

# Mental Wellbeing Tips for Families with Children Who Are All Working from Home, Social Distancing or Self-Isolating: A Guide for Parents



Mental wellbeing will be of utmost importance to help families get through periods where everyone is working from home, social distancing and/or self-isolating. This is a guide for parents with children to help them think about how best to look after everyone's wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic.

Mental wellbeing describes an ability to cope with everyday life. Our lives will look very different during this time and giving our minds the best chance to stay strong and resilient will help. Outlined are key areas to think about as you make plans for the coming weeks and months.

This guide includes practical tips and steps on how to:

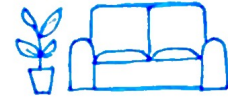
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## Please note:

This document is not an alternative to Government guidelines. Please ensure you have read the guidelines for social distancing and for households displaying symptoms of coronavirus. Stay up to date and appropriately inform your children.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

## A. Create the right environment



Research shows that the physical space around us is key in helping foster good mental state. However small your home, now is the time to use all space as well as you can. Push back the sofa, rearrange the corner full of junk and make every inch of your home a useful.

### Some dedicated spaces to consider:

These don't need to be stationary spaces but can be flexible over the course of the day. Your kitchen table may be your work space, messy space and eating space. Just make it clear what it is and when. You could create a box or basket with the items you'll need for each space. Set it up and tidy away afterwards.

- **A Quiet Space:** comfy with cushions, books, audiobooks, cuddly toys, fairylights or a homemade den?

- **A Work Space:** for everyone who needs one (this may also double as your tablet or computer space for video calls/connection to the outside world).



- **A Messy Space:** could be a table or the floor. You'll need a box of things like a plastic tablecloth, aprons, paint, glue etc. in a box and you should be able to clear it all up at the end.

- **An Active Space:** You will need space to be active inside – how can you create this? Can an unused hallway become an active space? Take down Grannie's precious china plate from the wall if it allows a place for handstands. Don't worry, you can always repaint the wall later!



- **A Sacred Space:** for reflection and perspective. A little corner with a cushion and candle is perfect. Start a prayer/thought box for the world.

### Bring the Outdoors In



Health experts are clear that engaging with nature is great for our wellbeing and can improve low mood. Cut budding blossoms from tree branches and put in vases in a few key spots around your home. Plant seeds / herbs and watch them grow. Open curtains and blinds so you get as much daylight as you can. Open windows to let in fresh air and birdsong!

## Adult Space & Time

Tidy away toys at night to create a child-free space. This can include moving toys out of your eyeline, putting away mats or anything that will distract you from having all important headspace. Work with your kids at the end of the day to put toys back in their right places so you can transition into down time as they sleep/wind down for bed.

## Tidy Up

Use baskets or empty boxes to put all your “messy space” things in, for example. Bring out when required and put it all back at the end. The ritual of tidying up at the end of one activity and the start of another is crucial. This applies to washing dishes after each meal and putting away dirty clothes at the end of the night. It’s great for our wellbeing as we feel we have completed something and the tidying up enables us to move on psychologically.



## Some Tips on Creating Spaces:

- **Rugs, Mats & Cushions:** Use rugs, mats and cushions as boundary markers i.e. a small rug can create a quiet space for 30 mins which can be rolled up afterwards or moved to a different location.
- **Trial & Error:** Move sofas and shift furniture around to see what works and don’t be afraid to move things back if it’s not working. Furniture can also be moved throughout the day to help create functional spaces. This requires energy and thought but can enable a small home to function.
- **Use Walls:** Hang things on walls – posters, wallpaper etc. to create temporary whiteboards or zones.
- **Keep It Clutter Free:** If there is too much stuff in our house or things on our walls, we become over-stimulated, bored and more tired from all the information our brains are trying to process. Keep it simple.
- **Think outside the box:** A bedroom doesn’t just have to be a bedroom – it could be a quiet space too, a reading nook or a classroom!

## B. Create Structure

Creating structure in our days is an important aspect of keeping our minds healthy. Structure will help you create a backbone for your days at home and allow your whole family to have a say on what happens when.



### Make your bed, brush your teeth!



If we're stuck at home all day, we might think lazing around in our pyjamas will be great. But a few days of this and you will begin to feel like the days are dragging and productivity and wellbeing will decrease. Make your beds in the morning, get dressed into clothes you feel good in, do your hair, brush your teeth. Pop on some lipstick if it makes you feel good. Maybe you could have dress down Fridays or fancy dress Wednesdays! You could even get your kids to bring their school bags to the homeschool classroom or go out the back door and come in the front door to indicate the start of the day!



### Hold Meetings

As a household locks down, it has to unite. Family 'meetings' are a great way of ensuring you know what everyone is thinking. You could put a big piece of paper on a table and write/draw all your best ideas about how to make this time the best it can be. Include all the key areas of life. Allow everyone to write their hopes and dreams down and find ways to make them happen.



### Create a Flexible Schedule

But keep it flexible. Don't be disappointed if things don't go to plan. Keep it fluid and be ready to change tactic when it's not working. Be kind to yourselves and go easy on your children. Allow kids to have lots of input to their schedule. You could draw out hourly slots and then get them to draw pictures or write in each of the sections. Make sure everyone has their own schedule so that it's age appropriate and helps everyone engage.





## Be Intentional with Screens & Devices



Screens will be the lifeline and the enemy in these times. They will allow you to stay connected, entertained, do your work and everything in between. But screen time will need monitored and bounded, as always. Make sure you have the right parental controls in place.

Remember, the whole world is at home online right now and you should be monitoring that what your kids are engaging in is age appropriate and safe. Use screen time as an incentive: “If we do this together, then you can watch programme X or you can play videogame Y”. Discuss what they will watch and how long for before it happens so that expectations are created and met. It is good to pepper screen time with other activities. i.e. blocking out a huge chunk of screen time at the end of the day may be less effective than staggering it throughout the day and may allow you to get on with bursts of work or chores. Work towards a film afternoon in the middle of the week and plan ahead about what snacks you’ll eat or make posters to advertise the film showing!

Think about where your TV is. If it’s front and center of every room, your kids are more likely to ask for it every 5 minutes. Push the TV to the side, rearrange the room. It’s also going to be really important to have times when you completely switch off devices and go screen-free. This is really good for our minds and helps us focus on our emotions and process our thoughts.

## Give Everyone a Job

Never had a chores rota? Now could be the time to start. With supervision, a 2-year-old can stack the bottom rack of the dishwasher with plastic plates and bowls. Kids can do laundry, water plants, Hoover and help with just about anything. Adjust your expectations, make it fun and be willing to give them a hand. Your whole household needs to pull together to help you function.



## Try New Things

Research shows that taking up new hobbies can improve wellbeing and help maintain perspective. You may not be able to learn to deep-sea dive right now, but you could take up a great new hobby or get better at something by finding online classes and tutorials. There’s so much out there and lots that’s free! Learn a new language as a whole family, learn how to cook, paint or read a book if you’ve never tried.

## C. Create Sustainable Relationships

Relationships will undoubtedly be strained in these days and we will need to work hard at listening to one another and learning to understand what everyone needs to get it right. It won't always go well, but there are things we can do to help. Having conversations which will help build sustainable relationships over days and weeks is key.



### Communicate Well



Communication has never been more important. Start a daily 'check-in' at dinner to see how you're all finding things today. Be honest as a parent too. How can your kids/partner give you the space to do what you need too? If you don't already know, learn how the other people in your household function, communicate and process emotion.

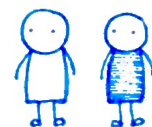
### Forgive Easily

Forgive quickly and easily. Spending a lot of time together will put extra strain on relationships in your family. This is a lot for everyone. Learn how to communicate emotion as well as thought. Try and listen before defending yourself. Give each other as much physical space as is possible when things are tense but try and resolve conflict quickly. It is even more important to let go of grudges quickly when you're all under the same roof.



### Everyone is Different

Everyone in your family is different. Some people will quite like having people to be around 24 hours a day, others will panic at the thought. Make sure you know what everyone needs. Who needs an extra half an hour quiet time in their bedroom with some books to function? Who needs an extra 15 minutes of video calls with their friend? Who needs permission to skip family tea today so they can have a soak in the bath? Work as a family to make that possible.



## Foster Relationships



Use this time to do special things. Despite the circumstances, this is a great opportunity to spend real quality time together. Could one of your children do with some quality dad time? Set up a picnic in the living room one evening and have dinner just the two of you. Does one of your children always feel misunderstood? Use this time to help them explore this more deeply. Our cracks will be exposed as we are pushed to our limits during this intense time. But we can all use it for growth. We will be fully seen and known! Talk about your mistakes as a parent, be honest about how you want to grow too.

## Find Ways to Help

Research shows that doing good does us good! Finding and fulfilling helping roles during a time like this is important. What can you do as a family? Who is lonely around you who you could connect with in a video chat and would love to see kids? Can you write messages in your windows, donate to foodbanks, encourage the world?

## D. Foster Good Mental Health

We will need to use all our best tricks to keep our minds healthy in this time. This is a psychological battle as well as a physical one. Never be afraid to ask for help!



### Create Boundaries Around Pandemic Discussion & Information

It is important to keep informed about the coronavirus pandemic, however, too much information can be harmful to our wellbeing and keeping our own worries in check is important. Understand that over-talking about the pandemic could be unhelpful for our children, and distraction is good. It is important to decide how much news and information you want to hear about the pandemic each day. With endless articles to read, putting boundaries in place will help us. Create boundaried time for your kids to talk about their worries and make sure you are acknowledging that it is a hard time. Listening to one another is important. Reassuring one another is equally important.

### Relax & Breathe

Find ways to relax. If you've never tried breathing exercises, now could be a good time to start. It's really easy to teach to your kids too. There are so many online tutorials and videos on this. But the simplest way to do this is to get comfy and to breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth. Long, slow breaths, repeating 7-20 times.

### Keep Active



Movement and getting our heart rate up are crucial for good wellbeing. Get creative with your workout routine. Climb up and down your stairs. Find exercise classes online, put on some good music and have a dance!

### Have Fun

Fun and play are significant to good mental health. This is true for adults too! Play silly games, tell jokes, find things to laugh about. When we take ourselves and life too seriously, things can get heavy. Even in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, we can find things to laugh about.



## Practice Thankfulness

Psychologists know that thankful people have lower levels of anxiety, increased blood flow and are more liked by others. Find ways to stay grateful as a family. This is something you could do at breakfast every morning. Start a thankful list and put it somewhere visible.

## Additional Help & Support



If you or a member of your household are struggling with mental health, please reach out and find help quickly. Some common mental health problems to look for during this time are anxiety, low mood, OCD and panic.

There are so many mental health services, phonline supports and counsellors and therapists who have transitioned to online work during this time. Some are offering free and reduced fee spaces to support people during this time.

### Advice for Teens on Self-Isolating

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/#dealing-with-stressful-situations-at-home>

### Listening Services

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/crisis-services/helplines-listening-services/>

### More information Wellbeing during the Coronavirus Pandemic

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse8d58e>

### Information and Therapists

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb>