

## Advice for Parents and Carers – Looking After Yourself, Looking After Your Children, Within the Home Due to COVID-19

This is an uncertain time for a lot of people and may be causing you worry and anxiety. This is normal. It is important to consider not only our physical health but also our mental health. By doing this we will be better placed to look after our children. Remember the aeroplane safety briefings that advise putting on your own oxygen mask before helping others – it's like that.

**You may be feeling pressure to provide education in the same way that your children would get at school but this is not necessary. Mostly, children will need what they've always needed; love, attention and opportunities to learn and play.**

Although teachers will be planning learning activities, it may be helpful to start by planning your days or weeks to include something from each of the '5 Ways to Wellbeing' (CLANG), **for you and your children**. Involve them in planning ideas to cover each of these aspects to maintain wellbeing.

**GIVE** – Research tells us that giving helps people feel valuable and makes us happier. We may not be able to contribute to our community in our usual way but there may be different and new opportunities. Text or call friends or family members and include your child.

Send pictures of what your child has created to those you know who are isolated. Check that your neighbours are able to get food and supplies and have your child help with listing and packing these. Support charities, locally or worldwide, which provide care for children and make your child aware of this.

**CONNECT** – Social connection is one of the most important ways that we can look after our mental wellbeing. Physical distancing is going to make that trickier but in this technological age we can be creative in finding other ways to maintain social connections. Try to have phone calls and videos if possible rather than just using social media. Arrange to Facetime/Skype a friend for coffee and phone relatives more often than usual. Try to find other things to talk about other than the virus. Perhaps children can read to other family members over video, and use apps such as designed to maintain contact with groups of friends.

**LEARN** – Learning a new skill or honing an existing one gives us a sense of purpose and achievement. Whilst we are busy we are less likely to have anxious thoughts and worries. Many people may now have more time to start a new hobby or learn about an area that they have always been interested in. Maybe learn something new **WITH** your child. When children are doing activities set by school, help them see these as learning rather than 'work'. Even that language shift can make the experience more enjoyable.



**Take NOTICE** – Take a break from the news and social media and concentrate on what is happening in the here and now; in your own body, thoughts and with family. Notice and appreciate the small things. Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing. There are many good mindfulness apps to try (eg Headspace) but if that is not for you then getting into something you enjoy eg cooking, drawing and really focussing on it can be just as good. Encourage children to take notice of things, including how they are feeling.

**Be ACTIVE** – Getting regular daily exercise is important for everyone. There are a lot of websites and YouTube videos that can guide you, whatever your current physical capabilities. Encourage children to plan physical activities in the home or outside (if current government advice permits) such as dance routines or assault courses. Older children may respond better to fitness videos. If you cannot get outside then open the window and get some fresh air and notice the outside.

## Who Does What – Parent/Carer, Teacher

- Your child's teacher(s) will be providing learning activities, on-line over the coming weeks.
- The teacher will provide you with information as to the: point; direction; aims; duration; outcome; importance; recording of the lesson (which may just be a conversation between you and your child).
- Where the lesson requires you to provide particular resources (pens, scissors ...) the teacher will make you aware of this.
- During this period of time you will be required to supervise and support your child but it is the teacher who will organise the teaching.
- It will be helpful for your child to have a desk or table on which to do some of this learning, within an area which has as few distractions as possible.

If children or young people are at home for long periods because of physical distancing or self-isolation, the following may also be helpful:

- **Expect Stress** – This is an uncertain and unpredictable situation, stress and anxiety are normal.
- **Reassure children** – Children can sometimes believe they are responsible for things that are beyond their control. Reassure them that it is the adult's job to make sure things are ok and to keep them safe.
- **Have a routine and structure** – Having a plan and a predictable routine that suits you can be very reassuring. This does not have to be a minute by minute timetable, but no plan at all can mean that very little gets achieved. If you take the view that, 'At some point we'll do this,' you may fall into the trap of not ever getting anything done. A consistent routine allows everyone to feel secure about the plans for the day, especially keeping bedtime and morning routines as close to existing ones as possible. It is often useful to involve the child or young person in creating this routine, so that they feel part of the plan, rather than having it imposed on them. Encouraging them to get up and dressed at a reasonable hour during the week will help to maintain the difference between weekdays and weekends.
- **Do not worry if the routine is not perfect** – Remember, this is not a normal situation. If you find that sticking to a routine or plan is causing more stress, friction or conflict among you, then it is ok to be more 'free-flow'. Perhaps be guided by the activities that children want to do.
- **Keep boundaries firm** - make it clear that you expect the same standards of behaviour as usual. Boundaries show that adults are still in control and taking care of them, which helps children to feel safe.
- **Play** – Play is fundamental to the wellbeing and development of children of all ages. It is also a great way to reduce stress in adults.
- **Normalise the experience** – Reassure children that lots of adults and other children are in the same situation as they are. This can reduce their anxiety.
- **Help children to stay connected to their friends** – Friendships are a key resilience factor for children and young people (see CONNECT above). Be wary of giving unsupervised access to IT platforms that you would not normally allow your child to use; the internet still poses the same risks as in normal times.
- **Reduce access to rolling news** – Reduce the time that children spend hearing, reading or watching the news. The cumulative impact of ongoing Covid news may be overwhelming for adults and children. Try to protect children from distressing media coverage.

- **Supervise children with screens** – It is likely that children and young people will be using screens more often over a period of lock-down eg phones, consoles, tablets etc. Make sure they are supervised and ensure appropriate content filters are active. Try to ensure that they have a balanced range of activities each day and can learn new, age appropriate skills that do not require screens eg baking, tying shoelaces, finance/budgeting. Involve them in the discussions so that they feel part of the plan.
- **Schools have not ‘shut down’** – Although most children will not be able to physically attend school, you will still be able to communicate with senior leaders, or in some instances, teachers.
- **Do not try to replicate a full school timetable** – It will 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.
- **Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work** – Most parents and carers are not teachers and so it is ok not to be doing ‘school work’ for six hours each day. It might be more important to be spending time together, building relationships, enjoying shared activities and reassuring children, as opposed to replicating a full school timetable (remember CLANG).
- **Try to keep work in one place** – When children are doing school work or project work at home, try to keep it all in one place so that it does not 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 that this is not always possible, so perhaps there might be other ways to ‘signal’ the end of working e.g putting the work away and then enjoying a favourite song or shared dance!
- **Give children a say in what will be happening** – They may have had a lot of their freedoms and choices removed for a while and may feel powerless, disappointed or angry. Older children and teenagers will be more able to understand the risks of too much screen time, too little sleep, inactivity etc. They are more likely to buy in to the new rules and routines if they feel that they have a voice. Family meetings where children and adults problem solve together can be helpful for this.

Ultimately, psychological wellbeing is paramount. In some cases children and families may be experiencing significant levels of anxiety due to the general situation or a family member being ill. This may mean that for these children focusing on their wellbeing and mental health is the priority, rather than educational activities.

(With thanks to The British Psychological Society and Wiltshire Council for much of the above advice)

### **Physical Wellbeing**

The Health Improvement Commission for the States of Guernsey has provided a series of resources to support parents/carers and children as they are required to stay at home:

<https://healthimprovement.gg/services/be-active/be-active-home> - the up-dated home page;

<https://healthimprovement.gg/services/eat-well/eat-well-home> - which features healthy, affordable recipe ideas from easily accessible ingredients.

Their news page <https://healthimprovement.gg/news> shares practical tips on how to break up your sitting time at home.

## How to Talk to Children About COVID -19

It is very likely that your child will wish to talk to you about COVID-19, Save the Children offers the following 7 Simple Tips as to how you may guide that conversation

1. Get informed and share the facts.
2. Tailor your approach based on your child – think about whether more information makes them more or less anxious.
3. Approach the subject simply and calmly – kids take their cues from you.
4. Ask your child what they know, answer their questions and address any misinformation.
5. Validate their feelings, while reassuring them – “I understand this can be scary. We’re taking steps to keep healthy, and we’re well prepared.”
6. Remind them of what’s in their power – washing hands thoroughly and often, coughing and sneezing into their elbow, wearing a face covering, getting plenty of sleep, etc.
7. Model good hygiene, and try to make it fun! Sing a favorite song while scrubbing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

## Praise

Praise is one of the most powerful tools which we possess in our interactions with children and yet it is one of the most poorly understood. Praise is a means of supporting your child to work out how to make the best choices – and then to keep on making these. In praising a child, we make them aware of their progress towards a goal. Our key message should always be that it is the child’s effort and process of learning which is highly valued by us and not just whether their response was ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’. Many thinking and creative tasks will not lead to a product which can be judged to be correct or incorrect and so it is the process of learning itself which is the point of the task.

When children are complimented in an ongoing way for any and every behaviour, this is not praise, this is flattery and it is not valuable to them. Praising children clearly and genuinely, provides an opportunity for them to gain a sense of the pathway which they have taken to reach this point, while supporting them to consider what their next steps may be.

Praise should be an opportunity to develop trust in your relationship, so that if you are not able to provide the ‘proof’ of the praise which you have given, you may need to think again. This way of praising links with developing and demonstrating a **Growth Mindset**, something which underpins the Bailiwick Curriculum and which schools in Guernsey have embraced. See this as an opportunity for thinking about how we can grow and develop, embrace challenges, accept feedback, focus on the process, seek advice, not give up and learn from any mistakes.

# Praise Your Child

DO IT RIGHT. DO IT WELL.



Praise the **process**, not the person.



Focus on the **efforts**, not the outcomes.



Be **specific**. Avoid generic statements.



Use **simple** statements.



Do not **overpraise**.



Be **genuine** and **sincere**.



Give **age appropriate** praise.



Avoid **comparisons**.



Catch your child **doing good**.

How do you **PRAISE** your child?



## Reference:

Dwyer, C & Dweck, C. (2016). *Using Praise to Enhance Student Resilience and Learning Outcomes*.

Mueller, C. M. & Dweck, C. (1998). Praise for Intelligence can Undermine Children's Motivation and Performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 33-52.



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