

Hello to parents, carers and children

I hope this letter finds you well. I am one of the SCHOOL COUNSELLORS. I know this lockdown period can be stressful and difficult for some families and so I thought it might be useful to share some TIPS with you about staying MENTALLY WELL and healthy during this time.

I hope you can find something here that you find helpful.

First of all, it is useful to remember that if adults are finding this time challenging, then children probably are too, even if they don't say so.

Anyone may be feeling STRESSED, ANXIOUS, BORED, LONELY, SAD, FED UP or UNMOTIVATED. It is not surprising. You are cut off from your friends and family and normal routines, and may be worried about health, school, work or other matters. These things will mean your mood may be up and down – you may feel fine one minute and IRRITABLE, ANGRY or SAD the next.

KINDNESS

An important thing to remember, when thinking about yourself or others in your household, is that these mood swings are NORMAL. The best way to deal with them is with KINDNESS, both towards yourself and others.

Being kind to yourself means trying to understand how you are feeling, NOT JUDGING yourself for feeling like that and ACCEPTING that it's ok.

Being kind to others means trying to understand how the other person may be feeling, not judging it but accepting it. People cannot always put into WORDS how they are feeling, but you will be able to tell by their BEHAVIOUR.

It is also useful to think of KIND things you can do for other people. Acts of kindness make you feel better, as well as the person receiving your kind act. So, you could make a card or a picture for a friend, neighbour or family member. You could bake something tasty for someone to eat. You could phone or Facetime someone special who you haven't seen for a while. You might cheer up their day.

Try not to get into arguments.

Being KIND means:

If you feel angry, walk away.

If someone is lashing out, give them space.

If someone is being naughty, change the focus.

If someone is sad, give them a hug.

MOTIVATION

Remember – it's a really big ask of anyone, but especially children who are used to learning together in class, to motivate themselves to work alone at home. If some days it just isn't happening then it might be better to leave it for that day and start afresh the next.

For children it is best to do SMALL CHUNKS of work, schedule regular BREAKS and REWARDS.

Note: REWARDS don't have to be edible! A reward could be 20 minutes screen time or playing a game together or a walk, or just a chat in the garden. The best reward for children is quality adult ATTENTION.

Let children have some CONTROL over their timetable. Work it out TOGETHER.

Where possible set up shared workstations so that children can work TOGETHER with other family members – whether siblings or parents working at home - at the same table or in the same room. Most people are not used to working alone. Being with others who are also working helps with CONCENTRATION.

BOREDOM

When people are BORED it is not usually because they have nothing to do, but because they don't want to do any of the things on offer. It's a feeling of not being able to settle on anything.

If this is the case, a CHANGE OF SCENE is the best answer. Try to get out for a walk or some fresh air. Do some star jumps. Get the blood pumping around your body. Put on some music and have a dance.

Try to get some VARIETY into your days. It's easy to settle into a routine of work, meals, TV, bedtime. While routine IS important (more on that below), try to build in a new activity each day. A new game to play or a new recipe to cook or a new exercise to try. Walk a different route or walk your normal route in reverse.

LONELINESS

We are all cut off from each other right now. We may be missing family members we usually see and friends we hang out with. Children are used to being with their friends all day at school.

Try to encourage children to be IN TOUCH with their friends – maybe they could do school work together while connecting online – through phone chat/ Facetime or online using something like Zoom.

Make more regular calls to family members. PHONE friends who you haven't seen for a while. Write a LETTER or a CARD instead of a text or email. You never know, you may get one back!

STRESS

Managing STRESS levels is important right now. The first thing is to recognise your stress. Have you been more MOODY or IRRITABLE than usual? Have you been shouting more? If you have, don't worry. It's understandable. You are getting used to a big change.

You need to LOOK AFTER YOURSELF to try to reduce your stress levels. Try to work out the source of your stress and what you need.

For parents who are trying to work from home and keep children occupied trying to juggle too many things can be stressful. You will need clear BOUNDARIES, STRUCTURE and ROUTINE.

It may be useful to think about COMPARTMENTALISING your time and giving your full attention to the task at that moment. So if you are helping your children, try to concentrate on that alone. If you have to work, try to arrange for someone else to be with the children so you can concentrate on your work. Trying to split yourself in too many ways in any given moment will be very STRESSFUL.

For children it may be stressful trying to keep on top of all the school work that is set. You might need help breaking it down, PRIORITISING and CONCENTRATING.

A family TIMETABLE which everyone understands and where chores and responsibilities are shared in a fair way may be helpful.

Looking after yourself also means EATING HEALTHILY and getting plenty of SLEEP, EXERCISE and time to RELAX.

Try not to worry too much about other things that are beyond your control right now. Take one day at a time, start each day afresh. And remember, you are only HUMAN. Try to do one thing at a time and do it well.

ROUTINE

We have to be disciplined to keep to a routine right now. It might feel unnecessary if we don't have to be anywhere at any particular time, but if we let the routine slip it can be very de-stabilising. Routine and structure creates a bit of NORMALITY and is REASSURING, particularly for children.

So try to keep to normal BED TIMES and get up at the same time each day. Have regular times for WORK, MEALS and EXERCISE.

Try to keep meals HEALTHY. Too much sugar makes people cranky and irritable.

Try to EXERCISE every day, whether skipping in your garden, walking in the park, bouncing on a trampoline or riding your bike. Even just doing some stretches in the garden can be invigorating. It is important to get fresh air, sunshine and movement into your day to keep yourself feeling POSITIVE and HAPPY.

SOME OTHER IDEAS...

Write a GRATITUDE JOURNAL – at the end of each day take time to think of THREE THINGS you are thankful for that day. They don't need to be huge things – maybe you noticed the birds singing or the sun shining; maybe you made someone happy or they made you happy with a simple act of kindness; maybe you waved to a friend or neighbour as they walked past your house, or tried a new recipe or a new exercise or played a game together.

Be CREATIVE - play some MUSIC, DANCE, PAINT a picture, have a WATER FIGHT, MAKE a sculpture, BAKE a cake.

Look for the POSITIVES that lockdown may bring. Have you noticed the quiet streets, the clearer sounds of birdsong, the stars shining brighter in the clear night skies? Try to notice what you have GAINED rather than what you may have LOST.

Above all, try to have FUN – try to enjoy this unexpected time together. Soon it will be a distant memory. Remind yourselves what you like about each other, and make the most of it.

Keep SAFE and WELL everyone, and I hope to see you again before too long.

Emma x