



NORTH EAST
COUNSELLING
SERVICES

HELPING OUR CHILDREN IN LOCKDOWN

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HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN DURING LOCKDOWN

We are all facing challenging times at the moment. It's probably fair to say that the latest lockdown feels somewhat different to our experiences in 2020!

This workbook aims to provide guidance for those living with and looking after children during lockdown.

Instead of using theories and models (which can be a bit mind-blowing when we already have a lot going on!), we're going to look at some basics of wellbeing and simple ways to 'be' with young people. Finally, we'll take a look at home schooling (!)

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'DOING' AND 'BEING' AND YOU

Whenever we face challenges or difficulties, we tend to focus on what we need to 'do'. This is undoubtedly useful, but it can sometimes add to the pressure we put on ourselves. This is particularly true in situations involving the unknown, the unpredictable, or the rapidly changing! It has the potential to leave us feeling worn down and defeated, putting more on our 'to do' lists than actually moving things forward.

It's important to consider what **you** need in order to support the child or children you look after. This is about 'being', rather than 'doing'. It's difficult when everyone is spending so much time together to think of taking time for yourself, but it's important. Try to work out the things that can help you to feel ok about what you are doing, and the things that work against that. If going out for a 30 minute walk each day, helps to clear your mind, then make sure there's some space for that. If constantly keeping up-to-date with minute-by-minute news feeds is causing you stress, then think about how you minimise your exposure to them.

WELLBEING FUNDAMENTALS

A useful place to start is checking that some of the basics of children's wellbeing are in place. They may seem obvious, but they really do make a difference. You'll certainly be noticing if some of these things are not in place!

The basics are **sleeping, eating, drinking and activity** .

Children need about nine hours **sleep** (this includes teenagers). Encourage a week-day bedtime routine that is broadly the same each night. Ideally, your child needs to say 'bye' to devices at least 30 minutes before bed (the light emitted by digital technology disrupts melatonin, the natural hormone that causes drowsiness when it gets dark). Many families opt to make it a 'house rule' that portable devices are turned off and charged overnight in the parents' bedroom.

Our brains need nutrients and hydration to function properly. Make sure your child **eats** regularly throughout the day in order give their brains what they need to work well. If you feel this isn't where it needs to be, consider a vitamin supplement. Make water the main **drink** available during the day. Remember, many fizzy drinks (even those that are low in sugar) contain caffeine. It's useful to steer clear of these as they can create feelings of restlessness and impact on sleep patterns later in the day.

It's likely our children are not as **active** as they would normally be when they are at school or participating in after-school activities. Try to encourage some out-door exercise once a day (within Covid-19 guidelines). What else can your child do at home that keeps them active for short periods of time?

It's worth noticing how we tend to 'be' with our children when times are challenging. Recently, The National Counselling Society (NCS) highlighted that it is, "acutely aware of the needs of socially isolated young people at this time. The global pandemic has resulted in many young people being cut off from much-needed avenues of support, alongside the myriad other issues that have been brought to the fore. We predict that this will have unforeseeable side effects in the future, in addition to the immediate lack of support they may now be experiencing' (Megan Nunn, CEO, National Counselling Society, 2020). What this means is that the way we are living during Covid-19 is creating a context that really does impact how our children are, and of course, how we are in relation to that.

Think about how you are with your child during these times. What do you notice about your child at the moment? How comfortable do you feel dealing with some of the changes in your child's behaviour that lockdown may be influencing?

The approaches listed below can help you to stay with your child while they are

working through difficult feelings and emotions.

NOTICING AND ACKNOWLEDGING

Children (especially younger ones) can often find it hard to put into words how they feel. It can be useful to notice and prompt what you see and hear in your child. For example, “You look worried” or “You sound angry”. In doing this you are helping them to identify what they are feeling, put some words to it, and begin to explore it.

Of course, you may not always ‘correctly’ identify what your child is feeling (you’re not them, after all), but giving a feeling a name is a starting point. Remember, if you haven’t hit the mark, be open to what your child says they do actually feel. For example, “I’m not angry, I’m sad...”.

PERMISSION TO FEEL

We tend to be very good at pushing our feelings to one side and getting on with things. Help your child to understand that it’s ok to feel sad, anxious, scared, worried, frustrated, embarrassed, confused, etc.

For example, “I totally understand that you’re sad you can’t see your friends at the moment. I miss my friends too”. Keeping uncomfortable things inside may mean your child feels alone as well as troubled, so try to encourage them to talk about what’s going on for them. If this is difficult for them, you could ask them to write you little notes to let you know when they are feeling ‘wobbly’.

VALIDATING

It’s tempting to try to make everything alright for our children. This can sometimes mean we end up talking them out of their feelings. For example, “I know you’re worried, but really there’s nothing to be afraid of, that’s never going to happen”.

Stay with what your child is saying and try not to dismiss it (this can sometimes take a bit of practice, as it may feel a bit odd to start off with!). For example, “So, you’re telling me you feel hurt by that”, “You seem really worried. What are you thinking might happen?”

STAYING ALONGSIDE

It’s worth considering that most times when we’re upset, we’re not necessarily looking for someone to provide solutions, we just want someone to be with us. Help your child to explore the ‘scary stuff’, by being with them and giving them time to be how they really feel. For example, “I’d like to hear what’s upsetting you” or “That does sound frightening, I can understand why you’re feeling

worried”.

CARING TOUCH

Writing in ‘Wellbeing and nurture: physical and emotional security in childhood’ (APPG, 2020), Professor Francis McGlone states, “What’s happening now is that, for the first time in evolution, people aren’t able to experience this thing we usually take for granted. You don’t miss something until it’s gone – but when touch is removed, people will notice that there’s something missing, even if they can’t pin down what it is”.

There’s a vast amount of research out there highlighting that touch is central to the physical, psychological and emotional development and wellbeing of our children. Sometimes a hug, or a reassuring pat on the shoulder can be worth more than any words.

CHILDREN AND CONTROL, OR MORE ACCURATELY, THEIR LACK OF IT!

When we think about it, children (especially younger ones) have very little control over what they do. They have clothes bought for them that they do not pick out themselves. They are often told what to wear (sometimes daily!). They sit down to meals they did not choose (and often, would never in a million years want!), at times that are dictated by others. They are told when to go to bed and when to get up. They are told what they can and can’t watch and for how long. And on top of all this, their world has grown incredibly smaller over the last year. It’s tough being young in these times!

Think about ways you can help your child to control small things in their immediate environment. What are the sort of things they can participate in at home? Try asking them what they would like to eat during the week and get them to prepare a shopping list. Perhaps they could do the weekly ‘click and collect’ order? Adults tend not to function particularly well when there is too much out of their control, and yet we expect our children to do it all the time. It’s worth thinking about how that feels sometimes.

CHILDREN AND SOCIALISING

It’s tempting to think that the main role of our children’s school years is education. That should be obvious, shouldn’t it? And yet, developmental psychology (the study of how we grow, change and stay the same) highlights something else. While much of the role of our primary to secondary school years (5-18) is about mastering tasks, acquiring skills and gaining knowledge, the psychological output of this is that we develop a sense of personal agency and self-esteem. Equally important during these years, is that we are learning how to ‘be’ in the world. This is about interacting with others and experiencing

relationships outside of family life that prepare us for being adult members of society. Because of this, friends begin to take more of a centre stage in our lives. Lockdown has drastically reduced our children's opportunity to enjoy their friends' company. This is really tough for our young people, as it's what they're programmed to do! Look for 'virtual' opportunities for your child to connect with their friends via technology that is safe and secure.

HOME SCHOOLING!

Word to the wise! You are not a teacher and your home is not a school.

Helping our children to learn at home is not without challenges! It's likely you haven't had any training to do this and home is not usually the place our children primarily associate with work. In addition to this, you may also be trying to work from home. Trying to combine the two can make us feel like we're failing and not doing justice to our children, our employers, or ourselves. This is not true.

What you are trying to accomplish is incredibly difficult! Things to consider are:

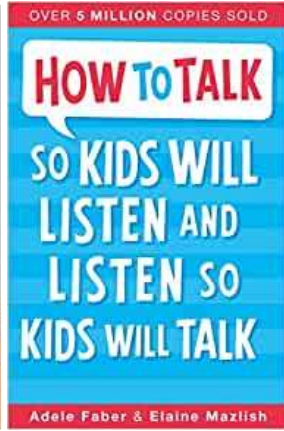
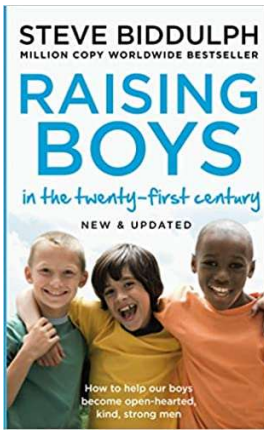
Lower your expectations. Children will not be able to accomplish the same things at home that they are able to at school. Try to think in terms of time, rather than getting through everything. If they need to complete 10 maths questions in 45 minutes, but have only managed 6, that's ok. It's time to stop.

Attention spans. The average attention span of a 10-year-old is 15-20 minutes. Anything that happens over this time is a bonus! If your child is getting restless or distracted, it's time for a break – they may have reached the limit of their attention span!

The blurring of roles. The relationship you have with your child is not that of a teacher and a pupil. You will probably have noticed by now that what your child will do for a teacher is not the same as what they'll do for you. Inevitably, this will cause tensions between you both. It's important to recognise when your child has had enough and it's time to flex the routine. Take a moment to stop and do something different. Tell them you know how hard this is for them and that you appreciate their efforts. Gaps in learning are recoverable. Your relationship with your child is what's of most importance, now and in the future.

BRILLIANT BOOKS

The books listed below are really useful in terms of understanding where your child is coming from and how you can communicate with them and support them going forward.



untangled

Guiding teenage girls through the seven transitions into adulthood

Lisa Damour

