



# HEALTHY MINDS TEAM

## Advice for Parents

During this time of uncertainty and recommendations to distance yourself from others, you may worry about how you will cope.

Here are a few ideas about how you can protect your mental health.

If you are in need of urgent mental health care, call the Crisis Team on **0191 5665500** or free via **111**



## General Advice

The Healthy Minds Team follow the 'Incredible Years' parenting programme (Webster – Stratton, 1992) principles in our work.

These are challenging times for families.

Our first priority is to stay safe and calm whilst adapting to this new routine. Here are a few tips for parents to consider with regards to keeping their children physically and mentally secure.

### Talking With Your Children

- This time is anxiety provoking for everyone. Children will absorb the stress and worry about what they hear from their parents, friends, the news and other adults.
- They will need your help to filter and interpret the situation and to help reassure them that they are safe and cared for.
- Young children under 6 don't need specific or detailed information because they are too young to process it. Explanations should be simple and factual, for example:  
*'There are some new germs that are making some people sick. We are helping by staying at home so we don't share germs with other people. We are also going to stay healthy by washing our hands a lot, coughing into our sleeve and not visiting other people.'*
- Let young children know the things you can and can't do as a family right now.  
*'We can't have your friends over or go to the playground right now because we don't want to share germs. We can go for walks, bike rides and read together.'*
- Don't be surprised if the virus theme, death or illnesses come up at play times. This is completely normal and expected.



- Older school aged children will likely have heard about the coronavirus. It is best to get ahead of the game by talking about things that might be scary before a scarier version comes from a peer or media. Check in regularly while playing together or eating dinner. Start off by asking them what they have heard and what they know. This can guide the conversation and give the opportunity to correct misinformation
- Encourage them to ask questions and express their worries or feelings of loneliness or anxiety. Take your cues from your child's questions as to how long this conversation should last. Focus on keeping the conversation open and creating a relationship where you are a safe and secure base to come back to.
- Some older children may want to find ways to be helpful. This might include calling elderly relatives, earning some money to send to a charity or helping to care for younger siblings. This helps them feel a sense of control.
- With children of all ages, be sure to use a calm and patient tone during these discussions. If you seem anxious (which is understandable) this can escalate your child's anxiety. Remember stress is contagious.

# How to Manage School Closures

- If your children are home due to school closures, set up basic expectations. Just like your child's teachers, post a daily schedule that everyone can see. Predictable routines help children feel safe, reduce stress and prevent power struggles.
- Your schedule or routine should include predictable times for various activities. For preschool children, this would include independent play time, play time with an adult, reading time, outdoor time, snacks, naps and meals, and likely some screen time for fun or educational activities.
- For school age children, some schools will provide structured learning assignments to work on. Help your child work on a schedule to complete these assignments. If the school does not provide work, it is still valuable for parents to set up expected time spent on educational activities.
- In addition to time spent on academic activities, be sure to include some time for unstructured play, physical activity, meals together and for older children social interaction in safe ways (e.g. a FaceTime conversation). Don't frame this time out of school as a summer holiday, rather a time to learn something new they normally don't have time for. Remember children thrive on stability and routine.
- Don't change your child's bedtime routine because there is no school. Lack of sleep will increase children's anxiety.
- Carefully think about your screen time rules and how much time you want your children to be on screens. These rules are especially important if you are at work and not able to monitor this. While this is not a time to be rigid about screen time, it is still important to monitor the amount and quality of screen time. Work with your child to find interesting documentaries or educational programmes to watch. Download library or audiobooks related to their interests. Look for games that have educational value including activities like coding or planning and building a city. Try to keep your children engaged in learning activities and excited about the opportunity to learn something new.
- Whilst play dates are to be avoided, outdoor activities without physical contact or shared equipment is fine. Moreover, physical activity does reduce stress and is important for physical health. Monitor current recommendations as guidelines for what level of contact is acceptable and safe are changing rapidly.





- Encourage children to learn a new skill on YouTube or find a new educational game on line. FaceTime, texting, gaming and skyping with friends will help your child feel connected to their friends. Encourage keeping in contact with relatives and grandparents via FaceTime or Skype.
- Ask children to help around the house by giving them a daily chore or special job challenge. Depending on your household, this can be framed as a way to help the family during a challenging time or as a way for your child to make some extra money.
- Whilst you can put together a list of interesting activities for your children, it is important to make time in the schedule to play with your child through a child-directed activity. While you will be distracted by other demands related to financial losses or lack of social contact, taking some special one on one time to spend with your child will be the most important thing you can do to keep them calm and help them learn how to manage life's challenges with persistence.
- Teach children how to help. When children understand that washing their hands helps others it can increase their sense of control. Their clean hands can become their 'super power'.
- Use and model stress management strategies such as the 'turtle technique'. This is when your child (or you) goes into your turtle shell and tells yourself 'I can manage this' or 'I can stay calm' and take deep breaths while thinking of a happy place or time. There is a video on the Incredible Years website which shows you how to use the 'calm down thermometer' with your child to teach them how to stay calm and practice how to go into a turtle shell.  
See: [www.incredibleyears.com/programs/parent/attentive--curriculum/](http://www.incredibleyears.com/programs/parent/attentive--curriculum/)
- Help your child take the long view. Talk about things they will like to do when the virus has subsided as it gives them a positive image of their future. Praise them for achieving goals and completing their daily schedule and plans.





- Above all else, be kind and forgiving to yourself.
- Many parents will be facing seemingly impossible situations.
- Perhaps you have to work and have no childcare.
- Perhaps you are sick but feel you must go to work because you do not have sick leave.
- Perhaps you are trying to work from home with your young children running around. Perhaps you are caring for an elderly parent and worried about spreading the illness to them. In these situations, you do not have the time or energy to attend to many of the suggestions above.
- The most important thing you can do is show love and caring for your child and provide reassurance that you and your family will get through this. Do your best to keep your child safe and cared for during the day.
- Create some structure you can realistically commit to and mostly achieve.

- Your child will be okay if you need to rely on screen time to give yourself some personal time for exercise or alone meditating time. These are unusual times, and there is no protocol for this. It is important to take care of yourself, so try to find someone to share your worries with and ask for help from anyone who may be able to support you.

Kooth provides a safe and secure means of accessing mental health and wellbeing support designed specifically for young people.

To find out more visit **[www.Kooth.com](http://www.Kooth.com)** where young people can register and others can find out more about the service.

There are lots of helpful links that you may find useful, for example MindEd for families **[www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people](http://www.mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people)**

You may find that you are struggling with your own mental health or emotional wellbeing, you can access support for yourself by visiting **[www.southtynesidelifecyclementalhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.southtynesidelifecyclementalhealth.nhs.uk)**



If you feel that your child requires a personal intervention or access to internet therapy, please call South Tyneside Lifecycle Talking Therapies on **0191 2832937** to discuss this further.

If your child is experiencing mental health crisis requiring immediate response from the Crisis Team, please telephone **0191 5665500**.

**For more information visit**

[www.southtyneside.gov.uk/youngpeoplementalhealth](http://www.southtyneside.gov.uk/youngpeoplementalhealth)



**South Tyneside Council**

