Friday 1st May 2020

*Dear Parents,*

*I hope that the end of this week sees our families in good form. Class teachers have been in school, on a rota, phoning families; reaching out to parents and children. Hopefully, these have been valuable and our staff able to address any concerns and give reassurance where needed. It has certainly been a joy to talk to our children.*

*Yesterday, the Prime Minister stated that next Friday he would reveal initial plans for the next phase of lockdown. We will receive this news as you do, and then, the Local Authority will provide guidelines on phasing a safe return, which we will share with you. However, it is realistic to expect the current situation will remain up to the half term break. Families are taking the guidance very seriously, and at St. Patrick’s, we have found that of all those who meet criteria to send their children to school in these times, less than a third are choosing to send children in. These families are still choosing to closely follow government guidelines and use the school only when they absolutely need to.*

MAINTAINING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is affecting daily lives, as the government and the NHS take necessary steps to manage the pandemic, reduce transmission and treat those who need medical attention. Regardless of their age, this may be a difficult time for children and young people. Some may react immediately, while others may show signs of difficulty later on.

How a child or young person reacts can vary according to their age, how they understand information and communicate, their previous experiences, and how they typically cope with stress. Adverse reactions may include thinking about their health or that of family and friends, fear, avoidance, problems sleeping, or physical symptoms such as stomach ache. During this time, it’s important that you support and take care of your family’s mental health – there are lots of things you can do, and additional support is available if you need it.

PARENTS - Looking after YOUR Mental Health first.

As well as thinking about the children or young people in your care, it is important to take care of your own mental health and wellbeing. Children and young people react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and carers deal with a situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children and young people. Parents and carers can be more supportive to others around them, especially children, when they are better prepared.

1. **CONSIDER HOW TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS:**  Think about how you can stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media instead of meeting in person – whether it’s people you normally see often or connecting with old friends.
2. **HELP AND SUPPORT OTHERS:** Think about how you could help those around you – it could make a big difference to them and can make you feel better too.
3. **TALK ABOUT YOUR WORRIES:**  Remember that this is a difficult time for everyone and sharing how you are feeling and the things you are doing to cope with family and friends can help them too. If you don’t feel able to do that, there are people you can speak to via [NHS recommended helplines](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/) or you could find support groups online to connect with.
4. **LOOK AFTER YOUR PHYSICAL WELLBEING:** Your physical health has a big impact on how you are feeling emotionally and mentally. If you are able to go outside, consider walking or gardening. If you are staying at home, you can find free easy [10 minute work outs](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-body/move-more/home-workout-videos/) from Public Health England.
5. **LOOK AFTER YOUR SLEEP:**  Try to maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep good sleep hygiene practices – like avoiding screens before bed, cutting back on caffeine and creating a restful environment. The [Every Mind Matters sleep page](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/sleep/) provides practical advice on how to improve your sleep.
6. **TRY TO MANAGE DIFFICULT FEELINGS:**  Some people may experience such intense anxiety that it becomes a problem. Try to focus on the things you can control, including where you get information from and actions to make yourself feel better prepared. The [Every Mind Matters page on anxiety](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/anxiety/) and NHS [mental wellbeing audio guides](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/moodzone-mental-wellbeing-audio-guides/) provide further information on how to manage anxiety.
7. **MANAGE YOUR MEDIA AND INFORMATION INTAKE:** 24-hour news and constant social media updates can make you more worried. It may help to only check the news at set times or limiting to a couple of checks a day.
8. **GET THE FACTS:** Find a credible source you can trust such as [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response), or the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/), and fact check information that you get from newsfeeds, social media or from other people.
9. **THINK ABOUT YOUR NEW DAILY ROUTINE:** Life is changing for us all for a while. Think about how you can adapt and create positive new routines – try to engage in useful or meaningful activities.
10. **DO THINGS YOU ENJOY:**  Focussing on your favourite hobby, learning something new or simply taking time to relax indoors should give you some relief from anxious thoughts and feelings and can boost your mood. There are lots of free tutorials and courses online and people are coming up with innovative online solutions like online pub quizzes and streamed live music concerts.
11. **SET GOALS:** Setting goals and achieving them gives a sense of control and purpose – think about things you want or need to do that you can still do at home. It could be watching a film, reading a book or learning something online.
12. **KEEP YOUR MIND ACTIVE:** Read, write, play games, do crossword puzzles, sudokus, jigsaws or drawing and painting. Find something that works for you.
13. **TAKE TIME TO RELAX AND FOCUS ON THE PRESENT:** This can help with difficult emotions, worries about the future, and can improve wellbeing. Relaxation techniques can also help some people to deal with feelings of anxiety. For useful resources see [Every Mind Matters](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/) and [NHS’ mindfulness page](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/).
14. **IF YOU CAN, ONCE A DAY, GO GREEN:** Spending time in green spaces can benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Helping children cope with stress

There are some key points you can consider about how to support your child or young person, including:

LISTEN AND ACKNOWLEDGE: Children may respond to stress in different ways. Signs may be emotional *(for example, they may be upset, distressed, anxious, angry or agitated),* behavioural *(for example, they may become more clingy or more withdrawn, or they may wet the bed), or physical (for example, they may experience stomach aches).*

Look out for any changes in their behaviour. Children may feel less anxious if they are able to express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Listen to them, acknowledge their concern and give them extra love and attention if they need it.

PROVIDE CLEAR INFORMATION ABOUT THE SITUATION: Children want to feel assured that their parents and carers can keep them safe. One of the best ways to achieve this is by talking openly about what is happening and providing honest answers to any questions they have. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe, including any actions they can take to help, such as washing their hands more often than usual. Use words and explanations that they can understand. We have put a simple guide to understanding COVID-19 on the school website. Make sure you use reliable sources of information such as [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response) or the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/) – there is a lot of misleading information from other sources that can create stress for you and your family. It will not always be possible to provide answers to all the questions that children may ask, or to address all their concerns, so focus on listening and acknowledging their feelings to help them feel supported.

BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN REACTIONS: Remember that children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how you respond to the situation is very important. It is important to manage your own emotions and remain calm, listen to and acknowledge children and young people’s concerns, speak kindly to them, and answer any questions they have honestly.

CONNECT REGULARLY: If it is necessary for you and your children to be in different locations to normal *(for example, due to staying at home in different locations or hospitalisation)* make sure you still have regular and frequent contact via the phone or video calls with them. Try to help your child understand what arrangements are being made for them and why in simple terms. Support safe ways for children and young people to maintain social interaction with their friends, for example via phone or video calls.

CREATE A NEW ROUTINE: Life is changing for all of us for a while. Routine gives children an increased feeling of safety in the context of uncertainty, so think about how to develop a new routine, especially if they are not at school:

* encourage maintaining a balance between being on and offline and discover new ideas for activities to do from home. The [Children’s Commissioner guide](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/cco-childrens-guide-to-coronavirus.pdf) signposts to some ideas to help fight boredom
* children and young people ideally need to be active for 60 minutes a day, which can be more difficult when spending longer periods of time indoors. Plan time outside if you can do so safely or see [Change4Life](https://www.nhs.uk/change4life) for ideas for indoor games and activities
* don’t forget that sleep is important for mental and physical health, so try to keep to existing bedtime routines
* it may be tempting to give children and young people treats such as sweets or chocolate but this is not good for their health, especially as they may not be as physically active as normal. See [Change4Life](https://www.nhs.uk/change4life) for ideas for healthy treats

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

How children and young people of different ages may react

All children and young people are different, but there are some common ways in which different age groups may react to a situation like the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Understanding these may help you to support your family. The common reactions to distress will fade over time for most children though could return if they see or hear reminders of what happened.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| For infants to 2-year olds | *Infants may become more easily distressed. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.* |
| For 3 to 6-year olds | *Preschool and nursery children may return to behaviours they have outgrown. For example, toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents or carers. They may also have tantrums or difficulty sleeping.* |
| For 7 to 10-year olds | *Older children may feel sad, angry, or afraid. Peers may share false information but parents or carers can correct the misinformation. Older children may focus on details of the situation and want to talk about it all the time, or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.* |
| For preteens and teenagers | *Some preteens and teenagers respond to worrying situations by acting out. This could include reckless driving, and alcohol or drug use. Others may become afraid to leave the home. They may cut back on how much time they connect with their friends. They can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their emotions may lead to increased arguing and even fighting with siblings, parents, carers or other adults. They may have concerns about how the school closures and exam cancellations will affect them.* |

FEELING LOW / ANXIOUS / ANGRY / SAD? THESE ACTIONS COULD HELP…

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| IDEAS | | TICK IF YOU GIVE IT A GO | | | |
| 1 | Drink water / squash regularly |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | Smile - at someone else or yourself! |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | Punch a pillow! |  |  |  |  |
| 4 | Hug a pillow! |  |  |  |  |
| 5 | Avoid too many sweets or treats - eat an apple! |  |  |  |  |
| 6 | Take deep breaths – in through nose and out through mouth – blow bubbles, blow windmills etc. |  |  |  |  |
| 7 | Read for pleasure - make a reading corner |  |  |  |  |
| 8 | Spend time enjoying the sunshine - open the windows |  |  |  |  |
| 9 | Doing something physically active – skipping, dancing, keepy uppies |  |  |  |  |
| 10 | Write a diary or journal of different feelings |  |  |  |  |
| 11 | Get enough sleep - everything seems better after a good rest! |  |  |  |  |
| 12 | Look for positive news around you. Take your mind off the bad news - it will get better! |  |  |  |  |
| 13 | Make a memories box / self soothe box |  |  |  |  |
| 14 | Listen to music |  |  |  |  |
| 15 | Talk to a trusted adult or loved one- be honest about your feelings |  |  |  |  |
| 16 | Take 15 daily - to rest, be calm, be quiet and still - meditate! |  |  |  |  |
| 17 | Spend virtual time with friends |  |  |  |  |
| 18 | Be kind to others in your home |  |  |  |  |
| 19 | Help someone else - not in your home |  |  |  |  |
| 20 | Stroke a pet - or a fluffy cushion |  |  |  |  |
| 21 | Squeeze a stress ball |  |  |  |  |
| 22 | Write a letter about my feelings (see sheet) |  |  |  |  |
| 23 | Get dressed every day - dress up in a comfy / favourite outfit! |  |  |  |  |
| 24 | Sort something out - your book shelves, drawers, under the bed |  |  |  |  |
| 25 | Be productive - make something |  |  |  |  |

Say: "Can we talk about something different?" This can help stop every aspect of your life being taken over by talk of coronavi

HOW TO MAKE A SELF SOOTHE BOX

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| TOUCH | Include something that you can touch; this serves as a good distraction for your hands.  Playdough, fidget cubes or spinners, and stress balls are great for this; they’re satisfying to touch, and easy to put force into and relieve some stress.  It can encourage your muscles to relax, which is what many methods to reduce anxiety involve. |
| MEMORIES | Keep a few photos of people or places that have only positive memories attached to them. This acts as a reminder that life is made up of different elements – not just the mindset that I find myself in at that specific time. It reminds us that there are people who we can turn to and also that new opportunities await.  Keep a nostalgic item that encourages a similar thought process. You could include a book written when you were younger; filled with accounts of favourite things and days out with friends and family. It's a really nice way to remind yourself how far you have come and how far you are capable of going. |
| SMELL | This can be personalised depending on what scents you prefer; a few of the typical ones include:  peppermint for grounding, and lavender or rose for relaxation and tranquillity.  You can put a few drops on your clothing, stress ball or playdough.  The scent of a candle is perfect to focus your senses on and has the ability to make you feel much more present. Room sprays or essential oils work in a similar way. |
| MUSIC | Music can have a really positive affect on emotional wellbeing. Include a small music box, cd or even a playlist for Alexa.  Pick music that is calming and has a solid beat to help you breath slowly and steadily.  Slowing your breathing to a steady pace can help you relax if you are feeling stressed. |
| WATER | Drinking water can be such a vital way of reducing symptoms of panic. Not only is it important to stay hydrated, but the regular sipping is a good way to keep a steady rhythm to your breathing.  It keeps you fresh-minded, and the coolness of water can often give you something to focus on and have a grounding effect. A water-bottle or cup in the self-soothe box acts as a gentle reminder to keep drinking. |
| CALMING TECHNIQUE CARDS | A postcard with some steady breathing techniques written on it acts as a reminder to keep calm and focused.  There are a variety of techniques available; once you find one that works particularly well for you, write it down as a card to remind you.  Diaphragmatic breathing techniques for children - blowing bubbles, windmills, resting teddy on your tummy and watch him rise and fall with deep breathes - in through nose and out through mouth - counting to 5.  The NHS website has a few breathing exercises for stress which can be used for anxious thinking and panic also. |
| POSITIVE AFFIRMATION / QUOTE CARDS | Make up a load of little cards and wrote down favourite uplifting quotes from films, books, poets and accounts. Some people like to read their positive affirmations out loud to themselves.  Keep letters and postcards that you have received from friends, family and teachers.  Being able to see your positive attributes written down in physical form from the perspective of others can be really reassuring. This is particularly helpful if you are prone to feeling strong emotions around attachment and detachment of loved ones when struggling. |
| ACTIVITY | Having an activity to complete can really help you self-soothe. Reading and colouring are the more obvious options. You can find plenty of inexpensive beautiful colouring books, pretty much anywhere nowadays - The Works, Amazon and Waterstones all have a good variety to choose from. You can also find a lot of printable colouring sheets online. Avoid books that could be potentially triggering, particularly if you are in a vulnerable mindset *(eg. Michael Morpurgo - excellent author but highly emotional reads at times!).*  Other activities can include: word searches, word games, sudoku, knitting, crocheting, collaging, games on your phone etc. |

Attached are a series of excellent sheets to support families with mental wellbeing at home.

* A Letter About How I’m Feeling
* How Many Positives?
* Young Minds Conversation Starters
* Inspirational Quotes for Colouring In

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

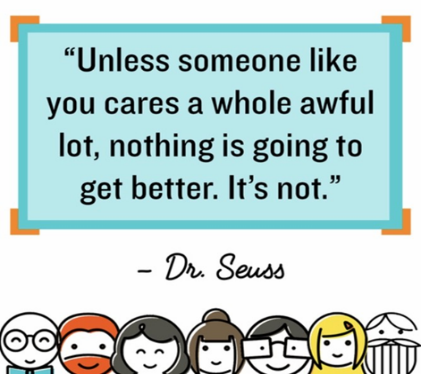
VE DAY - Friday 8th May 2020

School will be open next Friday for those few families who are already attending.

Attached is a special VE Day pack of activities which you may wish to dip into.

CHILDREN’S NEWSLETTER - Keep an eye out for special themed days and activities for the week ahead in our weekly newletter for our children.

CONGRATULATIONS…. To Luke in Reception who was a runner up in his age category for the Diocesan Easter Garden competition. Well done Luke!

**

*Have a good week. Stay safe. Stay positive!*

*R.E. McLoughlin & J. Courtney*