

## Supporting your Child's Wellbeing

### Plan healthy meals and snacks for your child

Eating a well-balanced diet doesn't just support children's physical health, it is also associated with good wellbeing. There are also many psychological benefits of eating meals with other people as shared mealtimes provide excellent opportunities for families to socialise and relax together. You can help your child by making time to sit down together for family mealtimes. There are lots of simple, healthy recipe ideas online at [www.nhs.uk/change4life/recipes](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/recipes) - why not involve your child in helping to prepare the meal?

Small, regular snacks eaten between meals can help children to maintain good energy levels throughout the day. However, excessive snacking can ruin children's appetites for their meals and prevent them from getting adequate nutrition. If your child is demanding more frequent snacks whilst at home during lockdown you may find it helpful to set up a daily snack box. This can be filled each morning with a range of healthy treats for your child to enjoy, but when the snack box is empty it cannot be refilled!



### Remind your child to drink plenty of water

The human body is made up of about 60% water so good hydration is essential for children's health and wellbeing. Whether your child is learning from home or at school they will benefit from having regular drinks (the NHS recommends drinking 6-8 glasses of fluid a day). Water is best for hydration but other drinks such as fruit juice and squash can be enjoyed with meals.

### Encourage your child to do regular exercise

Physical activity keeps children's bodies strong and healthy. It improves children's energy levels and concentration, and causes the release of chemicals called endorphins which trigger positive feelings in the body. The NHS recommends that children should engage in 60 minutes physical activity every day, and a range of different activities each week.

You can support your child by helping them to plan enjoyable ways to be active each day. Activities could include walking a dog, riding a scooter or bicycle, trampolining, skipping with a rope, dancing, practising yoga or joining in with an aerobics video. Lots of activities can still be enjoyed inside if it is raining outdoors!



### Make sure your child gets enough sleep



Sleep is as important for children's health as eating, drinking and exercising; being well-rested gives children energy and boosts their immune systems which helps them to recover from illnesses. The NHS recommends that 3-5 year olds need between 10-13 hours' sleep, whilst 6-12 year olds need between 9-12 hours' sleep.

You can make sure your child gets plenty of sleep by establishing relaxing bedtime routines, creating a calm bedroom environment and making sure your child goes to bed on time. You can calculate the appropriate bedtime for your child by counting backwards from the time he or she usually wakes up in the morning.

The blue light emitted by screens inhibits the sleep hormone melatonin so it is recommended that children should not use electronic devices for at least an hour before they are due to go to sleep. Remove your child's devices before bedtime and plug them in to charge overnight.



### **Talk to your child about COVID-19**

Although it can be tempting to try to protect children from difficult topics, they are more likely to worry if they are kept in the dark. Without the facts they need, children may 'fill in the gaps' with their own ideas. Having clear information from trusted adults can help children to feel more in control.

Take time to talk to your child about COVID-19. Find out what they already think they know about it and use child-friendly resources and offer age-appropriate explanations to fill in any gaps in their understanding. Be led by your child as they may not be that interested in, or want to know everything at once. Reassure your child that it is normal to feel scared, sad and angry in a situation like this. Listen to your child and allow them to ask you questions. Try to answer their questions honestly and accurately, but appropriately for the age of your child so as not to cause unnecessary worry. Reassure your child that their own risk of becoming poorly is very low, but we must all work together to look after people who might become very unwell if they caught the virus. Reassure your child that health and school officials are working hard to help people to stay healthy and talk to your child about the precautions you are taking as a family to keep yourselves and others safe.



You can also help your child by limiting their exposure to adult news programmes or articles which they may find confusing or upsetting. Try to be mindful of conversations you hold with other adults in situations where your child may be able to overhear.

### **Manage your child's behaviour sensitively**



All children respond differently to changes and whilst some may be quite unphased by the recent lockdown, others will become worried or anxious. Children often do not have the necessary language to tell us about their emotions so instead show us how they are feeling through their behaviour. Children who are worried might demand extra attention through challenging behaviour, revert back to immature behaviours, cling to their parents, panic about family members leaving the house or find it difficult to concentrate on their learning tasks.

Try to be patient if your child misbehaves as responding calmly and kindly to your child will show them that you care. Of course, it is important to maintain clear rules and boundaries as these also help children to feel safe and secure. Remember to offer your child warnings if they behave in a way that you do not to accept, and plan consequences for unacceptable behaviour in advance to ensure the sanctions you impose are age-appropriate and fair.

## Help your child to keep in contact with family and friends

For children and adults alike, connecting with others and maintaining good relationships - with family, friends and the wider community - are hugely important for good mental wellbeing. With self-isolation and social-distancing measures in place, lots of children have felt the loss of human contact and have been missing family and friends they have not been able to see.



You can support your child by finding ways to help them stay connected with these people. Children may enjoy telephone or video calls, but can also play games with family members using virtual platforms and send photographs, letters or written messages to those they are unable to visit in person.

## Play with your child

Engaging in different types of play has a hugely beneficial impact on children's development, health and well-being. Through play children develop a range of social, physical and emotional skills. Role play and imaginary play provide opportunities for children to process information and problem-solve situations in their own lives, and group play encourages team work, turn taking and social communication. Play should be fun, stimulating and engaging for children.

You can help your child by giving the time, space and permission they need to enjoy play. Provide them with toys and household objects to explore and play with and facilitate opportunities to play games together as a family. These could include board games, card games, pen-and-paper games and computer games. Consider holding a weekly games night for children and adults to come together to engage in fun activities.



## Find opportunities to get outdoors with your child



Spending time outdoors is proven to have lots of benefits for children's physical health and emotional wellbeing. It is thought to help children relieve stress and anxiety, boost brain development and improve mood.

You can help your child by taking advantage of chances to get outdoors together. With Spring around the corner there are lots of free activities you can enjoy outside in your local area - why not go for a nature walk, have a scavenger hunt in your local park, try some gardening or even try bird watching? You might like to sign up to take part in the RSPB 'Big Garden Birdwatch' on 29-31<sup>st</sup> January [www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch). Whatever you plan to do outdoors, remember to follow the Government guidance and stay local.