

Supporting Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing During School Closure

You may have heard this a lot recently, but we are living through extraordinary times. During lockdown, **motivation**, **emotions** and feelings of **resilience** will vary from day to day for all of us, including our children. It is important when things are feeling difficult that we are kind to ourselves as parents and remember that we are not trying to recreate the school at home, neither have we taken over as our children's teacher. Maintaining **positive relationships** with our children as well as supporting their emotional needs should remain our priority during lockdown.



Wellbeing has been described as **feeling good** and **functioning effectively**, two things that may feel hard to achieve at the moment¹. We are all worried about the wellbeing of children at this time. As well as managing the disappointment of cancelled trips and not being able to see their friends, children are having to adapt both to the loss of their school routine and to the introduction of the brave new world of online learning. We understand that this is a difficult transition and we hope that this brochure provides some helpful guidance on how to help to maintain the wellbeing of your children throughout this temporary period of upheaval.

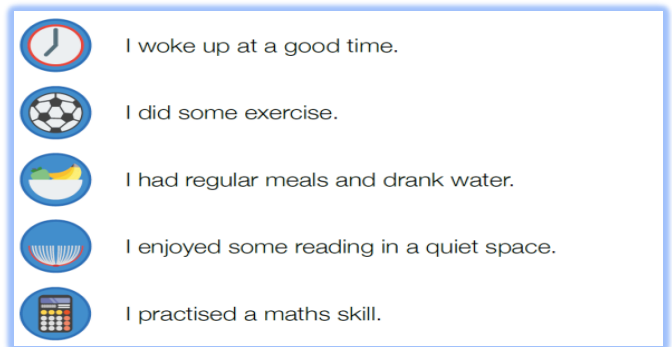
Routine and Structure

Structure and **routine** are very important to us all and help us to feel 'in control', especially during

difficult or uncertain times². They can be helpful for managing home-schooling as well.

Children want **predictability** and to know what is going to happen each day. They need a sense of when they are supposed to be working and when they get to play. Having a regular routine and structure is a helpful way for children to manage any uncertainty they may be feeling about not being in school and helps to **reduce** feelings of **stress** and **anxiety**.

Children are used to a timetable at school, so you might find it helpful to have one at home as well. Perhaps you could ask your child's school to share their timetable and use a similar structure. This could include time for snack-breaks, lunch, reading and exercise. It is also important to include some time where children can **connect** with their friends.



You will most likely be finding a new rhythm with your family and routines can also help to **support behaviour**. Simple ideas like creating a daily checklist can also help children to manage their new routines³. This could be done together as a family, or older children can be involved in designing their own checklist. For example, *I enjoyed some online learning, I did some baking, I played games outside*. As children are spending more time online, it is also important to make being outside part of the daily routine where possible. However, sticking to a set timetable each day is not feasible for all families all of the time, and **flexibility** is often necessary, so it's important to be kind to yourself if routines don't always go according to plan. If possible, make time at the end of each day to **acknowledge** with your child the learning they have completed, and what you think they've done well.

It is also important to bear in mind the healing power of **sleep**, which is vital for effective learning and wellbeing⁴. Try and set a consistent routine for going to bed each evening, beginning 15-30 minutes before the actual bedtime you have decided upon.

Learning Together



It can sometimes be difficult to know how to help your children with their schoolwork, but as parents, you are not expected to be teachers and schools should be setting work that students can complete independently. Whilst it is important for your child to engage with the work set by their school, it is also important to set **realistic expectations**.

We know there are many ways to learn, with school being just one of them, so home learning can be used as a time to embrace a wider perspective on learning and help children/young people feel in control by giving them more **options and choices**⁵. Learning by doing practical tasks and playing, particularly when exploring and active physical skills are involved, is incredibly important for a child's **healthy brain development**. If children have good, structured play opportunities it will improve their academic learning because their creativity, imagination, problem-solving and dexterity are all improved.

Below are some ideas for activities that can be enjoyed at home by children of all ages which provide opportunities to learn together, whilst hopefully reducing some of the stress of home-schooling.

Jigsaw puzzles can improve short-term memory, problem-solving skills, attention span and spatial awareness, whilst providing a sense of **accomplishment** when completed. They can be a

great way to connect with family, encourage teamwork and support communication skills. They're also a great stress buster!

Baking or cooking encourages younger children to explore their senses. For older children, baking can be linked to science and simple experiments can be carried out by changing recipes. Reading skills can be developed by reading recipes and maths skills can be used to measure ingredients or amend recipes. Cooking can also develop planning and problem-solving skills and passing family recipes on to children develops a sense of **family belonging**. You could also try linking this to your plans for family meals so that you might get some help with making dinner!

Reading together can also be a **calming experience** and provides opportunities to develop language and communication skills, as well as knowledge of the subject you're reading about. The Education Endowment Foundation recommend taking the TRUST approach⁶:

- T** Take turns to make predictions e.g. "I wonder if the bear will get lost?"
- R** Recap to check understanding e.g. "Why do you think the boy was frightened?"
- U** Use praise to keep children engaged e.g. "You're so good at guessing what's next!"
- S** Share what you already know and link to what you're reading e.g. "Do you remember that time we saw penguins at the zoo?"
- T** Tune-in, listen and be curious e.g. "I love reading about dinosaurs with you, what's your favourite one?"

Just taking time to **do something creative together** can also be hugely beneficial for wellbeing. Be it painting, singing or writing, creative pursuits give a sense of **accomplishment** and a welcome **distraction** from our worries.

Of course, if you do want to be more involved in your child's home-schooling, you can! Just remember that children's learning often benefits if they **try things out for themselves**, so try not to help *too* much!

Although being involved in your child's learning can be beneficial, it is also important to remember

that **child-led play** (without adult involvement!) is hugely important for children developing **independence** and **resilience**. Allowing children time to **relax** and to choose what and how they play is essential. Play is also the great way that children can deal with their emotions. They can act out experiences and **express feelings**, big or small, in a safe way. We currently have an opportunity to allow children more time to learn in this way, so don't feel worried if structured learning sometimes falls through.

Keep Active



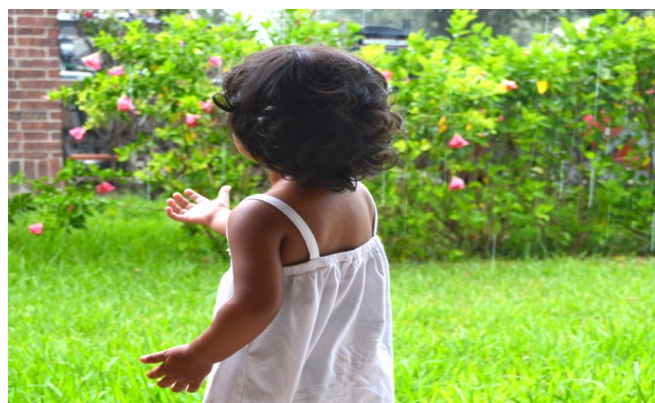
It is important for children and young people to take **regular breaks** when online learning. One way to fill this time could be with physical activity. We all know the great feeling that comes after exercising (perhaps not immediately after!) and this is thought to be caused by the release of **happiness-making endorphins**. Regular exercise also helps to create feelings of **confidence**, **achievement** and **mastery**. It also centres our mind, gives us time away from intrusive negative thoughts and helps with **concentration**, which will make learning all the more effective once children return to it.

You could even exercise together with your children, which would provide a shared experience and an opportunity for **reflection** and **conversation**, during and after the exercise. Difficult conversations with older children are often easier to have shoulder-to-shoulder than face-to-face, so walking or jogging together can be good times to raise tricky topics. It is also important to get outside and soak up Vitamin D from the sun, which boosts the immune system and keeps us healthy!

Take Notice

Taking notice means being **present** in the moment and **taking in the world** around us that we so often take for granted. This time in history can be worrying but it's important to remember that **this will pass** and to **focus on what's important** to us. Don't forget to **take time** for each other, perhaps asking how your child's day has been and encouraging them to ask about yours too. Perhaps document this time of your lives by keeping a **photo diary**. This can encourage us to look at the world in a different way, noticing positive things that may otherwise go unnoticed and it will provide a log of the extraordinary time we are living through to look back on in the future. This would provide a longer-term project and an opportunity to develop a practical skill, whilst also developing **self-esteem** about what we can achieve in the face of adversity.

Connect



As humans, we are social beings and a huge part of our wellbeing comes from the **quality of our relationships** with family and friends. Feeling connected to those you care about is important for you and your children, but it doesn't just have to be over the phone or a video call. We can also encourage young people to write **letters, emails** or **postcards** too, which can support written literacy development at the same time. Writing can help us **organise our thoughts** and to **understand how we feel**. Depending on the age of your children, trips to the letterbox can also be a good first step to developing **independence**. Sharing positive moments with others connects with the previously mentioned concept of 'taking notice' and allows us to **appreciate small moments** that might otherwise be missed.

Managing Technology



Technology plays a large part in helping children and young people to feel the important sense of **connection** to friends and family we have mentioned. It also gives us useful tools for providing leisure time. A recent study even found that moderate use of video games can have a positive impact on wellbeing! On top of this, there is an unimaginable treasure trove of educational information online and the fact that schooling is able to take place during lockdown is a huge benefit of modern technology. Besides, whether we like it or not, young people are now ‘digital natives’ who have grown up with technology, so it comes very naturally to them!

However, as we are sure you may have found, technology can often also be a source of **conflict**. Excessive use of social media has been linked to depression and ‘video game addiction’ is now considered by some to be a diagnosable condition. It can be worrying when even the education of children becomes reliant on technology. So how do we balance the benefits with the downsides of using technology too much⁷?

Firstly, it can be helpful to be **upfront** and **honest** with children (especially teenagers) about their screen time. It can help to make it clear that you understand they need a source of indoor entertainment at the moment and that it helps them to be in contact with their friends. But you can also talk to them about why it is not good for their wellbeing to spend all of their time online, as well as the huge benefits of physical exercise and other activities that don’t rely on technology. If they understand why it’s important to restrict their own screen time, they will be more likely to do this themselves.

Secondly, **give teenagers a voice** and a **sense of responsibility**, ask their opinion about recreational screen time (not including the time they currently have to spend learning online). Perhaps they can suggest when and for how long they think would be appropriate for them to have access to their screens after school hours. This can then be ‘negotiated’ or agreed with you as parents and carers. Again, if they feel a **sense of ownership** over the decision-making, they may be more likely to follow through.

Closing Thoughts

We hope this advice has provided you with some useful ideas and some food for thought. We would like to close by saying that it is important to remember to be kind to yourselves. The situation we find ourselves in with COVID-19 is unexpected and entirely new to all of us. When things don’t go according to plan with home schooling, or just with day-to-day life at the moment, remember that many families are having similar experiences. Although children are always our priority, don’t forget to take time for self-care and to look after your own wellbeing as well. A moment of quiet for yourself (however small) is always important. Keep safe and remember that this will pass in due time.

Useful Links

1. **The Five Ways to Wellbeing:**
<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>
2. **A video about supporting routines:**
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/videos/EEF_Supporting_daily_routines_during_school_closures.mp4
3. **An example of a daily checklist:**
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Covid-19_Resources/Resources_for_parents/Supporting_home_learning_routines_-_Planning_the_day.pdf
4. **Our service’s guidance on sleep routines:**
<https://services2schools.org.uk/File/GetPageOrArticleDocumentForDownload?fileGuid=3b0ce49b-4637-4fec-b83f-aaf149f731ec&fileType=PageSectionDocuments>
5. **Fisher, N. (2020). Schools’ Out, *The Psychologist*. BPS (3):**
<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/schools-really-out>
6. **Tips for supporting reading:**
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/Covid-19_Resources/Resources_for_schools/7_Top_Tips_to_Support_Reading_at_Home.pdf
7. **Advice about teenagers and technology:**
<https://parents.au.reachout.com/skills-to-build/wellbeing/technology-and-teenagers>
8. **Our service’s guidance for shielding families:**
<https://services2schools.org.uk/File/GetPageOrArticleDocumentForDownload?fileGuid=b28ecfbb-4c91-4f48-a593-ca4522851326&fileType=PageSectionDocuments>

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