

Children's Mental Health Week

Every year, Children's Mental Health Week takes place during February. Mental health charities and schools get involved to help teach children all about mental health and wellbeing. As we are all aware the last year has been particularly stressful and worrying for us all. As we cope with another lockdown, it's completely normal to feel anxious, overwhelmed or frustrated about the situation. It can be harder than usual at the moment to know how best to look after your child's mental health and wellbeing, as well as your own.

Here are some tips to help a child who is struggling during lockdown.

8 WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN STRUGGLING DURING LOCKDOWN

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1 Know how to spot the signs

If you notice your child is becoming withdrawn, that there's been a change in sleeping or eating habits, if they seem to lack confidence or get upset, it might be a sign they're struggling.
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2 Talk to your child

If you spot signs your child might be struggling, it's important to talk to them. Keep talking and trying to communicate in any way you can – hugging, listening to them, texting them.
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3 Create structure and routine

Try introducing a rota or loose timetable that includes fun things you're doing during the week. This can help to create a feeling of stability, which can alleviate anxiety.
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4 Give children a sense of control through information

Look online with your children to find useful information and resources that help children feel they have control.

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5 Keep children learning

Using fun and creative ways at home to learn alongside continued access to educational opportunities will support your children's development.
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6 Limit screen time and mix up activities

As most socialising moves online, it's important to have conversations on how an increase in screen time can have an impact on everyone's mental health and self-esteem.
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7 Help your child manage stress

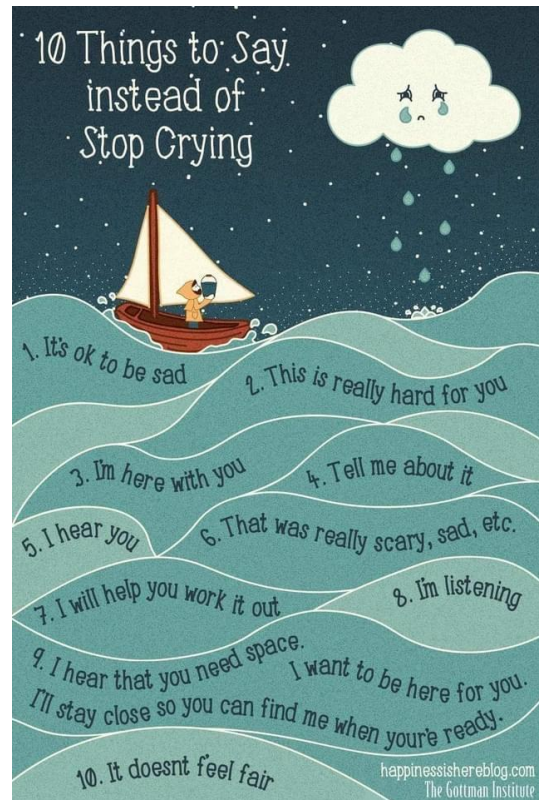
If you spot signs your child might be struggling, it's important to talk to them. Keep talking and trying to communicate in any way you can – hugging, listening to them, texting them, etc.
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8 Expressing feelings doesn't have to be face-to-face

Children might find it easier writing their thoughts down, so the whole family could do this and put them in a 'feelings box' and then talk about their good, sad or difficult feelings at the end of the day.



Children's emotions can seem big and unpredictable at times. Although these can be natural parts of a developing mind, it's easy for us to be drawn into a "fixer" role and want to make the crying stop. Here are 10 different ways to acknowledge and validate their emotions, while also giving them the words to make sense of what they are feeling.



THE EMOTIONAL CUP

Some ways that children deal with having an empty cup:

- Steal from other people's cups
- Misbehave to get your attention and show that they need a refill
- Seem to have bottomless cups, or need constant 'topping off'
- Can't sit still for refills or actively refuse them
- Bounce off the walls when they approach 'empty'
- Think they have to fight or compete for every refill

What fills a child's cup:

- Play
- Friendship
- One-on-one time
- Love and affection
- Connection
- Succeeding
- Doing what they love

What empties a child's cup:

- Stress and strain
- Rejection by peers
- Loneliness and isolation
- Yelling and punishment
- Failing
- Fatigue
- Doing what they hate

CAMIS

So much of what we do in our daily interactions can fill a child's "emotional cup"- greeting them warmly, sharing a funny story, giving them time to talk about their interests, appreciating their efforts and conveying empathy for their feelings. The emotional cup is a helpful way to explain to your child why it's important for them to identify how they're feeling, to come to you if they're running on empty, and what they can do to ensure their cup is always full.

Often we picture anxiety as worrying, overthinking, panic attacks etc.
However, anxiety can present itself in a lot of different ways.



Having the skills to cope and manage these feelings is very important.



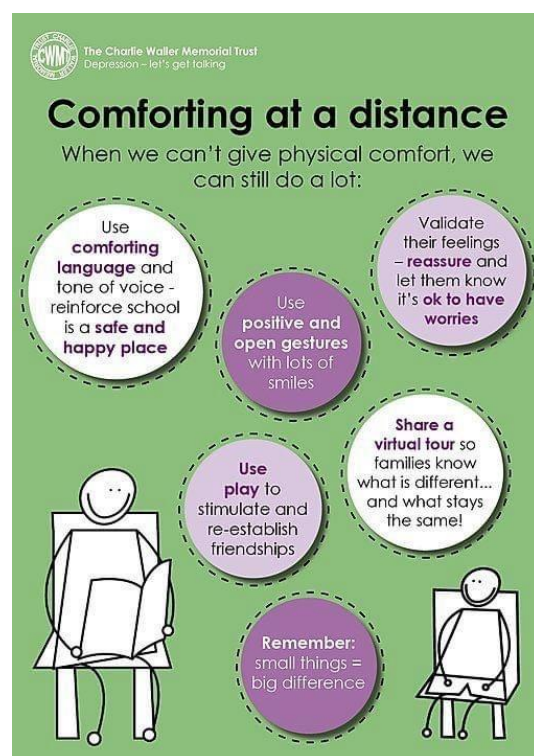
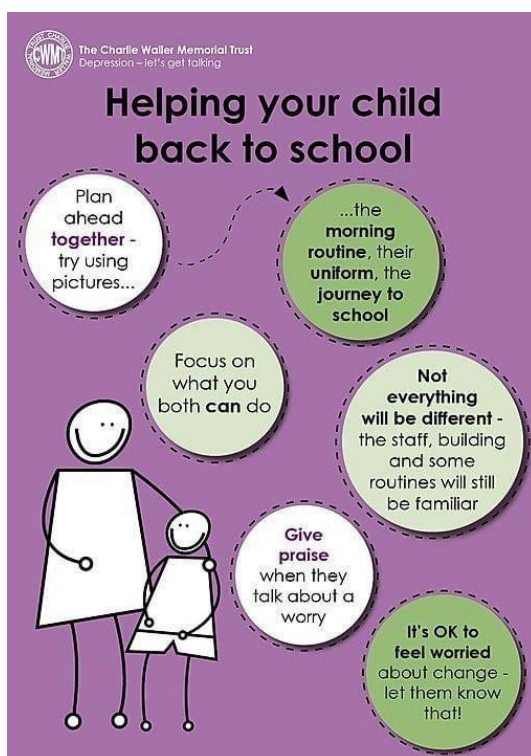
Supporting your child from home

With schools closing across the UK, most children will be at home full time. As parent/carers you will inevitably be concerned about the effect this may have on your child's development, their physical and mental health, as well as your family's wellbeing.

1. **Establish daily routine.** Routines provide reassuring structure and purpose. Include a mix of learning, creative, physical, relaxation and 'electronics' time. Help your child make a visual timetable so everyone understands the plan.
2. **Make time for physical activity.** Encourage your child outside and rediscover garden games. If you can't get outside, suggest your child makes an indoor obstacle course. There are lots of resources available on the BBC, ITV and YouTube.
3. **Work on personal care skills.** Identify self-care tasks that your child would like to do more independently, for example tying shoelaces or getting dressed.
4. **Develop life skills.** Help your child learn how to prepare their lunch, use a washing machine or change their bedsheets. Older children could complete an online First Aid course or start to learn another language.
5. **Create a suitable study space.** Ideally your child should have an appropriately sized chair and table, but if they must use adult furniture ensure they can sit with feet firmly planted and their shoulders relaxed.
6. **Teach your child to type.** Typing is a valuable skill for education, social communication and for the workplace.
7. **Rediscover creative activities** such as playdough, junk modelling, Lego and origami.
8. **Spend social time together as a family.** Play board games, watch a film or make a cake. Schedule mealtimes together and commit to them.
9. **Keep in touch.** Arrange for your child to spend time each day talking to friends or family members on the phone or on social media (with adult supervision where appropriate).
10. **Look after yourself.** Being a full-time parent/carer with household duties and work is challenging. Make sure you eat and sleep well, and include time for your own rest and leisure in your daily routine.

Returning to school

We have all experienced a lot of change over the past few months, and many children are worried about the return to school. Having a conversation about mental health and checking in with your child about how they are feeling is really important. Here are some helpful tips on helping your child back to school and offering support and comfort at a distance.



ONLINE RESOURCES

A list of websites & apps that are helpful for managing mental health

NHS Every Mind Matters

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters

This website offers a range of mental health advice as well as an interactive quiz that's designed to help you feel more in control of your emotional/mental wellbeing.

Kooth

www.kooth.com

This site contains free mental health support with their online counsellors. It is a free sign up service that has resources such as discussion boards, helpful tips/articles written by young people and an option for them to write mood journals & set positive goals.

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

A mental health charity for children & young people that has a wide variety of helpful videos, games and articles. They have a free telephone helpline (0800 1111) and message boards where young people are encouraged to share experiences and support each other in a positive way.

Papyrus

www.papyrus-uk.org

A mental health charity dedicated to preventing young suicide by providing support and resources for young people and their families. They have their "Hopeline" (Call: 0800 068 4141 / Text: 078600 39967 / Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org) for children and young people who are experiencing thoughts of suicide, or for anyone concerned for a young person that could be thinking about suicide.

Calm Harm

An app to help teenagers manage/resist the urge to self harm by providing a wide range of distraction techniques.

Combined Minds

This app contains psycho-education for parents, families & friends with practical advice on how to provide mental health support to children & young people.

Cove

A relaxing musical app that helps people try to capture their mood and express it by making music within the program and capturing it in a journal format. Note: you do not need to know how to play an instrument to use this app.

Stem4

www.stem4.org.uk

A charity that promotes positive mental health in teenagers as well as encouraging them to build resilience and manage difficult emotions via online resources.

YoungMinds

www.youngminds.org.uk

A mental health charity that gives help and advice for young people, as well as encouraging them to get involved in fundraising/campaigning to raise awareness for children & young people's mental health.

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

A charity that offers mental health support & information online for everyone. Their helpline is free and available to all ages. Call 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org 24/7.

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavementuk.org/young-people

A site which has resources for young people who are grieving, as well as providing information & advice to families/professionals on how to best support a young person who is bereaved. A helpline is also available on 0800 028840.

Clear Fear

An app to help children & teenagers manage anxiety through distraction & helpful activities.

Calm

A mindfulness app that includes various relaxing sounds to listen to as well as "sleep stories" & some guided meditations.

Headspace

A mindfulness app that has more of a "podcast feel" to it with various talks, guided meditations and helpful videos available.



Midlands Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust
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