Support for Parents and Carers following School Closures due to COVID-19

School closures due to the coronavirus outbreak means that we are all facing a change to our routine, and this can lead to uncertainty, which may have an impact on children and young people’s emotional wellbeing.

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.

1. **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.
2. **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.

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **Use wellbeing strategies** to help keep emotions balanced and to stave off depression and anxiety. This might include activities such as mindfulness and meditation.
4. **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.