOUR CHILD TO MANAGE THEIR WORRIES

- Remember it's ok for children to feel anxious and want lots of reassurance; give them time to talk about their worries.
- Try and understand any specific anxieties/worries through listening and talking.
- Manage the information that is available to children (e.g. reduce access to news channels and social media).
- Keep a routine and provide structure to the day.
- Keep your child busy and active with a wide range of activities (including physical activity).
- Talk about the things we can and cannot control at the moment and make sure they are able to control some elements of their day, e.g. this task or this task
- Help them to stay connected to friends and family (such as video calling and writing letters).
- Consider relaxation activities (helpful links shared in the resources section of this booklet).

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT COVID-19

- Be truthful and factual whilst being mindful of your child's developmental stage.
- Allow your child to ask questions.
- Give practical advice about how they can help prevent the spread of the virus.
- Provide lots of reassurance.
- Try as far as possible to manage your own worries.
- There are links to helpful resources explaining COVID-19 to children and young people at the end of this booklet.

'HOME-SCHOOLING' IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

- Be a parent first and foremost; acknowledge that your relationship is not one of teacher-student.
- Primary focus should be on well-being and looking after your family relationships.
- Give each other time to get used to the changes.
- Avoid putting pressure on yourself to be a teacher or to follow the same curriculum as schools.
- Think of yourself as 'helping' rather than 'delivering' an education.
- Have a routine and structure to the day but stay flexible.

Coronavirus and School Closures: Advice for parents

This advice has been produced by Oldham Council's Educational and Child Psychology Service in response to the UK Government announcement that from Friday 20th March, schools will be closed for the majority of children in the UK due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

How might COVID-19 impact my child?

The outbreak and spread of coronavirus presents a challenge for everyone as our normal routines and lifestyles are dramatically changed. Whilst it is often easier to focus on how this affects ourselves as adults, it is important to remember that this will likely affect our children and young people.

Anxiety is a natural response to worrying or upsetting experiences, particularly those that are beyond our control. Our brain releases chemicals to help us deal with difficult situations which can sometimes be useful but sometimes this can lead to negative feelings and behaviour (e.g. anxiety, stress, worry). Children may currently feel anxious.

They might show this in different ways - e.g. they may notice their bodies feel different ('butterflies in their stomach') or report other feelings (such as sadness, anger). They can also behave differently; might have difficulties with sleeping or a change in appetite; may be more argumentative or irritable; and they may be less able to concentrate and focus on activities. They may also be quieter or may seek comfort or closeness more so than usual and younger children may tantrum more.

The Anna Freud Centre offer some useful videos and resources around mental well-being in relation to COVID-19 (<https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/anna-freud-learning-network/coronavirus/>).

Children may also be worried by a particular aspect of the current crisis, for example:

The virus itself

Children of all ages will currently be trying to make sense of the COVID-19 crisis and what it may mean for their family and themselves. They may be concerned for their own health or that of older relatives or family members considered vulnerable.

Change and Uncertainty

Most children do better with routine and for all children their 'school day' and life has changed dramatically. On top of this, current information on COVID-19 is changing daily and children may feel confused or uncertain about what is happening. Some children and young people may have lots of questions and adults will not always have answers to these. This will be an unfamiliar experience for most children.

Loss of social opportunities

A key part of attending school and college is socialising with friends, interacting with familiar adults and, for young children, play. Social contact is important for everyone, including children, and contact with peers is particularly important for teenagers. With the closure of

nurseries and schools our children and young people are denied this opportunity. Furthermore, the Government's policy of social distancing and self-isolation, means that opportunities for socialising outside of these settings is limited.

Missed Learning & Key Transitions

Many children and young people will feel anxious about their missed learning. Many young people face cancelled exams, whilst other children and young people may be worried about falling behind and not making progress in their learning. For those young people in years 6, 11 and 13 - who were facing key tests/exams - they may feel a sense of loss, upset or anger. A lot of pressure is placed on young people to revise and work hard; the opportunity to 'show' this hard work has been taken away from them.

New information about exams was released by the government on 20 March 2020:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-details-on-exams-and-grades-announced>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2020/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2020>

Many key transition activities will also have been cancelled (trips, proms etc) for these age groups. Endings can be important for all individuals and it is important to be aware that this has been disrupted.

Talking to children about Coronavirus

Top tips for talking to children about COVID-19/Coronavirus:

1. It is good to talk

- Ensure that the information you share is from a good source such as the NHS and Public Health England; do not rely on information shared via social media.
- Explain the facts of what has and is happening; do not be tempted to give information that is not wholly true.

2. Be truthful but remember your child's developmental stage

- Make sure explanations and discussions are age appropriate.
- Younger children may like a cartoon or story
- Younger children and children with additional needs may also benefit from a social story. There is a link to this in the resources section.
- Older children may appreciate a more factual 'news' style (CBBC's Newsround has lots of helpful videos available online).
- For those who have access to social media, it is important to emphasise the likelihood of misinformation being shared on these platforms and to reiterate reliable sources of information.

3. Allow children to ask questions

- Allow your child to ask questions. Some children may ask the same questions repeatedly and may need more reassurance.
- Listen as much as you can.

4. Try to manage your own worries

- Limit access to news on the television and the internet and avoid viewing upsetting information when your children are present (constantly watching updates can increase anxiety).
- Be mindful of when you are watching coverage, e.g. ideally not just before you go to bed.
- Model calmness and share your own coping strategies.

5. Give practical advice

- Focus on giving them clear practical information and instructions about how to prevent the spread of coronavirus (hand washing, coughing and sneezing into tissues and disposing of these immediately, social distancing etc.).
- Teenagers may benefit from being encouraged to take shared responsibility – to ‘do their bit’ – as they may find social distancing much more difficult.
- Take the opportunity – particularly with older children – to focus on good personal hygiene more generally.
- POINT have provided a useful interactive book <http://anyflip.com/psbnb/vgqd/>

6. Provide reassurance

- Remain calm and provide as much reassurance as possible about the virus. For example, ‘most people will recover fully’.... ‘doctors and scientists are working hard to develop treatments and vaccines’ etc.
- Provide reassurance around other worries. For example, ‘there will be opportunities to celebrate endings/transitions’... ‘everyone is in the same boat with missed learning’.... ‘the government will make sure you get a fair grade’, etc.
- Where children and young people seem worried or anxious try and understand what they might be anxious about – it may be the particular loss of something or fear for a particular person/relative.

What is the best approach to home-schooling my child?

Make sure you and your family are healthy – physically and mentally

It is important to ensure that the emotional well-being of yourselves and children is prioritised at this time. In the first days following school closures many children may need more reassurance and everyone will need time to adjust.

Look after your own mental and physical health. You need to be healthy to be able to look after your children. Try and find time in the day and a space to yourself, if that is possible.

Wiltshire Council have produced a useful guide which highlights the importance of the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' (taken from The New Economics Foundation).

- **BE ACTIVE**
Try to ensure you do some physical exercise every day, whilst current government advice allows.
- **TAKE NOTICE**
Try to be aware of the world around you and notice what you are feeling.
- **CONNECT**
Connect with the people around you - utilise technology, letter writing and phone calls.
- **GIVE**
Help out others in whatever way you can.

Psychologists often talk about 'locus of control'. This relates simplistically to whether we can control situations or not. Accepting when we cannot control something and focussing on the things we can control can be a powerful way of managing stressful situations. Thecounselingteacher.com have produced a useful visual reminder of this (<https://thecounselingteacher.com>).



What does my child need?

More important than the 'curriculum' or teaching at home is:

- **Love and reassurance** – this is a confusing and worrying time for many and being a parent first and foremost will be essential.
- **Calm parenting** – you may not always feel (or be) calm, however, trying to manage your own feelings and taking time to look after yourself will help you in meeting your children's needs.
- **Boundaries** – this makes life more predictable for children and young people and will support children in retaining some of the expectations of the school environment. Rewards and incentives may help young children.
- **A sense of control** – boundaries will need to be balanced with the opportunity for control. This will be particularly important for teenagers.
- **Structure and routine** – it is important to maintain this for everyone. It can provide predictability and reassurance for children and young people and can also support in balancing the needs of the whole family. This does not have to look the same as others' routines but having a routine that suits your family and circumstances will be helpful.
- **Time to be active** – there are many useful websites and free videos to encourage children to be active.
- **Space and time to play** - Having space from each other where possible. Designated areas can be helpful for some families.
- **Social interaction** – this will be important for all children and especially teenagers. Utilise modern technology, whilst ensuring e-safety and awareness.
- **Balanced screen time** – this is usually a challenge and will be even more so during the current climate. Whilst children may spend more time in front of a screen than usual, try to maintain boundaries and limits around this, make it dependent on completing other activities first and ensure they have a healthy 'diet' of activities.
- **Attuned parenting** – this means parenting that notices children's behaviours and feelings. As noted, children may present differently following such a big change to routine and being aware of this is important.
- **Play to your strengths as a parent** – if you're arty embrace that, if you're a baker utilise this in your activities, etc.
- **Start each day like it's a new day!**

TO HELP YOU MONITOR YOUR CHILD'S WELL-BEING WE HAVE INCLUDED A CHILD EVALUATION FORM WHICH THEY CAN COMPLETE EACH WEEK AT THE END OF THIS GUIDE

If you have any concerns about your child please contact the school or the Educational and Child Psychology Service to talk about this further.

Home-schooling – Parent or teacher?

It can feel daunting to home-school your child, particularly where this is unexpected, for an unknown period and under the current circumstances.

It can be hard to know whether to be a parent or a teacher and it is important to remember that they are different roles. As a first step, avoid trying to provide the same education at home as your children get at school. This will be especially important in the 'transition' period, just after school closures when everyone is adjusting.

Also try and not expect the same behaviour and compliance that you know your children might give at school. Children generally respond to their parents differently. You may need to be flexible and give children more choice than they might normally have at school. Many, especially older children, are more likely to 'buy in' to new rules and routines if they feel that they have a voice.

Many parents and carers will also be juggling work commitments and caring for others and so being flexible and realistic in your expectations on yourself is important.

Current social distancing policy also means that families are in the same house in a way they are not used to - for an extended period – which can put pressure on relationships. Focus on looking after your relationships with each other – this is more important than the curriculum the children are experiencing. These relationships will be important when they return to school and you are back to just being a parent again

All children will be in the same boat when they return to school and so whilst doing some learning activities will be useful for keeping children busy, do not worry about their progress or how good the learning is.

Having a routine and keeping busy – whatever this looks like - is more important than the details of that routine.

Be reflective rather than critical. This means looking at what has worked/not worked and planning for the next day or week – not being hard on yourself because something hasn't worked as you hoped. All professionals work in this way and very few teachers get everything right first time, or all of the time.

TO HELP YOU WE HAVE INCLUDED A PARENT REFLECTION SHEET YOU CAN USE AT THE END OF THIS GUIDE.

Planning Your Child's Day

It is important not to try and replicate a full school timetable but instead have a routine that suits you.

Try to keep bedtime and morning routines close to existing ones to promote a sense of normality to reassure children.

Have a routine in the week which is different to the weekend to help keep them different.

Remember activities like play, exercise and art are fundamental to children's wellbeing and development and can be used to fill up the day at home. It may be useful to think of your children's day in terms of a menu of activities – just as you would try to give your children a healthy 'diet' regarding food - aim for the same with activities.

Particularly with older children it is useful to think in terms of a list of jobs to complete – they could even choose how and when these will be done.

Where you need to work yourself try and intersperse or 'block' activities, so there are periods where children can do some activities independently.

Being flexible and having a routine are not two separate things and a mixture of both will likely best help your child.



Think of home schooling as a river – moving in one direction but with many twists and turns!

Example Timetable

Here is a suggested way of timetabling your child's day. Remember this is only a suggestion and is offered to give parents and carers ideas for their own planning. They are provided courtesy of Sandwell Educational Psychology Team.

Time	Activity	Examples	Time	Activity	Examples
AM	Morning:		PM	Afternoon:	
	Wake up routine	Make bed, get changed, eat breakfast, wash face and brush teeth. 		Lunch break and clean up	Try and encourage children to start to make their own lunches. Be sure to make it safe and hygienic. 
	Movement break	Breaks could include: morning stretches, going outside, running up and down the stairs whilst being timed, star jumps, dancing to music etc. 		Creative time and quiet time	This could include: independent or shared reading, drawing and colouring, arts and crafts, making videos, gardening, cooking, writing letters to family members or neighbours, creating and playing board games, building a den, putting on a show, learning the words to a favourite song, make a poem 
	Discuss what will happen during the day	Do this in your designated working space. Talk about the schedule, what work will be done throughout the day and what the child will learn. You could set a daily challenge of learning a new word or fact. 		Movement break	Breaks could include: going outside, running up and down the stairs whilst being timed, star jumps, dancing to music etc. 
	School work e.g. Literacy	What has been directed by the school or what is age appropriate (there are plenty of online resources which could be used). 		Creative time and quiet time	Continue with task started after the lunch break or if completed pick a new one. 
	Snack and movement break	Try to encourage your child to have a healthy snack. Breaks could include: going outside, running up and down the stairs whilst being timed, star jumps, dancing to music etc. 		Tidy up time	Make sure everything used is packed away ready to start again tomorrow. Any spare time can be used to help with the household chores. 
	School work e.g. Maths	What has been directed by the school or what is age appropriate (there are plenty of online resources which could be used). 		End on a positive note	Everyone to name one thing they enjoyed the most throughout the day and one thing they have learnt. Gratitude activities can be a great way to do this and can be very creative e.g. making a gratitude tree or jar. Many ideas for gratitude activities can be found on the internet and have many benefits for well-being. 

More simplistically you could block the day as 'adult chosen jobs' and 'child chosen jobs':

Adult chosen job	Child chosen job	break	Adult chosen job	lunch	Child chosen job	Adult chosen job	break	Child chosen job
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Or by types of activity/lists of jobs to be done:

Reading activity	Technology/screen time	Number work	Play	Creative	Physical
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And remember Don't worry if that routine does not go to plan!

Returning to School

Currently it's unclear when children and young people will be able to return to school and college. This return may be a challenge for some young people, especially if they have been off for a long time. For children moving from one school/college to another the usual transition process may not have taken place. Once there is further clarity on this situation further guidance will be provided as required.

Special Educational Needs/Vulnerable Children

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Our understanding is changing each day and the government is working to keep everyone safe, including vulnerable children and young people. The link below is to the latest government advice (20th March 2020, written as questions and answers) for children and young people who are supported by the social care system, who have EHC plans or are in alternative provision, using the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people#children-in-alternative-provision-ap-settings>

There is also advice for vulnerable young people in further education and skills training (23rd March, 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/maintaining-education-and-skills-training-provision-further-education-providers#information-on-vulnerable-young-people>

New legislation has been introduced to Parliament and is currently being considered (<https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2019-21/coronavirus.html>). This may make some changes to the provision for those with Education, Health and Care Plan and those currently being assessed. Further information should be available soon and there is a DfE corona helpline 0800 046 8687.

If you are concerned about your vulnerable child's special educational needs at this time contact their nursery, school or college, in the first instance.

If your concerns continue, you can contact Oldham Education and Child Psychology Team to talk about this further:

EHCInfo@oldham.gov.uk

SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES & LINKS

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-details-on-exams-and-grades-announced>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2020/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2020>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people#children-in-alternative-provision-ap-settings>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/maintaining-education-and-skills-training-provision-further-education-providers#information-on-vulnerable-young-people>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-set-out-to-support-pupils-eligible-for-free-school-meals>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

A cartoon video explaining more about the Coronavirus appropriate for primary school aged children:

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

A short story about the Coronavirus for children who like pictures; also useful for children and young people with social communication needs (e.g. Autism):

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

Another social story that is specifically relevant to children now learning at home:

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

A cartoon superhero story to explain the Coronavirus and what you could do to fight it:

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Story-about-Coronavirus.pdf>

A comic explaining what the Coronavirus is and what might change or be different for you:

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

The BBC Newsround website has lots of helpful and factual videos about Coronavirus:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround>

The MindHeart Covibook supports conversations about the virus with younger children:
<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

LEARNING, READING AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

BBC bitesize has a wide range of activities for children aged 3 years+, up to and including those in post 16 education:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>

Twinkl also provides activities for both primary and secondary school aged children and young people:
<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/covid19-school-closures>

Playworks provides ideas for games and fun activities:
<https://www.playworks.org/resource/fun-paper-and-pencil-games-to-play/>

Storyline Online has many free stories read by famous actors:
<https://www.storylineonline.net/>

Audible are providing free access to many audio books for children and teenagers:
<https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>

David Walliams is releasing one free audio story every day for 30 days:
<https://www.worldofdavidwalliams.com/>

TO HELP CHILDREN RELAX AND MANAGE ANXIOUS FEELINGS

The Healthy Young Minds website has links to apps and websites that can support children and young people in managing feelings of anxiety:
<https://healthyyoungmindspennine.nhs.uk/resource-centre/apps/>

Bedtime stories and mindfulness and relaxation audio stories for children of all ages:
<https://bedtime.fm/peaceout>

Yoga and mindfulness videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

Mindfulness app for children and young people and adults:
www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app

Mindfulness colouring:
www.diaryofajournalplanner.com/free-mindfulness-colouring-sheets/

Mindfulness games cards:
<http://www.unm.edu/~unmvclib/gamification/cards/mindfulgamescards.pdf>

For children and young people with communication needs, NHS Forth Valley Speech & Language Therapy have shared printable symbols on their Facebook page that can be used to support understanding of new routines and reduce anxiety around changes:
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1433823750146845&id=973808689481689?sfnsn=scwspmo&extid=3VZ1qWA5kHPAnC1H

The Anna Freud Centre has a page on strategies with young people themselves have found useful when feeling anxious:
<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

STAYING ACTIVE

Daily P.E. sessions:

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

<http://www.instagram.com/p/B-Fbh84liZn/?igshid=v2x0zfrvfqbb>

BALANCING WORK AND HOMELEARNING

Timetable suggestions and tips for home working:

<https://burntree.sandwell.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Top-Tips-for-Teaching-at-Home-from-Sandwell-Educational-Psychology-Team-.pdf>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51936286>

Managing your own well being:

<https://www.aep.org.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=11754>

<https://www.aep.org.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=11759>

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

SOME USEFUL TOOLS

1. **A parent reflection sheet to help you think about the week.** You can also use this to record any concerns if you feel you need to talk through these with a professional.

2. **A child evaluation sheet which can be used to monitor your child's well-being and also to encourage them to have a voice during this period.** The first version is better suited to younger children and the second version to older children.

Parent weekly evaluation - date: _____

Rating for this week of facilitating education at home:

1

10

What's gone well:

Learning: _____

Creativity: _____

Exercise: _____

What didn't work: _____

What we could try differently next week:

Facilitating your children's education at home can be challenging. If you feel you would benefit from support from the Educational and Child Psychology Service, contact us at: ehcinfo@oldham.gov.uk

My Week

I didn't like...

I liked...

Circle the face that matches how you feel about this week.



My Week

Rate your week!

1 2 3 4 5

I didn't like...

I liked...

My feelings this week have been...

My thoughts about this week are...
