



Family Well Being

With so much uncertainty around the current COVID-19 outbreak, particularly given that the situation is rapidly changing and information about the virus is constantly developing, understandably this is causing a lot of worry and anxiety for people.

Having children and young people at home, often when people are trying to work themselves, adds another layer of stress. It is therefore important to not only consider our physical health during such challenging times, but also to pay attention to our mental health. It is normal to feel worried, stressed and anxious when we are faced with uncertain situations, but the sooner we acknowledge and learn to take care of our mental health, the healthier and better equipped we'll be to cope with the situation that we are currently facing.

We hope you find these tips useful in supporting you and your child during these exceptional circumstances. We have also included some example timetables that may help structure the day.

Looking after yourself

Taking care of our mental health and checking in on others is something that we can all do, and we need to remember that by looking after our own mental health, we'll be best placed to look after our children. Remember when they tell you on aeroplanes that you need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others? It's like that.

Time is precious, especially when looking after children. However, try to plan your days or weeks to include something from each of the '5 ways to wellbeing' (developed by NEF):

1. BE ACTIVE

Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise every day. YouTube has lots of exercise videos for kids and adults. Get children involved in planning their own 'indoor PE'. If current government advice permits, try to get outside once a day either into your garden if you have one, or in a place where there are few people. If you can't go out, open the windows for some fresh air and take some time to look at the world outside.

2. TAKE NOTICE

Take a break from the news and social media and concentrate on what's happening in the here and now within your 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 lots of good mindfulness apps to try, but if that's not for you, just getting into something you enjoy, for example, cooking, drawing, etc, and really focussing on it can be just as good.

3. CONNECT

Social connection is one of the most important ways that we can look after our mental wellbeing. Social distancing is going to make that trickier, but we're lucky enough to have technology to help us out. Think physical distancing, but social connections. Social media is great, but if you can, try to have phone calls or even video calls. Arrange to "chat" to a friend for coffee using one of the video call apps (Facetime, Skype, Houseparty, Zoom) and phone relatives more often than usual. While it can be helpful to share worries, try to find other things to talk about too.

4. GIVE

Research tells us that giving back to our community helps people to feel valuable and makes us happier. We might not be able to contribute to our community in our usual way, but many people



will still be able to find ways to give back. Lots of community groups are setting up schemes that aim to help vulnerable people at this difficult time. If you want to get involved, check out local social media for ideas. Many of us will not be in a position to offer practical support. We can still offer mutual support to friends and family by checking in with them regularly.

5. KEEP LEARNING

Learning a new skill or honing an existing one gives us a sense of purpose and achievement. While we're busy learning, we're less likely to experience anxious thoughts and worries. Social-distancing will bring new challenges, but it will give many of us the time to start a new hobby or learn about an area that we've always been interested in.

Looking after your children

For the most part, children, including teenagers, will need what they've always needed; love, attention and opportunities to learn and play. If children are home for long periods because of social-distancing or self-isolation, the following tips might be helpful:

- Try and keep to a structure and routine that suits you. Keep bedtime and morning routines close to existing ones to promote a sense of normality that children will find reassuring. Encouraging them to get up and dressed during the week will help maintain some difference between weekdays and weekends.
- Keep boundaries firm and 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.
- Make sure they get some time to burn off energy every day. Younger children will enjoy assault courses, discos etc. Older children and teens might respond better to fitness videos.
- Expect children to do some learning every day. In the longer-term, schools are likely to provide opportunities for online learning. In the short term, or as extra activities there are a wealth of helpful websites, many of which they will be able to access independently. Continuing with their learning helps promote a sense of normality and purpose as well as keeping them up to date for when they are back at school.
- Find opportunities for them to interact with their friends remotely. For tweens and teens, contact with their peers is especially important. Technology provides lots of opportunities for older children to connect, chat and game together. But be wary of giving unsupervised access to platforms that you would not normally allow your child onto; the internet still poses the same risks as in normal times.
- Balance screen time with other activities. Challenge children to learn new skills that don't involve screens, for example, tying shoe laces, juggling and baking. Older children might want to set their own goals.
- Give children opportunities to have 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 or angry. Older children and teenagers will be more able to understand the risks in too much screen time, too little sleep, inactivity, etc. They are more likely to 'buy in' to 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.



Below are some example timetables. These are just shared as a guide but may be helpful in terms of thinking about how to maintain some structure and routine throughout days spent at home. Remember to intersperse activities with breaks, and don't forget healthy snacks and drinks!

Sample timetable 1

Get ready for the day	Have a shower/wash, get dressed and eat breakfast
9am Activity 1	Online learning set by school OR a craft activity
10am Activity 2	Online learning set by school OR Hegarty Maths, Creative writing task
11am Get Active!	Go for a walk, play in the garden, do an exercise video or workout
Midday	LUNCHTIME
1pm Help in the house	Tidy your room, Hoover, wash the dishes
2pm Quiet time	Do something calm – read a book, draw/colour
3pm Activity 3	Online learning set by school OR be creative – make some music or video, design an outfit etc.
4pm Have some free time	Tech time or play board game
5pm Dinnertime	Help prep and clear up
6pm Family time	Play a game, do a jigsaw, watch TV or film, spend time together
7pm Free time	Catch up with friends via internet/phone/social media
Get ready for bed	Do something relaxing - listen to music, have a bath, read a book.



Sample Timetable 2

45 minutes	Academic learning
45 minutes	Creative activities
45 minutes	Exercise
Have lunch	
Free time	
45 minutes	Academic learning
45 minutes	Help around the house
Free time	
Have dinner	
Contact family & friends – phone, email, social media apps	
Free time	
Get ready for bed	