

In it together

Top tips from Warrington's Parenting Leads on how to help your household be pleasant and as stress less as possible during the coronavirus outbreak.

Start as you mean to go on – try getting together as a family for 10 minutes, sit down and be open and honest with what is happening bearing in mind your children's ages/stages of understanding. We are all uncertain and nothing like this generation has ever experienced. Create a sense that you are all in it together and think together about what will need to happen to keep the house calm and pleasant. This is not an opportunity to start blaming each other or nit picking. Keep the conversation calm and positive, focus on realistic solutions rather than problem. Reminding them of the positives e.g. quality time together, opportunities for the time to do fun activities at home. What will help you all get through this together? Do you need a set of house rules? E.g. we listen to one another. We find a quiet spot if we need to calm down. We take turns. We talk to each other calmly.

Empathise and model – it's really frustrating not being able to see your friends or being stuck at home. If you are feeling like this, you can bet your children are feeling it even more so. It's ok to feel frustrated, but it's how you manage that frustration that counts. If you start shouting and stomping about, your children are learning how to shout and stomp. No matter the age of your child or teenager, they are still learning how to manage difficult emotions. By empathising with them calmly, you are showing that you are there for them, you understand them and that you can help them.

For example: "I know it's really frustrating that we can't go to your friends, I'm frustrated too. But we can have lots of fun together instead because we all need to stay at home so we can stay healthy".

For older children who may have more understanding they may be feeling anxious "It seems scary right now, but I think you are doing a great job as being really brave and helpful."

There are lots on online resources to help explain coronavirus to children and young people:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/coronavirus-wash-hands-video-pepper-soap-water-virus-children-tom-fletcher-a9403946.html>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51734855>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/>

Many more options are available on apps e.g. Instagram or Pinterest

Maintain routines – whilst you will be out of your normal routine, keeping your day to a structure will help children to feel emotionally secure during an unpredictable time. Whilst it may be tempting to let all routines slip, what can start out as fun initially can cause difficulties if a few days' time. Maintaining bedtimes and bedtime routines will ensure that they sleep well and that you have more opportunity to get time to yourself once they are in bed.

Putting a structure in helps children to know what is going to happen each day and feel emotionally secure. E.g. morning routine, tv/ film time, get dressed, baking activity, lunch, go for a walk outside/ play in the garden, start preparing tea, tea time, play, bedtime routine. If your child has been mentally and physically stimulated during the day they will be able to sleep better.

It is likely that children will be provided with school work during a lock down. Allocating a set time each day to do this will support their learning and help with your routine. Get the children to help create your own! See examples of this in links –

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-c-081-visual-timetable-for-home>

Home schooling – don't get too hung up over 'home schooling' your children. Looking back on this time your children will not remember what they learnt, but what it felt like. Stressing yourself over school work will make it unpleasant for everyone. Yes take time each day to sit and help your children with any work they may receive from school, but it will not be realistic to expect to spend a full day 'learning'. Children learn from watching you, through their lived experiences and through play. Take time to build dens out of pillows, bake together, play board games and read stories together. Give them lots of praise and encouragement for what they are doing well, this will keep them motivated for longer, rather than criticise or correct what they are getting wrong. Older children and teenagers let them show you what they've been learning and generate discussions on how learning was different for you. Have sometime creating activities together that they have an interest in links –

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/you-and-your-teen/spending-time-with-your-teenager/>

https://www.jamesdysonfoundation.co.uk/resources/challenge-cards.html?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI1f7-pIWn6AIVGIfVCh0t2QZdEAAAYASAAEgJtwfD_BwE

https://b2a2aee4-a9b4-4927-94f4-4438a64148ee.filesusr.com/ugd/5e0ce4_74e75e3bdbc442e98f2b45e7139be691.pdf

Mealtimes - If you aren't normally able to sit and eat as a family, try using this opportunity to have meals together. Children will learn mealtime social skills by watching you. If meals out as usually problematic, starting eating together will give you the opportunity to help children to learn to sit at the table, use cutlery and wait for everyone to finish before getting up. Maintaining normal mealtimes will help with keeping a simple daily routine.

Try involving your children in preparing meals with you. If you have more than one child, allocate each child a day to cook with you so it's fair for all. Cooking with children can take longer, whilst you may be self-isolating as a family this is a perfect opportunity to take that time together.

<https://www.jamieoliver.com/features/tips-for-getting-cooking-with-kids/>

Self-care – taking time for yourself is going to be even trickier but even more important during a lockdown. Finding 10 minutes for yourself each morning and evening can be vital in maintaining your wellbeing as a parent.

<http://happyoksad.warrington.gov.uk/media/12202/5-ways-to-wellbeing-2-Jan-16.pdf>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/>

Modelling to children how to take time out for yourself will help them to learn this skills E.g. I'm feeling a little stressed, I'm going to give myself a 5 minute time out to calm down.

Avoiding rows – when we spend prolonged period of time together we naturally see all the negatives about someone. To keep children motivated and calm it can be really helpful to look out for the things that they have done and give praise/ high 5/ appreciation for those things, rather than criticise what they've not done. E.g. thank you so much for putting some of your toys away, that's really helpful (rather than, "finally, how many times have I asked, you've not even finished yet". This is a useful tip for all family members and partners e.g. "thanks for helping make lunch" (instead of "there was too much butter on those sandwiches, I'll just do it next time").

Keep it positive (easier said than done!) – This refers to your commands. Tell children what you want them to start doing instead, then you can praise them for doing it. Avoid 'stop' or 'don't' commands – what if I said to you "don't think of a pink elephant!" What are you thinking of? By telling children exactly what you want them to do, you are helping them know what is expected of them. E.g. put your feet on the floor please (as opposed to stop climbing). Use your quiet voice (instead of stop shouting). Top tip – this approach works with teenagers and partners as well.

Exercise – scheduling time to exercise each day, both for yourself and your children. Exercise will help to break up the, burn off energy and support your mental health during this time. Kids will love getting involved in online exercise videos with you and having a laugh whilst young children will be happy to dance, jump and copy your movements. Remember to keep your children safe and do not let them use weights (although building a pretend weight out of Lego could be a really fun activity).

<https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1> will be doing online kids PE lessons whilst the schools are closed.

Screen time – whilst it is maybe tempting for yourself to be constantly checking the news either on tv or on your phone/ tablet this could cause a couple of problems. 1) Children may be exposed to worrying things on the tv news which can cause anxiety. 2) Children will misbehave to get your attention when you are immersed online.

If you are not working from home, trying to practice being present in the room. If you are not distracted by your phone, then you won't get frustrated by little ones wanting your attention. Use this time as an opportunity to learn about the digital world and safety for you and your children.

<https://parentzone.org.uk/parents>

Working from home – try to set aside time for interaction and play throughout the day – even 10 minutes can satisfy children. Setting a timer on your phone can help you to stick to your play time with them and also helps young children to understand those boundaries. “You play whilst I do some work. As soon as the alarm on my phone rings I will come and play with you. When the alarm rings again, then I’ll do some more work until the next alarm” [and so on]. This will also add into the element of structure and routine that supports children to feel secure and learnt that what you say you mean.

And remember, we are all going to meet our colleague’s children on skype at some point over the next few weeks ...and that’s okay! Children don’t know work place etiquette and why would we want them to?

The attention rule – remember, whether it’s positive or negative, children want your attention and they want it now. By giving positive attention to positive behaviour your child is more likely to repeat that behaviour to get your attention. If they manage to get your attention for negative behaviour, then they will repeat that behaviour more. Don’t take positive behaviours for granted, notice when they are playing calmly, sharing toys, sitting well, trying food, brushing teeth, having a bath, getting dressed. Noticing those small positives can help you all feel more positive. For teenagers, getting a rise out of you for a negative behaviour is just the same. Notice when they do something well and give them a simple ‘thanks for that’. Be genuine but not over the top or sarcastic, that will just aggravate them (as it would you).

Notice you own mood – are you having a good day or a bad day? Are you over reacting to a behaviour that yesterday wouldn’t have been an issue? This can be very confusing for children and they don’t know what behaviour is expected. Be kind to yourself and be kind to your children, this is a really strange time and nothing like we normally experience. If it’s odd for us, imagine how it might feel for your children.

A special note about Teenagers - over the coming weeks your teenagers will probably express ideas and views that you don’t agree with or you think is just plain wrong. Immediately disagreeing or shutting down the conversation will only aggravate the situation and lead to an unpleasant environment. They are simply trying things out on you, things they have read or heard from others. Listen to them and respond with an interested question, let them explain and then try exploring other general viewpoints on the topic. Your goal is to show that you are interested in what they have to say and that their opinion matters, not to challenge it or make fun of it that would only put them against you and during the current situation that would not be helpful for anyone.

For example: “it’s wrong to kill animals for food!”

“wrong in what way? / do you think that’s true for everyone or just our society?”

(Taken from Triple P Program)

Practice kindness – help model kindness and community to your children. Spend time thinking with them how you can help neighbours or the wider community. You could litter pick in front of your

house if it is safe to do so or contact the local nursing home and write letters or draw pictures to the residents who will be isolated from their families. Remember, kindness starts at home.

[A Chart for Kindness - Family Links](#)

shop.familylinks.org.uk › [download](#) › [kindness-charts-1](#)

Safeguarding and Child Protection - If you feel that things are getting out of hand and your home is becoming unsafe during this difficult time then please contact emergency children's services such as the NSPCC and Warrington Children's Services.

NSPCC national helpline: 0808 800 5000

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Warrington children's services: <https://www.warrington.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families>

- Report any safeguarding concerns about a child or young person to Children's Safeguarding/Social Work Team on **01925 443322**
- Outside of office hours ring us on **01925 444400**
- If you believe a crime has been committed contact the police on **101**
- If you feel a child is at immediate risk from harm call **999**

Additional supporting information links –

<https://www.familylinks.org.uk/free-downloads-for-parents>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>

Warrington Parenting Leads deliver a range of evidence-based interventions for parents aimed at developing parental skills to best support their children and adolescents. We use both group work and one-to-one interventions whilst also providing consultation for professionals. To be referred to our service then please liaise with your school, health visitor, family support worker or social worker.

Over the coming weeks of uncertainty we hope you all stay well and healthy. We will be working remotely to provide telephone and skype support for all our referred families.

We hope you and your families keep healthy and have fun being **IN IT TOGETHER** 😊

Suzanne, Louise and Sam