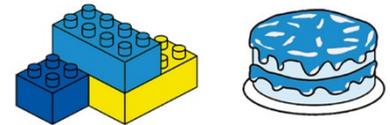


Keeping children well during self-isolation

Mental and physical health depends upon meeting emotional needs in healthy ways. This keeps stress levels low and allows our immune system to fight back and work to promote recovery from illness. Meeting children's emotional needs if we are socially isolated is challenging, and even more so if we are concerned about uncertainties. Here are some suggestions to allow parents to meet children's emotional and wellbeing needs during this time.

Security and Control

Children are picking up on adult's worries and our insecurities. There may be lots of things that are out of our control but try to limit their concerns by talking to children about the things that we CAN control, such as an activity structure for their day, what they would like to do and achieve, what they would like to wear and which friends they would like to contact. Reassure them about the things that are already known and encourage them to see positives in these situations, such as more time to spend together or do craft or Lego activities that there isn't usually time for. If your children are being cared for in an unusual setting or in an unusual way whilst you are working, talk to them about what you know about the situation and what to expect so that they feel more secure.



Attention

Whilst parents are working from home or juggling emergency shifts, children may feel close to you physically but not emotionally and require more of your attention than usual. Encourage their creativity in this time, and make time to put aside work emails, calls and concerns for short periods and connect throughout the day doing something of their choice such as playing Lego, baking or just snuggling up with a book. Make it clear the time frame that you have allocated and what they can do when this time together ends so that they are expecting to play alone after a period of playing together. Encourage positive play by praising them for setting up a game ready to play later and letting them know when your next period of play together will be.

Achievement & Meaning and Purpose & Status

Having the needs met of achievement and meaning and purpose that they may usually get from school or clubs may be difficult at this time. Allow your children to feel stretched and supported by deciding together on tasks that they can complete that may be a new challenge, such as helping with household tasks, completing a wordsearch, caring for pets or a creating a treasure hunt around the house. Praise them for their efforts and come up with a list of more things together that the child could do. Allow them to see that they are a valued part of your family team.



Community

Whilst school is postponed and usual groups are not meeting, children may lose their sense of community. Try setting up video calls with other families, painting pictures to stick on windows, or writing messages and cards for friends. Lots of

children's services are providing online videos to keep children busy, active and entertained, such as fitness, yoga, art and storytelling or encouraging online challenges. These videos could be a link between your child and another and give them a sense of community.



Movement

During this socially distanced time usual movement groups will be postponed. Encourage your children to make sure their physical needs are still met by walking the dog, going for a run, dancing or doing yoga to online videos, playing football in the garden or on the trampoline or making up their own dance/yoga/karate/gymnastics routines to show other family members or friends via video chat.



Emotional Connection

At this time, it is difficult for parents to balance work, parenting, worry, ensuring the household is ready for isolation and trying to give their children educational stimulation. Children need to feel particularly cared for and free from judgement at this time, so make a game out of your days and try not to put pressure on about homework and school packs. Break up your day by changing activities and encouraging creativity. Little and often is far better than a learning struggle, so alternate snippets of learning with fun and calming activities. Reading, either by themselves, with an adult, or both, is always a valid educational resource and one that will allow everyone to relax, be transported to another world and connect with the grownups in their family.



Privacy

For the next few weeks, the family will mostly be together in a small space. During this time, every family member has a need for privacy and time for themselves. Allow there to be periods of time throughout the day that are free from screens, and encourage daydreaming and creativity by providing blank paper and pens for children to draw, doodle or write whatever they would like to. Encourage parts of the day that are set aside for playing in separate spaces to allow rest and quiet.

Food and Drink and Sleep

At this time, it is vital that immunity is at its highest. Routine and a balanced diet will allow children to feel anchored and secure within uncertain times, so where possible stick to usual meal times and bed times. Sleep allows children to rest their brain, calm their emotions and repair their body, and will allow them to be more resilient the following day. Try and include a balanced plate or box of snacks for children to enjoy that nourish and hydrate.



Encouraging children to address these emotional needs will hopefully allow them to refocus their attention and remember this time as a period of connection, creativity and calm.