

You Make All The Difference

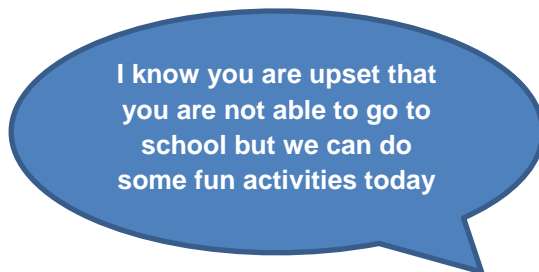
Parenting has probably never been as hard as it is now during the COVID-19 outbreak.

We at Stockport Parenting Team would like to offer some support. Even though this will be remotely, we hope to help by providing you with some useful information and links to resources for you to use yourself and for your children if you so wish.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION

...and we don't mean just via apps and social media, which is important at the moment of course – what we are talking about is EMOTIONAL CONNECTION.

Trying to make sense of how you and your child are feeling, and naming these emotions, can help you and your child stay calmer and feel less anxious. Using positive attention, (every child wants Attention!) you can describe all the positive emotions you see as well as some of the negative ones – we know that children experience the full range of emotions that adults feel. For example:



To acknowledge feelings, we need to let children know they have been heard and that we accept those feelings and are not judging them. We can do that by reflecting back what they say, or by trying to identify what emotion their behaviour is showing, because behaviour is a communication. Sometimes, when a toddler or young child is having a meltdown, the underlying emotion can find its origins in anxiety where the child feels overwhelmed and has not yet learnt the skills to regulate their emotions. That's where you make the difference, by trying to stay calm and wait until your child calms and have a cuddle with them, acknowledging they were overwhelmed.

Getting in Touch with FEELINGS through Play/Special Time



For younger children this can be done really well through child directed play or for older children having special time together, where you can describe emotions you may see. You can download a handout for this coaching and play here:

<http://www.incredibleyears.com/parents-teachers/articles-for-parents/>

(NB Coronavirus page in this link was produced before lockdown in UK)

Play is a wonderful opportunity for children to have positive attention, to be child led and they can learn so much from you!

Happy

Sad

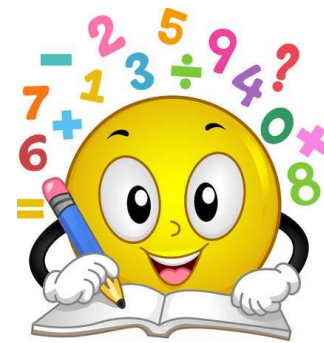
Curious

ROUTINES

It is important for children to feel safe and secure, and having some simple routines in place that they are familiar with can help to reduce anxiety. In a world that is changing rapidly this provides a sense of consistency, so morning routines, mealtime routines, bedtime routines can be maintained. These will also help your child feel some element of control and provide copious opportunity for praise and encouragement which will boost their self-esteem.

Yes, school work may need to be done for older children, but positive, nurturing experiences with a parent enables focused attention when needed for learning. Children's brains thrive with positive, loving relationships which stimulate production of the Happy Hormones.

Writing down a routine, adding pictures to it, lets a child know what's coming next, and they can help to decorate it.



Reward systems can support promotion of routines.

There are many ways to support positive behaviours in children, but this includes involving them in discussions and making sure they understand, so things need to be age and developmentally appropriate for a child. There are useful links about talking to your children in the links below.

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/1960/coronavirus-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources.pdf>

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/1998/coronavirus-mental-health-and-wellbeing-toolkit-2.pdf>

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

This is a difficult and uncertain time for all but for those parents whose child has special educational needs and/or disability this can have additional challenges. The Stockport Council SEND local offer webpages are a central place to access support and advice.

<https://stockport.fsd.org.uk/kb5/stockport/fsd/localoffer.page>

COMMUNICATION is KEY

Getting down to your child's level, gaining eye contact and using key words, such as your child's name, ensures their attention. Being available when your child is ready to communicate and giving attention, models pro social skills for your developing child.



The BBC has a useful website for developing younger children's communication skills

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>

HOUSEHOLD RULES

A simple chart made up of 4-6 agreed rules can make a family feel they can function in a more positive way eg; We use kind hands, We put our phones away when eating together, and so on. Notice how these are Positive DOING Statements, rather than Negative STOPPING Statements!



Children can decorate the charts and pop them on the fridge. If someone breaks the rules, you can decide as a family beforehand what a simple consequence could be, and this goes a long way to reduce arguments and help to keep the peace! This also encourages a child to make the right choice if they know what the consequence is.

POSITIVE Attention

Remember whether it is positive or negative all children really want is your attention. And they want it all the time. Positive Attention is a very powerful tool for you to use. By giving positive attention to positive behaviours your child is more likely to repeat that behaviour to get your attention. If they learn to get your attention for negative behaviour, then they will continue to do so. If you notice and comment when they are sharing toys, taking things in turn, sitting calmly, brushing teeth etc then this makes everyone feel more positive. Even older children and young people appreciate a simple "thank you for doing that".

For examples of this The Incredible Years website has some useful information.

<http://www.incredibleyears.com/parents-teachers/articles-for-parents/>

(NB Coronavirus page in this link was produced before lockdown in UK)

Cheerful

Nervous

Safe

COMMANDS

Have a think about how many commands you give your child. It might surprise you! See if you can reduce the number of commands or requests you give your child to the minimum required. Imagine what it would feel like if someone kept telling you what to do.....?! You wouldn't feel very happy. As a parent, you can make a positive difference by using respectful communication with your child, supporting compliance with lots of praise, which will encourage your child to want to do it again!

By telling your children exactly what you want them to do, you are helping them to understand what you expect. For example "please sit still" instead of "Stop wriggling about". Avoid using "Don't" or "Stop" commands.

RELATIONSHIPS

We all know that we can't get things right all the time, so being kind to yourself and recognising you are trying your best under challenging conditions is important. It may be difficult to create time for yourself, but even 10 minutes can help to recharge your battery and refill your emotional piggy bank. Using "I" statements is a great way to let your child know how you are feeling and that you need a few minutes to yourself.

Useful websites:

<http://www.headspace.com>

<http://www.smile.au.com>



Jonny, I'm feeling a bit stressed so I need to sit down for five minutes and have a cup of tea. Then we can carry on.....

If you set your child up with a small activity, while you drink your tea, you can reinforce your child's positive behaviour by praising their cooperation with you and their good listening. Job well done!

WHEN THINGS ARE GETTING TOO RISKY

We recognise these are stressful times, so if you feel you need help to keep your child safe, and you feel you are not coping, then please ring **Stockport Children's Services on 0161 217 6028**

Or **NSPCC National Helpline on 0808 800 5000**

You will be able to speak to someone who can help, and work with you to offer support.

The **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** is available 24/7 for telephone support on **0808 2000 247**

For an emergency dial **999**. If you are unable to speak, due to being unsafe, **Key In 55 on your mobile when prompted and your call will be put through**

SCREEN TIME

Children will more than likely be spending more time on their screens and on line during this period of time. As screens (phones, iPads, laptops) emit blue light, the guidelines recommend children stop using technology for at least an hour before bedtime because this light interferes with their brain producing the sleep hormone, melatonin.

Find out more about sleep here: <https://www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk>
<https://www.sleepfoundation.org>

A word about online safety. Have a look at this website that has useful information for parents and children about keeping your child safe online:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>

TEENAGERS

These young people deserve a special mention as they are undergoing a huge amount of brain development and emotional change. This is a time when they are finding their way in the world, making connections with others and developing their independence. It can be a confusing time anyway where they may feel out of control of their world. The further impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on their friendships, routines, school life will understandably have a huge impact on them.



You may find that they direct some of their feelings and frustration at you which can be hurtful, especially when you feel that you are doing your best to hold things together. As with younger children, they may be unable to name their feelings or verbalise that they are feeling angry, anxious, confused, low in mood etc so this may present negatively in their behaviour.

Again, it is important to try and keep calm, not react and wait for things to calm down before talking to your young person. Listening and validating their feelings ie letting them hear that you understand how they're feeling, is really helpful to young people. Often, the main thing they need is to be listened to. You know your young person best and when may be a better time to talk to them, for example when out for a walk or whilst distracted doing another activity eg teatime or quiet time later in the evening.

The teenage brain undergoes a huge amount of development and growth during the night when your young person is asleep. Hormones are released and it is common for young people to have trouble waking up in the morning and feel tired.



Excited

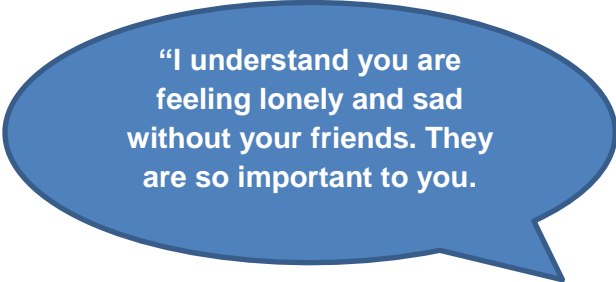
Bored

proud

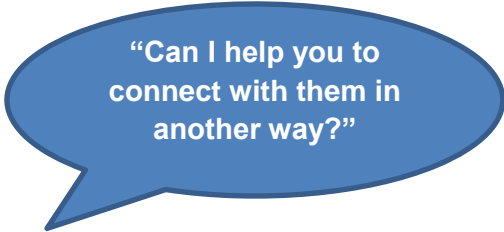
Often they may be much more awake and receptive to talking in the evening. This is completely normal and may be something you witness on school mornings! Without the need to get up for school you may find that they naturally fall into the pattern of getting up later. It may be that there needs to be some compromise on routines. Involving them in these discussions is important so that they feel that they have some control in the decision making.

Whilst talking about sleep, it is still important that your young person has 8.5 to 9.5 hours as a guide. Encouraging screen free time and a routine at bedtime eg bath, reading or listening to music is really helpful. Even if they are resistant, some fresh air and exercise promotes sleep. Encouraging them to come up with their own ideas for exercise is a good way for them to feel in control of this.

The areas of the teenage brain which process and understand risks may not be fully developed. This is why teenagers characteristically can risk take and not understand the consequences of this. Translating this to Covid-19, they may not fully be able to understand the risks and consequences associated with mixing with friends and they may react very negatively towards socially distancing. Again, it is important that you choose the right time to discuss this calmly so it doesn't escalate. Statements such as "I understand you are feeling lonely and sad without your friends. They are so important to you. Can I help you to connect in another way?" show that you understand.



"I understand you are feeling lonely and sad without your friends. They are so important to you."



"Can I help you to connect with them in another way?"

It is completely understandable that young people will, more than ever, want to connect virtually via social media with their friendship groups. Conversations around keeping safe and the potential risks associated with this are important to have. Although they may behave as if they have heard it all before and resist your concerns, this is showing that you care and that they are important enough to be concerned about.

If you are concerned about your young person's emotional health then there is advice from **Healthy Young Minds Stockport**.

They have a useful website for parents and young people with advice and useful apps and links.

<https://healthyyoungmindspennine.nhs.uk/find-us/stockport>

<https://healthyyoungmindspennine.nhs.uk/resource-centre/apps>

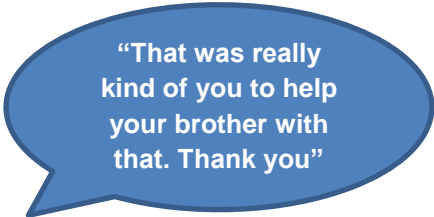
<https://healthyyoungmindspennine.nhs.uk/resource-centre/external-links>

Kooth is a free online counselling and emotional wellbeing platform for young people aged 11-18. <https://hub.gmhsc.org.uk/mental-health/kooth/>

To sign up to use Kooth, go to www.kooth.com

KINDNESS

Finally being kind to each other and modelling kindness is a really valuable behaviour to model to your children. Focussing on this is more important than ever in these uncertain times. Kindness starts at home and praising this helps to embed this.



“That was really kind of you to help your brother with that. Thank you”

Involving your children in talking about ways to help neighbours etc continues to model this kindness. There is a lot of research which shows this is good for wellbeing and a great skill for life. This maybe one of the many positives that come from this crisis and moving forwards is a valuable lesson for your child's future and building their resilience.

The website Family links has free useful downloads for parents: www.familylinks.org.uk

There is one that has a chart for kindness: [Kindness Chart](#)

If you feel that you require additional parenting support you can access the **Health Visitor and School Nurse Advice Line** on **0161 835 6789 - Monday to Friday 9am-5pm**

Thank you for taking the time to read this and we hope that you have found this helpful.

The Stockport Parenting Team

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