



## **Additional Pastoral Guidance for Families – May 2020**

We understand that the current situation continues to pose many challenges for families and we continue to be here to support you as best we can during this difficult time. Mental health and wellbeing for everyone must take priority during this unsettling time and it is likely that emotions and feelings will be constantly changing.

As well as the advice within our 'Staying Connected' guidance, we would like to share the following suggestions, to help children and families cope with the current changes, feelings of isolation and uncertainty.

- ***Help your child to feel heard and understood***

Feeling heard and understood is a core need, as well as being an important way of showing empathy. Talking and identifying how people in the family are feeling is important; you may find it helpful to create a Mental Health 'check-in' system for the whole family, so that you are all aware of how one another is feeling. This can also provide a way in to discussing and acknowledging these different feelings.



- ***Encourage your child to think about what they can and can't control***

For older children, this can be a helpful way to address any worries. Try separating the concerns into those that they can control and those that they cannot. For the worries that are beyond their control, reassure them that other people (their parents, teachers, hospital workers, the Government etc.) are doing their best to help.

- ***Draw on their strengths***

Draw upon skill sets and resilience that your child may have built in the past and remind them of how they can cope or manage their emotions and self-regulate. For example, "When I feel sad I can..." This could include being able to calm down when upset, to handle frustration without an outburst, or to adjust to changes in expectation.



- ***Highlight the good – as well as the bad***

As well as acknowledging the difficulties of the situation, it could be helpful to talk about the positives of the current situation, too! Remind your child how many people are looking out for their neighbours, contributing to their communities, being creative... the list goes on!

- ***Encourage choice***

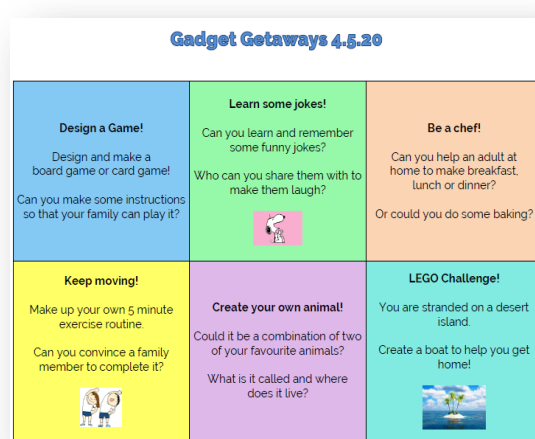
With families stuck at home for long periods of time, children are likely to feel frustrated, which can result in 'power struggles', as they try to gain more independence. If possible, encourage your child to make choices, even in small steps, such as choosing what and when to eat, helping to cook meals, planning their day; this may help to ease any tensions.

- ***Try to keep some structure***

As mentioned in our 'Staying Connected' guidance, establishing a routine and keeping a structure to the week will help children to feel safe and know what to expect. Our school's approach to remote learning aims to give families the flexibility to create a schedule for the week that works for their own individual situation.

- ***Learning to cope with boredom can be a good thing!***

Whilst the lessons that our teachers are preparing and sending will be keeping the children busy during the school week, some children may find it a challenge to 'entertain themselves' during their free time. Despite perhaps complaining that they are bored, this undirected time will not be harmful to children and if they are forced to think of something to do for themselves (that does not involve a screen) their imaginations can also start to bloom! Our weekly 'Gadget Getaways' will provide some initial ideas for the children, too!



- ***It's ok to have a bad day***

We are all bound to have days where we struggle with the current situation and this is OK. At times, it may be necessary to stray from the scheduled activities and have some down-time!

### **Further suggestions and guidance**

- The following article also has a number of helpful suggestions:  
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/parenting-during-coronavirus-outbreak>
- Axel Scheffler has illustrated a digital book for primary school age children, free for anyone to read on screen or print out, about the coronavirus and the measures taken to control it:  
<https://nosycrow.com/blog/released-today-free-information-book-explaining-coronavirus-children-illustrated-gruffalo-illustrator-axel-scheffler/>
- The Book of Hopes, with contributions from over 100 children's authors and illustrators, aims to comfort, inspire and encourage children during lockdown through delight, new ideas, ridiculous jokes and heroic tales. It is completely free for all children and families and is dedicated to the doctors, nurses, carers, porters, cleaners and everyone currently working in hospitals.  
<https://literacytrust.org.uk/family-zone/9-12/book-hopes/>
- There is a huge amount of advice and guidance on the NSPCC website:  
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/coronavirus-advice-support-children-families-parents/>

Their 'Calm Kit' also has some great suggestions of practical ways to help children manage anxiety and low feelings. We attach a copy for you on the next page.

### Calm Kit

Ideas to share with children and families to manage stress, anxiety, low feelings and anger.

Childline's website has a Calm zone, a unique space for children and young people filled with breathing exercises, activities, games and videos to help let go of stress. Below are a few examples, it can be really good to practice these as a family and model using them to encourage your child to use them.

### Breathing exercises

Taking slow, deep breaths can help you feel calmer and more relaxed. You can try just one of these exercises or as many as you like. You might need to repeat an exercise a few times until you feel it working.

#### **Breathe and sigh**

Breathe in through your nose, make a big sigh and drop your shoulders downwards as you breathe out through your mouth

Repeat this 4 times



#### **Calming words**

Breathe in while you say to yourself "I feel calm"  
Breath out while you say to yourself "I let go of stress"  
Breath in while you say to yourself "Feel calm"  
Breathe out and say to yourself "Let go of stress"



Using 'props' like blowing bubbles or a feather is a good way to teach children how to control their breathing whilst making it fun and interesting. Encourage children to blow slow and steady, in through the nose out through the mouth



### Drawing & writing activities

#### **Gingerbread man**

We hold tension in our bodies when we're under pressure, feeling stressed or feeling anxious.

Draw the outline of a gingerbread person and add where you feel stress and anxiety in your body - that might be butterflies in your tummy, your legs feeling weak or your heart beating fast.

Draw how it feels in each part of your body and use colours or numbers to show where you feel the strongest sensations. Let go of any tension by unclenching your hands, dropping your shoulders, stretching, doing yoga or dancing and draw or write any changes on your picture.



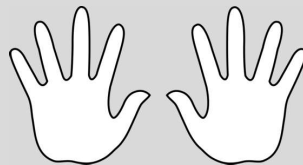
#### **Helping hand**

Draw the outline of your hand on paper or using the Art box on ChildLine's website. Follow the outline with your finger or click on it with the mouse to trace the shape as you take a slow, deep breath. Start at the thumb, move to your other fingers and end with your little finger as you breathe in.

Trace back from the little finger to the thumb as you breathe out.

If you can't make it all the way around, you can start with tracing around the thumb and the first finger while you breathe in and around the first finger and back around the thumb as you breathe out.

You can colour in the hand after.



#### **Crystal Ball**

Imagine 3 months from now. Draw or write what might look different, what challenges you will have faced and what positive changes you want to make.

Try to focus on things that seem possible to achieve like feeling more confident about an exam, starting a new hobby or making a new friend.

If it's hard to think that far ahead, you could start by imagining next week or next month.

#### **Mirror**

Draw yourself as your closest friend or a close family member would describe you. Remember, they can see who you are as a person as well as what you look like.

Draw or write the positive qualities they notice about you, especially the ones that you find hard to see yourself. Include things like being kind, patient and fun.

### Relieving stress and focusing your mind

#### **Treasure box**

Find 4 or more items to hold or feel. You can choose things like a blanket to wrap around yourself, a smooth stone to hold, something that was given to you by someone important to you, the lyrics of a happy song or a poem that makes you feel positive .

Put them in a bag or a box in your room. When you feel under pressure, worried or upset choose 1 item out of the box to hold while you remember a time that you felt safe and calm . After 2 or 3 minutes replace it and choose another.

You can do this as many times as you like

#### **Let it go**

Find a box, something small like a shoe box or a chocolate box. Write down what's worrying you on a piece of paper and place it in the box.

Tell yourself that you don't need to think about the worry at the moment and you can let it go and leave it in the box for now.

You can do this as many times as you like. Remember to keep the box somewhere private or share with someone you trust.

#### **Do some exercise**

Run, jump, skip, dance, do an online workout, kick a ball in the garden or go for a walk. Being active helps your mood, keeps you healthy and can take your mind off things. We have included a list of fun, active activities to try at the end of this pack.

#### **The Robot/Ragdoll**

Relax your body by tightening all your muscles for a few seconds like a Robot then relax them, going floppy like a ragdoll.

#### **Relax and imagine**

Get comfy, close your eyes and image you are in a place you feel safe and calm. Then then imagine what each of your five senses would pick up – sounds, smells, sensations, tastes and sights.

#### **Distract yourself**

Do something fun that you enjoy and will distract you, like reading, games, TV, music.

#### **Grounding**

Focus on what you can see, feel, smell and hear to help bring you back to now, to relax and let go of difficult memories.