

Advice and Resources for Parents: Covid-19

This is a very uncertain time for everyone. Don't put too much pressure on yourself, your partner or your children to do things perfectly. Do the best you can in the current situation.

1. Talking to your children about Coronavirus

- Try to filter the information to your children to make sure they are not hearing or reading false information or exaggerated reporting which can heighten anxiety. Stick to the facts from reputable sources such as Public Health England and government updates.
- Encourage your children to talk to you about any worries they have and to ask you questions about what's happening. Answer questions honestly in an age appropriate way. Also be honest if you don't know the answer to something. There are a lot of unknowns at the moment and you may not have all the answers to your children's questions.
- Assure your children that you will update them on any new and important information that comes out
- Don't avoid answering your children's questions as this will only make children feel more anxious. If someone in the family becomes unwell and your child is feeling worried, let them know they can talk to you. Be honest about what



you don't know but do reassure them that clever, experienced doctors, nurses and scientists are working hard on this and will be doing their best to help their family member. If they can speak to them by video call and the person is well enough, they may find this reassuring.

Resources

<https://youtu.be/aYIXLMaFzgU>

2. Supporting Yourself and your Children During Periods of Isolation and Social Distancing

- As much as possible, stick to a routine during the day. This means scheduling activities, such as schoolwork, play and downtime and regular mealtimes and bedtimes. Routines help children and young people to feel safe especially in times of uncertainty when anxiety might be heightened. If your children are old enough why not sit down as a family and come up with a schedule together. This will help them have a sense of control in these uncertain times and increase the chances they will engage with this. Include family mealtimes, these can be a good opportunity to involve children e.g. setting the table, tidying up etc. As well as a time to share ideas about the day ahead, reflect at the end of the day, share feelings etc.
- Even if your children don't have to wake up to go to school, keeping their sleep routine as normal as possible is really important as they can get into bad habits of staying up late which are difficult to correct again. If your child is not getting enough sleep this could impact their mood, appetite and behaviour. This is also true for adults.
- It may be tempting to allow children to spend the whole day watching TV, playing video games, using tablets and phones but it helps if you break the day up into various activities that are creative, fun and stimulating. These can include playing board games, doing puzzles, reading, word searches, cross words, baking, painting etc. Children's developing minds need to be stimulated. There are some great resources online for free children's activities. Children may find it hard to concentrate for longer

period, especially when feeling worried, so don't be disappointed if they need to do pause activities and come back to it later.

- As a family, try to be as active as you can. If you have an outdoor space at home, encourage children to go outside and play, jump around, throw a ball etc. If you don't have an outdoor space, do some indoor activities like dancing or jumping jacks and stretches. It's a good way to release energy and manage any frustration or anxiety. Both children and adults feel better when they are more active. Part of your daily routine could be a PE or yoga lesson, there are lots of free Apps and videos available on YouTube.
- Try to stick to normal boundaries and limits with your children (e.g. being polite to you and their siblings, completing their chores etc.)
- Recognise that this is an uncertain and unsettling time for all of us. Make time for self-care which means looking after your own needs as well. Talking to family and friends, having some time to relax etc.
- Remember that by looking after yourself, physically and emotionally, you will be in a better position to look after your children.

Resources:

www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities

www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/craft-ideas/how-to/g1389/diy-kids-activities/

www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/puzzles

<https://youngminds.org.uk/starting-a-conversation-with-your-child/20-activities-for-20-minutes/>

For support with healthy lifestyles please contact:

Camden: healthandwellbeingteam@camden.gov.uk

Islington: familiesforlife@islington.gov.uk

3. Meal Times and Snacks

- Try to stock up on healthy snacks to have in the house.
- Children (and adults) often mistake boredom or anxiety for hunger. If your children are asking for lots of snacks try to redirect them to an activity or check in about their feelings. Stick to the recommended amount of daily snacks and remember that your children are likely being less active during isolation than they would normally be.
- As much as possible try to stick to routine mealtimes and try to maintain a healthy, balanced diet.
- Try to have family meal times where you all eat together. Use this time to talk and connect. Don't allow any distractions at the table including mobile phones and tablets.
- Make sure your children are drinking enough water and staying hydrated
- Remember to model healthy behaviours and coping skills to your children. They will follow your example.

Resources:

www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/

www.nhs.uk/change4life

4. Managing emotions and behaviour

- It is normal to feel a bit anxious with all the uncertainty and changes to daily life. Recognise your child's feelings and empathise with them. Acknowledge all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice. When your child/ young person is in a relaxed, rational state, problem solve with them, e.g. "let's think about what you can do next time you feel like this"
- Staying active, eating healthy foods and getting enough sleep all help contribute to good mental health.
- Practising mindfulness and meditation can help to stay present in the moment, rather than carried away by worries. Breathing exercises can also help to calm our minds and bodies down. Make use of Apps (headspace, calm, smiling mind) and guided breathing/meditation videos on YouTube.
- Do keep up to date with the latest public health guidance but limit your exposure to news, negative stories and unconfirmed information about Coronavirus. If we're constantly exposing ourselves to it, it can feel overwhelming for us and our children.
- Incorporate pleasant activities into your and your children's day and try to look for any small positives. Listen to relaxing music, share things that you are grateful for (e.g. the nice weather, a nice meal, speaking to loved ones) and spend some quality time together and keep connecting with others via phone calls or social media.
- Children are very sensitive to picking up on their parents' anxiety and stress so it's important that you make sure you're managing your own feelings in order to support your children. Model self care.

Try to commit to one thing a day you can do for your own enjoyment or relaxation and let other family members know not to disturb you during that time.

- If you're worried about your mental health or your children's mental health deteriorating, reach out to professionals.

Resources:

Adults:

Samaritans 116 123 or jo@samaritans.org, Headspace app, CALM app

Adolescents:

kooth.com, Headspace app, smiling mind app

Children:

Childline 0800 1111 and childline.org

Contact your local CAMHS services

Islington CAMHS 020 3316 1824

Camden CAMHS 020 8938 2241



5. Staying Connected

- Social relationships and connections help us to manage stress and feel supported in difficult times.
- Although physical contact might not be possible with all family, friends and colleagues, try to stay connected through messages, phone calls and video calling.
- It can be especially difficult for grandparents or other vulnerable family members who can't have physical contact at this time. Make sure you stay in touch with them and facilitate contact between your children and their grandparents via telephone or video calls. As part of your routine, a grandparent or other family member could read a story to younger children.
- Putting up photos of family and friends who we can't be with at the moment helps adults and children feel connected and reminds us of good times together.
- If you don't have a social support system, reach out to community groups and charities for support. Check your local council's website for advice and support.

Resources:

Islington

www.islington.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/coronavirus-covid-19/need-help

or call the We are Islington helpline on 020 7527 8222.

or email: weareislington@islington.gov.uk

Camden

www.camden.gov.uk/covid-19

Gingerbread charity (for single parents)

[www.gingerbread.org.uk/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI7M2I7MzE6AIVI-](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI7M2I7MzE6AIVI-FRCh1szQrEEAAYASAAEgKRBPD_BwE)

[FRCh1szQrEEAAYASAAEgKRBPD_BwE](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI7M2I7MzE6AIVI-FRCh1szQrEEAAYASAAEgKRBPD_BwE)

6. Managing Difficult Behaviour

- You may notice your child's behaviour becomes more difficult to manage when they have to stay in doors for long periods of time and their routine is disrupted. This may be in part because they are feeling unsettled and worried (even if they don't look like it!) and in part because they have extra energy they aren't using up in the same way. They may also be picking up on how other people in the house are doing.
- Behaviour is a communication so it's important to think about why your child might be behaving the way they are
- Boundaries help children feel safe by making their surroundings feel a bit more predictable
- If your child is acting out and behaving poorly at home it may be a sign that they are feeling out of sorts or anxious. Think of calming strategies and activities with them. For example, counting and breathing activities, colouring, something more physical etc.

Support them by talking to them about how they're feeling. Sometimes children can find it hard to talk about emotions, so you might need to guess their feelings and see where that leads, or ask them to draw their feelings out if they can't find the words.
- Provide structure and routine, encourage a range of activities throughout the day.
- Encourage a healthy diet and enough sleep as this can impact on their behaviour.

- Maintain consistent boundaries around behaviour. Clearly explain your expectations and the boundaries for the time they spend at home tE.g. You can take turns playing on the tablet until lunch time, after that you can choose another activity.
- If your child is angry or upset, give them time to calm down before trying to talk to them about what happened. Think ahead of time how you can do this, as it can be more challenging when space is limited.
- Make sure to catch when your child has done something good! Give them specific praise, e.g. "I love the way you shared the toys with your sister."

Resources:

Free for Islington parents:

Online Parenting Courses at Solihull Our Place

https://directory.islington.gov.uk/kb5/islington/directory/service.page?id=GOa1wRnKc_E

www.familylives.org.uk/advice/primary/behaviour/challenging-behaviour/

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/leaflets/positive-parenting/>

7. Managing Conflict in the House

- This is an unusual and uncertain time for all of us which can lead to higher than normal levels of stress. This coupled with being stuck in doors with our partners, children and other family members increases the likelihood of arguments and conflict. This can put a lot of strain on relationships.
- It is normal and natural that people might be feeling more emotional and irritable at the moment. Try to show compassion for this and try to be kind to yourself and each other. If you need to, try to give each other some space (as far as is possible currently!) and reach out to friends, family or professionals by phone or online for additional support.
- Be aware that high stress and anxiety can impact how we behave and respond to situations and so the better able we are to manage difficult feelings, the better able we will be to respond positively.
- Try to be patient and communicate clearly and respectfully with each other, the way you would like your children to behave. If you need time to calm down before a difficult conversation, try to do so but try not to let resentments build up over time. Children learn from watching you how and when to calm themselves and how to resolve conflicts effectively.
- Don't put children in the middle of the conflict by asking them to choose sides, using them to communicate with the person you are having conflict with or blaming them for the tension between you and your partner.
- If the situation is causing a lot of tension between the adults in the house, try not to expose children to this conflict as this has a negative effect on them. If you feel unsafe with your partner call the police or contact Solace on <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/get-help> or call 0808 802 5565.
- If you are worried about the wellbeing or safety of a child call Islington Council Children's Services Contact Team 020 7527 7400 or Camden Social Services on 020 7974 3317, out of hours: 020 7974 4444 or email LBCMASHadmin@camden.gov.uk.

Resources:
[Relate.org.uk](https://www.relate.org.uk)