

Support for Parents following School Closures due to COVID-19 (coronavirus)

School closures due to the coronavirus outbreak means that we are all facing uncertainty, which may have an impact on children and young people's emotional wellbeing. Bradford Educational Psychology Team have put together some general tips to support children, young people, parents and staff throughout this challenging period.

1. **Try to keep to routines as much as possible.** This may be more difficult with the school closures, but children and young people will benefit from things being as routine as possible. As adults we like to know what is going to happen, and children like this too. For example, getting-up times and bed-times should remain the same. It is often useful to involve children in creating this routine, so that they feel part of the plan, rather than the plan being imposed on them. You could display the routine using a timeline, or maybe pictures and visuals. Encourage children to develop independence by referring to their own routine/plan themselves.

Children and young people can complete work and activities during the day that have been sent from school, or via online providers. We have listed some of these in the appendix to help you know where to start. Don't forget schools have break-times too, so try to plan something more fun in between.

It may not be possible to replicate a full school timetable for a variety of reasons. Giving yourself and your children permission to accept this can be a big weight lifted. Most parents and carers aren't teachers and so it's OK not to be doing 'school work' for six hours a day. It might be more important to be spending time together, building relationships, enjoying shared activities and reassuring children, as opposed to replicating the school timetable

Don't worry if the routine isn't perfect – remember, this isn't a normal situation. If you find that planning and sticking to the routine is causing more stress, friction or conflict, then it's OK to be more 'free-flow'. Perhaps be guided by the activities that children want to do.

If children are doing school work or project work at home, try to keep it all in one place so that it doesn't spread out over the house. This can help to maintain a work/home boundary. We know that people live in different circumstances that might mean this isn't always possible, so perhaps there might be other ways to 'signal' the end of working e.g. putting away the work and then enjoying a favourite song or shared dance.

2. **Provide reassurance about exams being cancelled** – Young people may now be concerned about the announcement that exams later this year will not be going ahead as planned. They may feel like all their hard work has been for nothing. Reassure young people that the Prime Minister has said that all children and young people will get the qualification they worked towards, but acknowledge that the plan is a bit uncertain right now. Reassure young people that the government and Department for Education are working on a plan.

- 3. Give information but limit exposure to news/social media.** Staying informed can make us feel in control, and which is generally positive. It is natural that children will have questions and worries about coronavirus, and it is ok to say you don't know - at the moment, there are questions we don't have answers to about coronavirus. Giving them the space to ask these questions and have answers is a good way to ease anxiety. Younger children might understand a cartoon or picture better than an explanation. Normalising the experience is likely to reduce anxiety for many children. Reassure children that lots of adults and other children are in the same situation

However, the constant news reports could also become overwhelming. Reduce the time spent hearing, reading or watching news. Try to protect children from distressing media coverage, and instead get information from reputable websites and sources, and try to make sure children access developmentally appropriate information. Suggestions about where to find these resources are also in the appendix.

- 4. Stay connected to others.** This is especially important for people who are in self-isolation. Humans are social creatures and without social contact, negative feelings can start to creep in. Even if contact can't be face-to-face, there are other ways of communicating with others. Friendships are a key resiliency factor for children and young people. Most children see their friends nearly every day of the week and so not being in contact with them for some time might be upsetting. Is it possible for children to talk to their friends on the phone? Perhaps establish a group Skype or WhatsApp call? Perhaps they could write letters to each other.

Just remember that social media can be a great place for socialising with other when we need to - but it can also contain fake news and anxiety-invoking rumours.

- 5. Try to maintain a healthy lifestyle.** This includes trying to maintain a balanced diet, doing some exercise etc. It is very tempting to binge on junk food when we are kept indoors, so it's a good idea to prepare some healthier snacks if you can. In terms of exercise, going to the gym or even for a walk may not be possible for some people right now, but lots of gyms, personal trainers etc. are putting exercise classes and routines online for those in isolation.

- 6. Use psychological strategies** to help keep emotions balanced and to stave off depression and anxiety. This might include activities such as mindfulness and meditation. Again, we have put some links to useful resources in the appendix.

- 7. Talk to someone you trust if you feel anxious.** Whilst it is normal to feel worried right now, if you or your child are starting to feel overwhelmed, it's important to acknowledge your feelings and speak to someone you trust, whether that's a friend, a family member, a teacher or a helpline.



Appendix 1: Useful resources to talk about COVID-19 (coronavirus) with different groups

1. For very **young children** - CBBC has a coronavirus-specific video from Doctors Chris and Xand:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089>

Also for young children, there is a coronavirus social story on the ELSA website:

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/coronavirus-story-for-children/>

2. For **older children/teenagers**, Young Minds has useful advice RE coping with the coronavirus situation.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus>

For older students including those who may have some communication needs, the following social story may be more appropriate:

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

3. For **information in different languages**. This MindHeart information and activity book about coronavirus is a way to open up a conversation about children's concerns. The book is available in 18 languages and it encourages children to label their current feelings and offers specific advice on things they can do to stay healthy.

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

4. **Easy-read resources**. Mencap have produced an excellent [easy read information sheet about coronavirus](#). This would be particularly useful for children, young people or adults whose understanding is improved with visuals and when information is given in bite-size chunks. The easy read version covers what coronavirus is, what to do if you think you have it, and how to help stop the spread.

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20UPDATED%20130320%20SD%20editsAH.pdf>

5. For **schools and teachers**, the Anna Freud Centre has published an article giving advice on how to respond to the coronavirus situation:

[Supporting schools & colleges: A guide to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and students during periods of disruption](#)

6. For **parents**, there are good sources on info and advice RE coronavirus via The British Psychological Society, The National Association of School Psychologists, ChildMind and The Mayo Clinic:

[bps-highlights-importance-talking-children-about-coronavirus](#)

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

<https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/helping-kids-cope-with-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

7. Advice for **adults** in dealing with mental health issues as a direct result of coronavirus, there is a good article on BBC news.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>

Additionally, the Anna Freud website is good for more general advice on looking after our mental health:

<https://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/>

Finally, the American Psychiatric Association has clear explanations (for adults) on what terms like 'pandemic' and 'quarantine' mean, *as well as* more useful advice to protect one's mental health during this time.

https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/pandemics?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=apa-pandemics&utm_content=pandemics-resources

Appendix 2: Resources, information and ideas on how to maintain positive mental health

1. **Mindful Schools** is offering free mindfulness classes for kids! Join them for mindful activities, mindful movement, read-alouds and have fun exploring mindfulness together
https://www.mindfulschools.org/free-online-mindfulness-class-for-kids/?utm_source=Mindful+Schools+Newsletter&utm_campaign=7968a81a59-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_NEWSLETTER_2020_03_18_NONREG&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_024a46d2a1-7968a81a59-20835055
2. **Kooth** – a website funded by Bradford CCGs where children and young people in Bradford aged 12 to 18 can access on-line advice and support for general mental health issues.
www.kooth.com
3. The **Anna Freud website** is good for more general advice on looking after our mental health:
<https://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/>

Useful mobile apps:

1. **Headspace** – Meditation designed to help you relax (has a free trial)
2. **Chill Panda** – being tested in the NHS to help with breathing techniques to help you relax.
3. **Beat Panic** - can help with overcoming panic and anxiety (£0.99)
4. **Bluelce** – helps young people manage their emotions (free)
5. **Catch it** – Helps to manage negative thoughts and look at problems differently (free)
6. **Cove** – create music to reflect emotions (free)
7. **Feeling good: positive mindset** – use audio tracks to help relax your body and mind (free, though has in-app purchases)

Appendix 3: Useful educational websites and resources for children and young people being kept at home

Khan Academy

<https://www.khanacademy.org>

Especially good for maths and computing for all ages but other subjects at Secondary level. Note this uses the U.S. grade system but it's mostly common material.

BBC Learning

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/coursesearch/>

This site is old and no longer updated and yet there's so much still available, from language learning to BBC Bitesize for revision. No TV licence required except for content on BBC iPlayer.

Futurelearn

<https://www.futurelearn.com>

Free to access 100s of courses, only pay to upgrade if you need a certificate in your name (own account from age 14+ but younger learners can use a parent account).

Seneca

<https://www.senecalearning.com>

For those revising at GCSE or A level. Tons of free revision content. Paid access to higher level material.

Phonics play

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

A site packed with interactive **phonics** games, **phonics** planning, assessment ideas and many teaching ideas and resources to help children to learn.

Openlearn

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/>

Free taster courses aimed at those considering Open University but everyone can access it. Adult level, but some e.g. nature and environment courses could well be of interest to young people.

Blockly

<https://blockly.games>

Learn computer programming skills - fun and free.

Scratch

<https://scratch.mit.edu/explore/projects/games/>

Creative computer programming

Ted Ed

<https://ed.ted.com>

All sorts of engaging educational videos

National Geographic Kids

<https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/>

Activities and quizzes for younger kids.

Duolingo

<https://www.duolingo.com>

Learn languages for free. Web or app.

Mystery Science

<https://mysteryscience.com>

Free science lessons

The Kids Should See This

<https://thekidshouldseethis.com>

Wide range of cool educational videos

Crash Course

<https://thecrashcourse.com>

You Tube videos on many subjects

Crash Course Kids

<https://m.youtube.com/user/crashcoursekids>

As above for a younger audience

Crest Awards

<https://www.crestawards.org>

Science awards you can complete from home.

iDEA Awards

<https://idea.org.uk>

Digital enterprise award scheme you can complete online.

Paw Print Badges

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

Free challenge packs and other downloads. Many activities can be completed indoors.

Badges cost but are optional.

Tinkercad

<https://www.tinkercad.com>

All kinds of making.

Prodigy Maths

<https://www.prodigygame.com>

Is in U.S. grades, but good for UK Primary age.

Cbeebies Radio

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/radio>

Listening activities for the younger ones.

Nature Detectives

<https://naturedetectives.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/>

A lot of these can be done in a garden, or if you can get to a remote forest location!

British Council

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/find>

Resources for English language learning

Oxford Owl for Home

<https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/>

Lots of free resources for Primary age

Big History Project

<https://www.bighistoryproject.com/home>

Aimed at Secondary age. Multi disciplinary activities.

Geography Games

<https://world-geography-games.com/world.html>

Geography gaming!

Blue Peter Badges

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/joinin/about-blue-peter-badges>

If you have a stamp and a nearby post box.

The Artful Parent

<https://www.facebook.com/artfulparent/>

Good, free art activities

Red Ted Art

<https://www.redtedart.com>

Easy arts and crafts for little ones

The Imagination Tree

<https://theimaginationtree.com>

Creative art and craft activities for the very youngest.

Toy Theater

<https://toytheater.com/>

Educational online games

DK Find Out

<https://www.dkfindout.com/uk/?fbclid=IwAR2wJdpSJSeITf4do6aPhff8A3tAktnmpaxqZbkgudD49I71ep8-sjXmrac>

Activities and quizzes

Twinkl

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

This is more for printouts, and usually at a fee, but they are offering a month of free access to parents in the event of school closures.