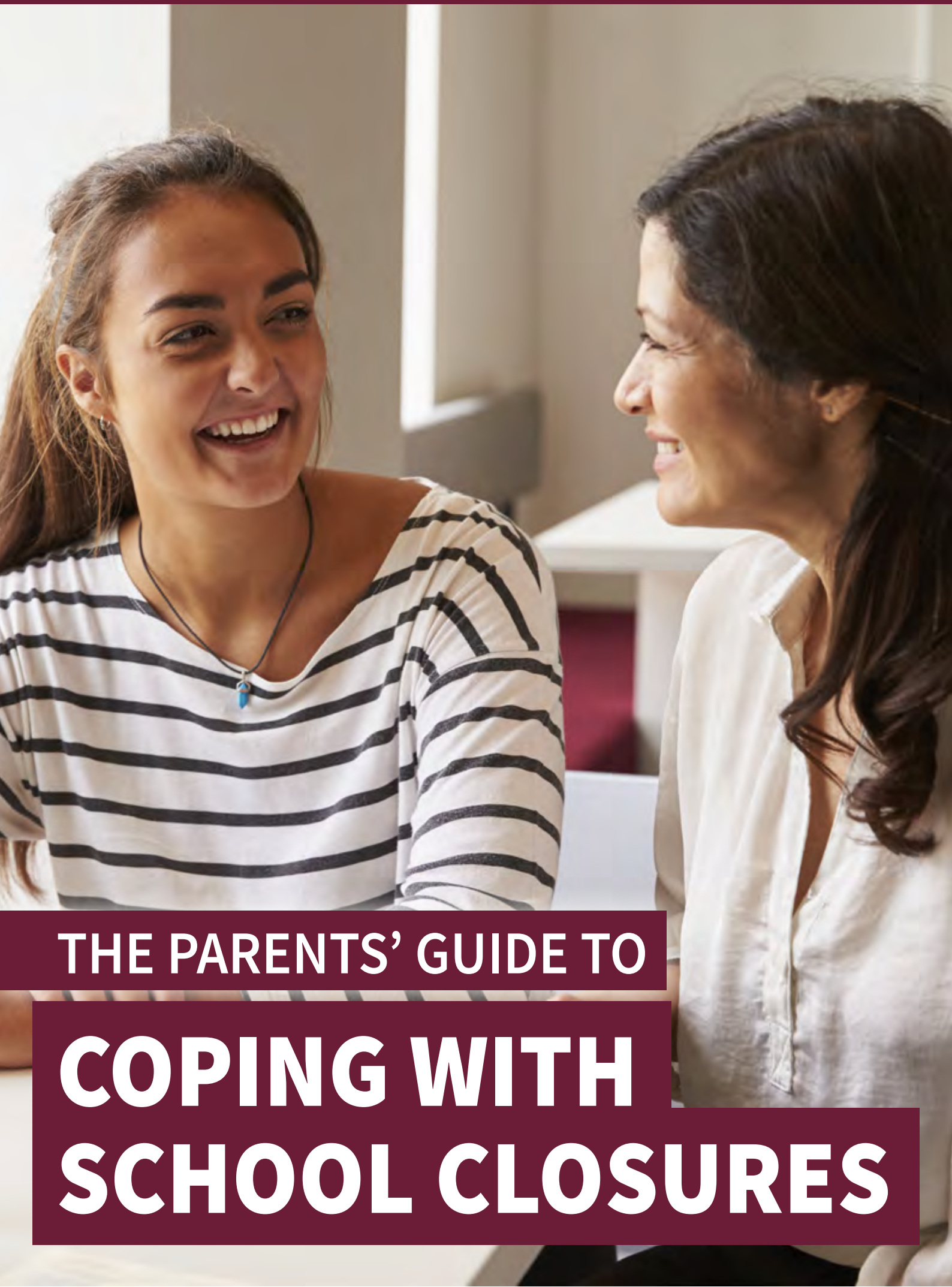
IN RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS - MARCH 2020



THE PARENTS' GUIDE TO COPING WITH SCHOOL CLOSURES

The Parents' Guide to provides parents with the information they need at GCSE and sixth form to help their **teenage children** create successful futures.

Our online guides are designed to inform, involve and guide parental support. They include the most up to date information on topics such as apprenticeships, universities and revision techniques.

This guide has been produced to support parents and schools during the coronavirus outbreak. We give practical advice, however we are not medical professionals and you should seek expert advice if needed. We make recommendations of what we believe to be reliable sources to help you find further information but these organisations have not endorsed this guide.

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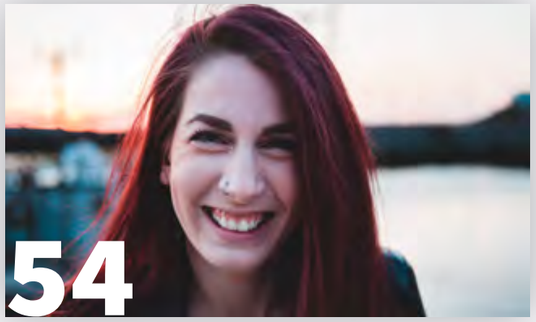
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Introduction

Concerns around the spread of coronavirus have escalated with governments worldwide taking drastic action to try to contain contamination. This has resulted in the recommendation of school closures in the UK. As a parent, first and foremost you'll want to keep your children safe, and so it is no doubt reassuring that the risk of infection will be reduced by preventing large groups of children being near one another. However, you may have concerns about what impact this will have on their schooling, especially if they were due to take examinations over the summer, and how this could affect their future.

This free guide by **The Parents' Guide to** has been specifically written to cover the basics around coronavirus, including:

- how to protect you and your family;
- what practical steps you can take to boost your children's immune system to help them stay healthy;
- how you can help them study at home and ensure they are staying on track with their work;
- how to protect their mental health; and
- what to do if your family becomes infected.

Across the country schools have been working hard at finding creative ways to facilitate schooling from home. The technology we have today makes this much easier, with the ability to conduct live lessons online, create active groups for Q&A, and to share assignments (and return marked assignments) via email rather than having to hand it in personally. That said, it is inevitable that your children won't be getting the level of attention they would get if they were at school, so how can you support them and their teachers in trying to ensure they keep on top of what they should be doing, rather than using the time at home as an unexpected holiday? We'll guide you.

Coronavirus
– the facts for you and your family

What is it?

Covid-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus. For most people, contracting coronavirus is not serious and will result in flu-like symptoms that will pass within a week or two and has no long-term harmful effects. For vulnerable people with underlying health conditions, the very young or elderly, coronavirus can result in more serious symptoms and it may be necessary to hospitalize. At present, there's no vaccine.

How does it spread?

Because it's a new virus, experts aren't certain, but it's believed coronavirus spreads like colds and flu – in droplets produced by coughs or sneezes which can land on surfaces and get picked up by other people. The germs can live on surfaces for several hours and the virus spreads when people pick up the germs and infect themselves by touching their mouth, nose or eyes and then further spread the virus by touching other surfaces and other people.

How to avoid coronavirus

1. **Wash your hands:** The best way to reduce the risk of getting coronavirus is to wash hands thoroughly and frequently with hand gel or soap. Always wash them when coming indoors from outside, before preparing food and before eating. If you can't wash your hands, use sanitizer gel if it is available or antibacterial hand wipes.
2. **Don't sneeze or cough into your hands:** Use a tissue (or your sleeve if necessary) and cover your mouth and nose.
3. **Bin used tissues immediately:** Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands as soon as you can.
4. **Minimize close contact with people:** If you are not feeling well, avoid close contact with people, try to stay at least two metres away from them and don't touch them.
5. **Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are unclean.**

Learn more:

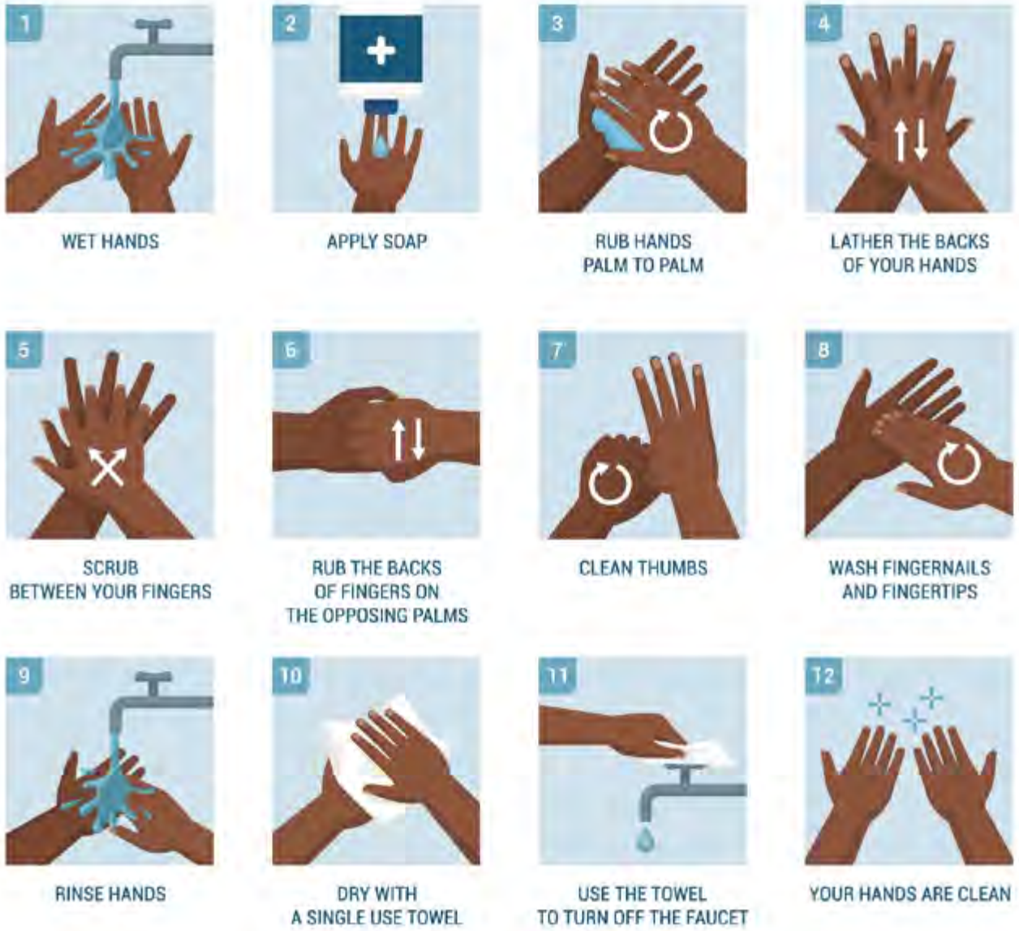
I am interactive: Click me and I'll take you to their website

NHS
Coronavirus overview

Gov UK

WHO
World Health Organisation

How to wash your hands



Application of hand sanitiser

Getting your teen to wash their hands properly

For many, washing hands means a quick rinse with a small amount of handwash or soap rubbed between the palms. This will not be effective in removing coronavirus. Hands needs to be washed for approximately 20 seconds, washing all over the hand, including front, back, around fingers and thumbs. The Government recommends singing two verses of Happy Birthday to You to get approximately the right length of washing time and has provided a poster with step by step instructions of what should be done.

It may not be easy to get your teenagers to do this, but there's a new website called ***Wash your lyrics*** which could prove useful – teens can download info graphics along with 20 seconds of their favourite song lyrics to ensure they wash their hands properly.

Are face masks helpful?

There's no evidence to indicate that masks protect people from becoming infected; in fact, frequently touch the face to adjust masks can increase the risk of infection.

NHS
Washing hands video

Wash your lyrics

Tissues

Provide your children with packets of tissues so they can safely sneeze and cough as necessary (or even offer one to someone else who is less well prepared!). Unprotected coughs and sneezes can spread the virus over comparatively long distances and will create greater risk of spreading.

Can I tell if someone has coronavirus?

Like many viruses, coronavirus has an incubation period where there are no symptoms, but the virus is replicating inside its host (the person who has got the virus). This means that you can get coronavirus and feel absolutely fine and not show any signs of being unwell. During this time, you can spread the virus to others, so it's important to take sensible precautions – both to avoid getting the virus and to avoid passing it on when you may not realise you are infected.

Be especially careful if you or your family have travelled to an area known to have an outbreak of coronavirus or if you know you have spent time with someone who is infected. If this is the case, it is recommended that you stay at home ("self-isolate"). More about that later.

Keep your distance

It's recommended that you stay at least two metres away from other people, often referred to as 'social distancing'. This can be difficult for teenagers, who tend to stand very close to one another when in groups. Try to emphasize the importance of:

- avoiding face-to-face social events;
- saying no to visitors;
- working and studying from home, where possible; and
- staying at least two metres away from others if you do need to leave the house.

Making sure your child understands

It is vitally important that you get your children to understand and comply with the government's guidelines for social distancing. This may not be easy and you may experience some pushback from your child, particularly as many young people see coronavirus as something that is less problematic for their age range compared with older people.

Try to get them to understand that although coronavirus may not impact them as severely as it may some other people, the issue is that they may spread the virus to someone else, potentially from a vulnerable group. Remember to explain to your child that you can't always know whether someone has the virus, and so any face-to-face contact with their friends could carry a risk of becoming infected and then spreading the virus to the rest of their family.

For your child, not being able to see their friends is likely to be incredibly frustrating and upsetting. This could lead to adverse behaviour or isolation from the rest of the family. Speak with your child about how they feel and use this as an opportunity to acknowledge that you understand that it's frustrating for them, and that this is a difficult time for everyone. Encourage them to explore other safe ways they might be able to interact with their friends, such as online.

BBC
Video on social distancing

What are the symptoms of coronavirus?

1. A high temperature
2. A new, continuous dry cough (coughing repeatedly)

If you feel unwell but are not experiencing either of the symptoms above, you may be ill, but are unlikely to have coronavirus.

What should I do if one of us has coronavirus?

The most important thing to do is to stay at home and try to keep as far away from others as possible. This can be difficult when living together, especially in a small space, or for parents with small children, but do your best.

Do not go out (even for a walk) and do not go to the doctor, chemist or hospital. There is no need to take a test for coronavirus if you think you have the symptoms and can stay home.

There is no specific treatment for viruses and they do not respond to antibiotics; in the majority of cases your body will be able to fight the virus on its own. You can treat symptoms, so pain killers and other remedies to alleviate sore throat, coughs and temperature are fine. Drink plenty of water. Ask family or friends to deliver anything you need (food or medicines) rather than going out yourself. Avoid contact with them; ideally they should leave items on the door for you to collect (rather than handing them over) and they shouldn't come inside your home. If possible, sleep alone.

As we begin to learn more about the virus, advice and guidance on what to do if you get ill may change. The NHS provides reliable information, which is updated regularly.

NHS
Staying at home advice

NHS
Overview

IF YOU SUSPECT ONE OF YOU HAS CORONAVIRUS, THE WHOLE FAMILY MUST STAY AT HOME FOR AT LEAST 14 DAYS

What to do if someone becomes infected?

Don't panic if someone (or all) of your family becomes infected. For most, the illness will pass in a few days. However, all the family must stay at home for at least 14 days (from the first day the first person became ill) to avoid spreading the virus outside the home.

Treat symptoms

Treat symptoms with pain relief (paracetamol is recommended rather than ibuprofen), cool showers (if they have a fever), cold and flu remedies, drink plenty of water and have lots of rest. Wash hands frequently. Change bed linen and clothes or pyjamas regularly. Your children should rest rather than trying to continue with studying while they are ill, but can return to studies when they feel better.

Keep your distance

As far as possible, keep infected people away from others within the home, although bear in mind that once symptoms show, they may have been infected for up to two weeks already. If possible, sleep alone. Do not share cutlery (vulnerable people should have their own cutlery, dried with a different tea cloth).

Ask for help

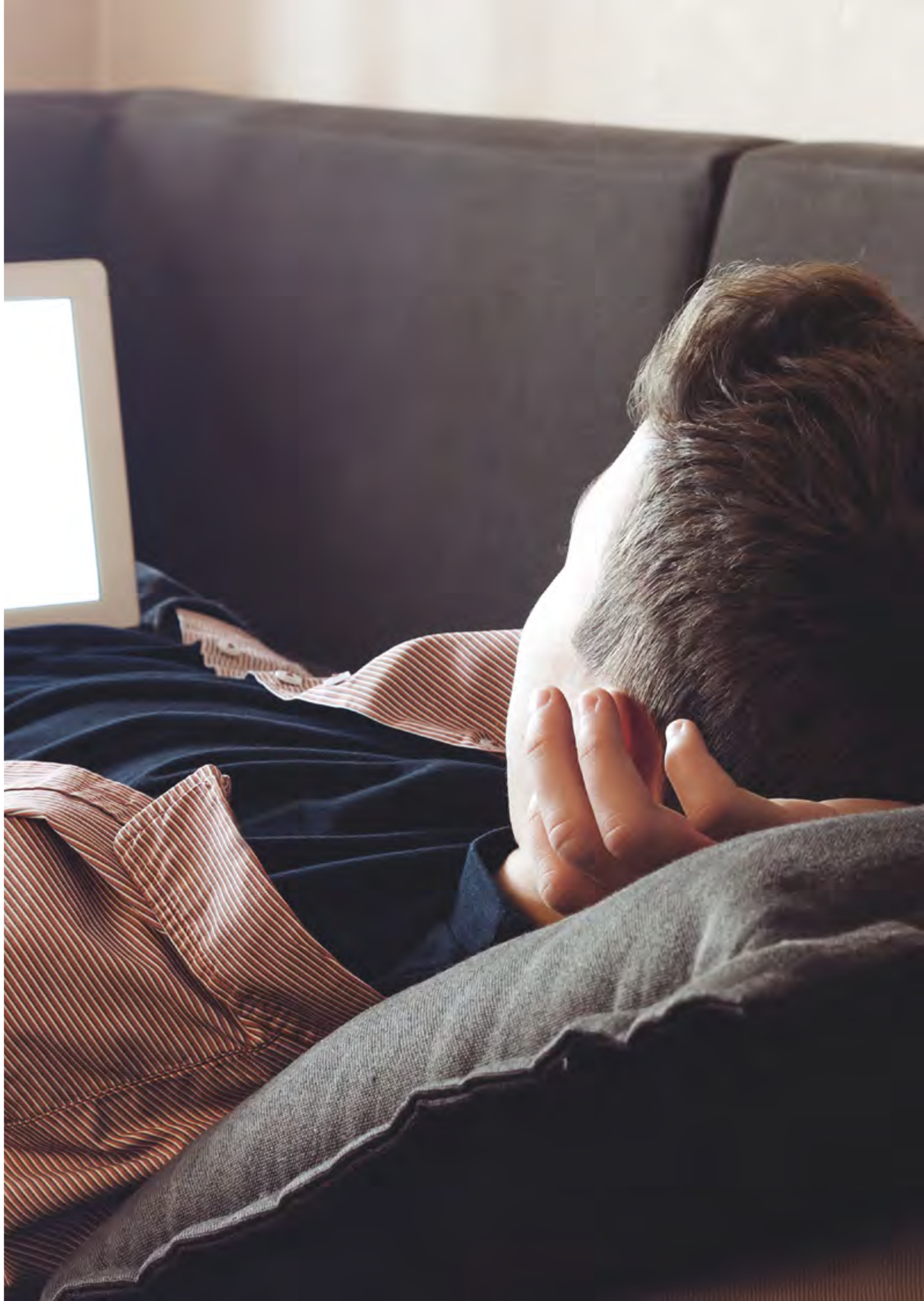
If you run out of essential supplies, ask friends or family to deliver them, leaving them outside your door rather than coming in. Do not go outside (other than in your own garden, if you have one). Do not invite visitors into your home and do not open the door to them either.

Keep clean

Keep surfaces clean, wiped down with anti-bacterial spray. Infected people should clean surfaces every time they come into contact with them (such as the toilet, bath etc) and be specially mindful about surfaces that people frequently come into contact with, such as light switches, key pads, remote controls, phones, door handles, hand rails, chairs and table tops.

Beat boredom

Think what you can do while at home, such as watching films, online learning, cooking, playing games and reading. Keep your mind healthy by practising relaxation techniques.



When should I call 111?

If you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms, your condition gets worse or you do not see improvement within seven days, get in contact with 111. First, use the online service where you will be taken step-by-step through a series of questions to assess what to do next.

Only telephone 111 if you are unable to get help online.

NHS 111
online

Keeping perspective

As the weather changes and temperatures start to warm up, many of us get colds at this time of year. Also, for some, it's the onset of hay fever season. Not all symptoms of feeling unwell will relate to coronavirus.

What can I do to help?

For most of us, family comes first. However, if you can, do check on elderly or vulnerable neighbours or friends who may not have their own family support networks to help them with shopping, dog walking or other chores if they need to stay at home to protect themselves.

Click me to go there now.

Much of this information in this chapter is sourced from The National Health Guidelines, and we recommend you keep a close eye on their website to receive the most up-to-date advice and information.

I am interactive:
Click me to go to the
NHS website

HM Government

NHS

CORONAVIRUS: PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Government and NHS are well prepared to deal with this virus.

You can help too.

Germs can live on some surfaces for hours.
To protect yourself and others:

- Always carry tissues with you and use them to catch your cough or sneeze.
- Bin the tissue, and to kill the germs, wash your hands with soap and water, or use a sanitiser gel.
- If you have arrived back from China within 14 days follow the specific advice for returning travellers.

This is the best way to slow the spread of almost any germs, including Coronavirus.

Find out more at gov.uk/coronavirus

How to boost your child's immune system

Being run-down means that our immune system is not as effective as it could be and it makes all of us more likely to pick up infections. There are some simple steps you can take to improve your child (and family's) immune system, and here are our top six tips.

1. Sleep

Sleep is an essential element for optimum health, so make sure your child is getting enough rest. Teenagers need a lot of sleep given the huge changes taking place in their bodies – somewhere between eight and ten hours each night. Tempting though it may be for them to stay up late (whether studying or binge-watching box sets into the small hours), they will be much better off settling down for an early night. This could prove tricky if they don't have a specific reason to get up in the morning with no school, so make sure you keep them in a healthy routine and not allow them to stay up late into the night and sleep in long into the morning. Work backwards! If they should get up at 7.00 am, then need to be asleep by 11.00 pm at the latest – which probably means being in bed much earlier.

Be firm about bedtime when they're in their mid-teens (or younger). At this stage you can insist they go to bed at the right time which should encourage them to stick to a similar routine when they reach their late teens when it's not so easy for you to tell them what to do. Even if they are not asleep, being in bed in a calm environment (without looking at their phones) will help to relax the body. It's a difficult rule to enforce as your teens get older, but you can certainly encourage them to do the right thing.

Mobiles, screens and sleep

Getting enough sleep can be severely impaired by ready access to a 24/7 online community via their phones. You think it's lights out, but they're on the phone under the duvet long after you've gone to bed. The simplest answer is to remove their phones overnight, but this doesn't teach them self-discipline. Do minimise the number of screens they have in the bedroom, encourage them to have at least 30 mins screen-free time before settling down to sleep and get them to use night screen settings in the evening to reduce glare (white light on bright screens prevent sleepiness).

Phones should be set to silent at bedtime so that sleep is not interrupted by regular pinging with alerts and messages – if they have one, using the phone's Do Not Disturb setting is an easy way to do this automatically.

TRY TO GIVE YOUR CHILD AT LEAST 30 MINS SCREEN-FREE TIME BEFORE BED

A bedtime routine

Creating a "bedtime" routine, such as switching the phone to silent, putting it away 30 minutes before bed, taking a bath, having a hot drink and dimming the lights can all help calm the mind and prepare it for sleep. Sticking to a similar routine every night signals to the body that it is time for bed and helps it switch off so try to get your child into the habit of doing the same things before bed and going to sleep at a similar time. Encourage them to keep this up, because it also acts as a trigger to reduce anxiety.

If your children share a room, curtaining off their sleeping area helps give them some personal space.

Avoid lie-ins

At the other end of the day, try to set a routine so they get up at a similar time each morning and, hard though it may be, try to limit lie-ins at the weekend to just an extra hour or so in bed. Long lie-ins disrupt their sleeping rhythm, making it harder for them to go to sleep at an appropriate time on Sunday night and consequently, making it harder for them to wake up on time on Monday mornings.

Be consistent

Where possible, bedtimes and get-up times should be similar from one day to the next allowing the body to synch to a regular cycle. Make plans for mornings so they have a reason to get up. As they are not going to school (either through school closures or holidays) then try and get them to stick to healthy waking and sleeping times. Don't allow them to get into bad habits by sleeping in all morning – this will be a hard habit to break once it's formed.

Sleep Council
Blog

2. Eating

Food is fuel for the body, so making sure they eat at regular intervals with plenty of healthy ingredients is vital. Try to ensure they have a healthy breakfast (even if it is only cereal), a good lunch and a nutritious supper in the evening. Where you can, prepare fresh food and give them a "rainbow diet", including all the colours of the rainbow throughout the week; this naturally ensures they are getting the right balance of vitamins and minerals.

A balanced diet

As well as their "five a day" (about a third of the overall diet), everyone should have some starchy carbohydrate (another third), and the remaining third split between protein and milk/dairy with a small amount of fat. Ensure vegetarians and vegans are getting enough protein with plenty of protein rich vegetables (such as peas, sprouts, sweet corn, asparagus, broccoli and avocado) as well as nuts, pulses and beans.

Good food choices to maximise concentration include green leafy vegetables, herbs, oily fish and pulses so try to include these as a regular part of their diet – it will be good for the whole family too! Fresh food is a better alternative to pre-prepared foods and will help you avoid panic buying large quantities of long-life items that are packed with salt and preservatives.

Eating regularly

It's important that teenagers eat at regular intervals to avoid peaks and dips in energy levels. Breakfast, lunch and dinner should be punctuated with healthy snacks. Be careful at home that they are sticking to regular mealtimes and not just snacking continuously throughout the day. If possible, sit down for a family meal together at the end of each day (mobile and tablet free!). Not only is this a fantastic lifestyle habit for them to take through to adulthood, it will also provide a break from being online and a chance to chat and share one another's experiences that day.

Snacking

The temptation to eat sugary, highly salted, unhealthy snacks to keep energy levels up is not only bad for overall health but can negatively impair their performance and ability to concentrate. Help them make the right choices when they are in a hurry by providing them with healthy alternatives, such as fruit, nuts, yogurts, smoothies and healthy snack bars. If chocolate is a must, swap milk chocolate for dark chocolate. This doesn't mean they can't have an occasional treat, but it's better to avoid eating high sugar and salty foods too often. The foods you have available in your house, and what you eat, will influence your child's choices, so make sure you have the right options at home.

As your teenagers are growing up and getting more independent, they will be preparing food for themselves and it's not possible for you to watch what they are eating every meal time. Remember, they are going to eat what you have available in the house, so if your fridge, freezer and cupboards are full of good options, that's what they'll reach for when they're hungry.

Fast food, sweets, crisps and other treats are absolutely fine, so long as they are a small part of an overall diet and not the staple foods.

KEEP THE HOUSE STOCKED WITH PLENTY OF HEALTHY SNACKS

Cook together

Whilst it may not be possible every night, it's great if you can include some home-cooked meals (from scratch) regularly throughout the week. Not only is this much healthier and cheaper than buying ready-meals and takeaways, it's one of the best lifestyle habits to teach your child which they'll benefit from throughout their adult life.

Cooking together provides a very good opportunity to spend time together and bond. It's a non-pressurized space for them to talk to you about things that may be troubling them without making it the central focus – you can catch up on good news too. It gives you a chance to show them how to cook well-balanced food and gives them life skills to take when they leave home (whether that's to go to work or go on to further education). It also means that, with enough practise, they'll be able to create a family dinner, so the pressure isn't all on you. As well as learning (or improving) a new skill, lots of us find cooking fun, and it's lovely to share home-cooked dishes, so it's a good way to pass time if spending a lot of time at home.

Healthy snacks shopping list:

- Mixed nuts
- Raisins
- Yoghurt
- Fruit
- Dried fruit
- Popcorn
- Rice cakes
- Flapjacks
- Dark chocolate
- Carrot sticks
- Cottage cheese
- Kale chips
- Hummus
- Eggs
- Smoothies
- Olives
- Peanut butter
- Avocado
- Tuna

BBC Good Food	**Jamie Oliver** Recipes	**NHS** Eatwell guide	**Tesco** Budget recipes

COOKING TOGETHER IS A GREAT WAY TO PASS TIME WHILST STAYING INDOORS

3. Hydration

The teenage body is made up of around 60% water. Not drinking enough water reduces productivity, both mentally and physically, and symptoms can include tiredness, confusion, reduced energy levels and the temptation to snack when not actually hungry (thirst is often mistaken for hunger).

Have water on hand at all times

The best way to make sure your child is drinking enough is to ensure they have water on hand at all times – at their desk, in bottles in their bag when on the go, and served alongside food. Plain water is ideal, but to add interest, use natural ingredients to give flavour – such as cucumber, lemon, lime, orange, tangerine, mint or ginger.

Other drinks

Natural fruit juices are great, but can be high in natural sugar, so why not dilute them? Herbal teas or honey with a dash of lemon offer hot, caffeine free alternatives. Limit your child's fizzy drink intake – whether calorie controlled or not, including energy drinks. They are all unhealthy if drunk in large quantities.

Eight glasses a day

Health experts recommend drinking at least two litres of water a day. This equates to roughly eight 250ml glasses.

Alcohol

Alcohol can damage the immune system, reducing the body's ability to protect itself against infection or fight off infection if compromised. Try to encourage your teen to stay alcohol free. If they must drink, an occasional beer or glass of wine with food is fine, with the emphasis on occasional and just one.

NHS
Live Well

British Nutrition Foundation

Caffeine intake

Watch their caffeine intake

Caffeine is present in coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate so keep an eye on how much of these your child consumes. On average, adults shouldn't consume more than 400mg of caffeine a day and adolescents should have much less.

Energy shots are often very high in caffeine and a firm favourite with teens. Drinks with high caffeine (more than 150mg per litre) need to show this on the label, although it is not always clear – and it doesn't apply to drinks bought in coffee shops. Many energy drinks don't necessarily have huge percentages of caffeine, but they are served in large volumes (half litre cans/bottles) so the amount of caffeine your child is drinking is a lot, whereas a small glass of the same product would be fine.

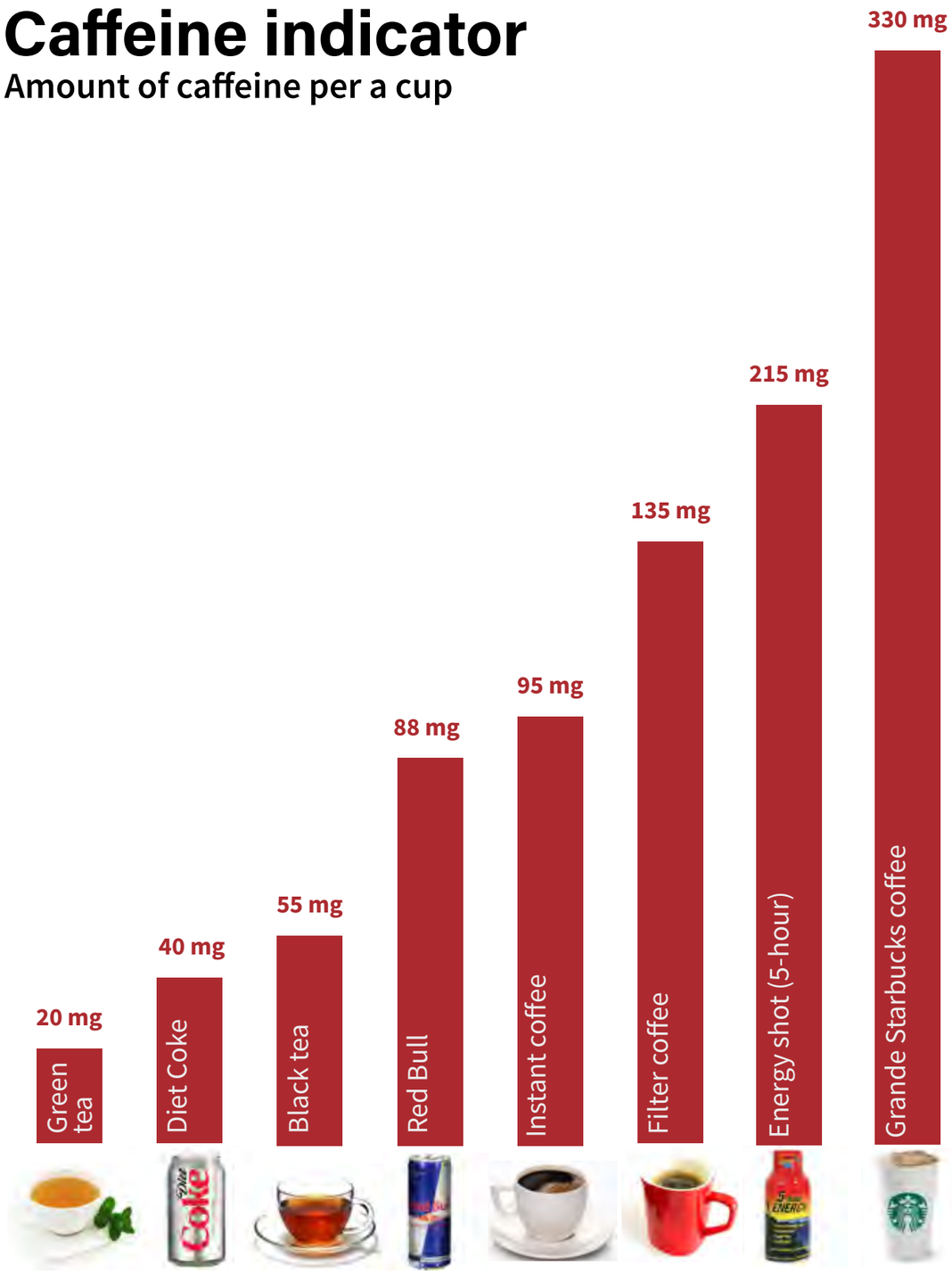
Lots of products high in caffeine are available in health food shops which can give the impression that they're good for wellbeing but, like many things, can be harmful if taken in large quantities.

Effects of caffeine

Caffeine affects us in different ways, and different people are more sensitive to it than others. Too much caffeine can result in loss of sleep, loss of energy, low mood and low concentration – the opposite of what's needed to study well. Caffeine is also long lasting, so drinking caffeine-high drinks (or eating high caffeine foods) in the afternoon can still impact on your child's ability to sleep that night. If possible, get them to avoid it completely from lunchtime as a year-round rule.

Caffeine indicator

Amount of caffeine per a cup



4. Being active

Being active is a key component in healthy living – both for mental and physical health. If you can arrange some outdoor activities with your child this will not only give you some quality time together, it will ensure they are getting out in nature, taking a break from being online and getting some exercise. Active hobbies release "happy" hormones that are fantastic for regulating mood, promoting self-confidence and reducing stress.

This is especially important if they are home schooling. Schools are very mindful about ensuring a balance of physical activities mixed in with academic studies and, particularly if your child is not inclined to be active, being at home could prove an excuse for stopping all exercise. Try not to let this happen, even if they are just going out for a walk. Of course, lots of group activities may be suspended (park runs, swimming, team sports etc) so there may be limitations on what they can do, but try to ensure they are not spending all day, every day sitting indoors and not getting outside.

Of course, this does not apply if they suspect they have coronavirus. In that case, they absolutely cannot go out (not even for a walk) but, if you have a garden, they can go outside (although not with other family members).

Darebee Workout database	**Make your body work**	**YOUTUBE** channels e.g. The Body Coach	**FIIT** Free and paid online classes

5. Don't stress

We've got a chapter dedicated to staying resilient and managing stress later in this guide because it's so important to health and wellbeing, but it's worth a mention here too. The rapid and far-reaching developments of coronavirus have resulted in sudden, dramatic life-style changes for most people and this can cause anxiety for adults and children alike.

Adjusting to change

Lots of things we have previously taken for granted have changed, including our usual routines: most of us are now schooling or working from home; we have been advised to avoid using public transport; cafes and restaurants are closed; and most large gatherings (sports, festivals and concerts) have been cancelled. Walking on, or driving through, previously busy but currently deserted streets feels strange.

So the first thing to do is make sure you know the facts so you can provide reassurance. Talk to your children and explain what's happening. For most people, coronavirus will result in a short-term temporary illness from which they will fully recover; however, it is very contagious which is why strict measures have been put in place to reduce the risk of people passing it on to one another, especially those in vulnerable groups.

Being online

Online resources are great for staying up-to-date and getting the latest information, but they are also a magnet for alarmist stories and scaremongering, especially amongst social media where articles and opinions are widely shared without first checking for accuracy. Check what your children are reading online and enforce regular breaks so they are not barraging themselves with information (or possibly misinformation) through every waking minute.

Take care of their physical health by making sure they eat well, get plenty of sleep and stay active. Also, adopt practises to improve their mental health and reduce feelings of panic, such as deep breathing, meditating and spending time in a soothing environment. We've got lots more tips on relaxation techniques in our *chapter about protecting your child's mental health.*

Get talking

Importantly, stay connected. We may not be able to attend social gatherings and get together, but we can stay in touch with those we love using social media, messaging and telephone calls. It's very important to do this, as isolation and the possible over-thinking without distraction, is very poor for mental wellbeing.

6. Good hygiene

The message about properly washing your hands can't be missed with the coronavirus and it's an important thing to do in maintaining overall good health, so be sure they wash their hand whenever they come in from outside and always before preparing or eating food (*see page 7 for more info*).

In addition, make sure your children are following these basic steps:

1. taking a daily shower;
2. washing their hair with shampoo (at least weekly);
3. cleaning their teeth daily for two minutes, at least in the morning and before bed, but more frequently if possible – and flossing regularly; and
4. wearing clean clothes.

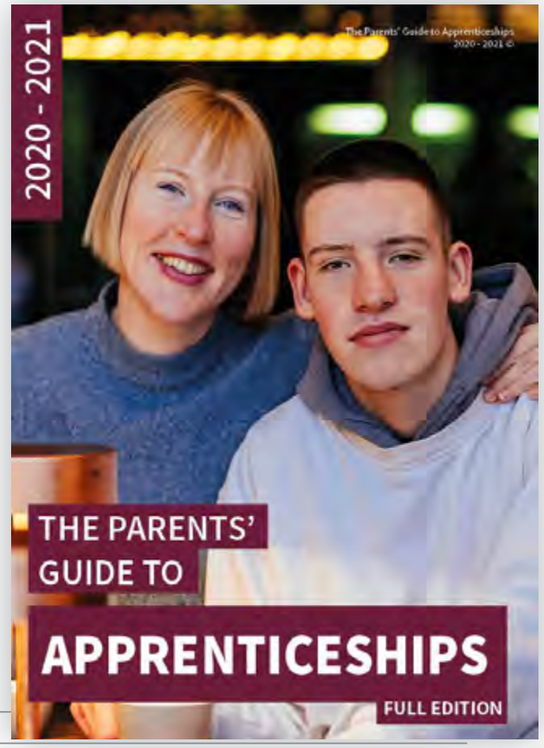
Make sure towels and bed linen are changed regularly so they are always fresh and clean. If one of your family gets coronavirus (or other infection), do not allow them to share towels. Where possible, dry washing outside in the sunshine, as this is a better way to kill bacteria than drying them in the home or tumble dryer.

Join us

Would you like more tips on how to help your teenage children make the best choices for their futures?

Yes please

You may also be interested in:



Click me to sample some pages

WWW.THEPARENTSGUIDETO.CO.UK

Scroll on for next chapter

Help your child study at home

Routine is important in creating a sense of certainty, and most people feel uncomfortable if their routines are upset. Recent events have disrupted many regular routines, so do what you can to reinstate a sense of certainty by establishing clear patterns for your new working environment. This is particularly important now that children can no longer attend school and have no clear information about when their schools will re-open. In so far as you can, try to help them keep a routine similar to what they would have at school: including study times, breaks (including rest and activity) and regular meal times.

If your child was due to take exams this summer, there's a risk they will lack motivation to study now that exams have been cancelled. However, it's still important that they do as much work as they can whilst they are at home. Schools will have set assignments to help them stay on track (and these may form part of a non-exam assessment) so it's vital they keep focused if they can. Here's some suggestions of how you can help.

Study timetable

Your child's school will have provided them with a new timetable to help them cover their course-work whilst studying from home. This may include live online lessons and dedicated time periods for online chat with specific subject teachers. However, they will have much more unsupervised study time than usual and it's important they make the most of it. School will have suggested what they should do and set assessments, but some children are better than others at following instructions and not getting distracted.

Where you can, keep an eye on them to check they are staying on track and not spending the majority of the day chatting on social media, watching TV or surfing the internet. This is not only important for their studies, but also for their mental health – bombardment of fast-changing news headlines could become overwhelming. We'll give some tips on how you can help your child study later in this section.

Teentips

Gov.UK
Guidance for key workers

If you are a key worker, things are likely to be different for you and your children. Read the latest guidance from the government.
Thank you for everything you are doing to help us all get through this crisis.

Home timetable

Try to set breakfast, dinner, family time, family activities at similar times to create stability and familiarity. This enables some together time, and an opportunity to talk about thoughts or concerns, but also enables "alone" time throughout the day. This is very important if you are not used to being together as a family for extended periods and suddenly find yourselves all together at home, almost all the time. Everyone needs time out, so try to include this too. As far as you can, don't encourage your teen to take mealtimes in their room or in front of the television – make meal times an occasion. The exception to this is vulnerable people if someone within the home is infected and they cannot move out elsewhere.

Finding the right space

Hopefully they will already have an appropriate place to study, but if it's a shared space and there are lots of you working / studying at home, help them find a calm space to study. Things to consider are noise levels, lighting, ability to store their papers tidily, and not being disturbed by other family members (especially if sharing a bedroom and lots of the family are forced to stay at home). People have different needs, for some, background music is helpful to studying, for others it's a distraction so try to have zones in the house for noise and zones for quiet. Earbuds are great if two children are sharing the same space and one wants to listen to music and the other doesn't. Bear in mind visual distractions too. Don't have televisions playing in every room all day. Different locations can help some children, so rather than always working in their bedroom, they might like to use the dining room, or living area from time to time. Give your child space to find out what works best for them.

Shared laptops

Not everyone has their own laptop or tablet, so you may need to introduce a sharing rota within the home. Schools will likely introduce some live lessons at specific times of the day when teachers are available for online chat, so it would be important for your children to be able to access these live resources if possible. However, when doing their own assignments there can be greater flexibility about times of use, and many resources can be read on phones. Introduce a family timetable for laptop sharing and place it somewhere where everyone can see it (for example the fridge door) so the rules are clear. Make sure the laptop/pc (especially keyboard) is wiped down between users.

Improve time management

Creating regular activities at regular times of the day will help your child take breaks from studying as well as improve their time-management skills by having to organise study around these times. It will give them structure and routine. This is always important, but especially when there is so much uncertainty in the news.

Bedroom

A calm environment can encourage sleep, so make sure their room is a comfortable temperature; their linen is fresh, clean and cosy; they have blackout blinds/curtains to reduce light in summertime (or eyeshades if that's not possible) and that it is quiet. Of course, you can't be responsible for whether or not they keep their room tidy (although you can try to encourage it) but it is proven that a calm, uncluttered environment helps relaxation. If they have their own room, try to allow them to keep this as personal space, avoid going into their rooms to chat or catch up, save that for when the family is in shared spaces.

Taking a break

It's vital for effective study and mental wellbeing that your child takes regular breaks (both long and short) – without feeling guilty!

Short breaks

When helping them create a home-schooling timetable around the structure as set out by their school, ensure they factor in five or ten minute breaks within 30 or 60 minute study sessions. Short bursts of studying produce much better results than long stretches. Even if they have to study all day or all evening, they should not do more than an hour at a time without having a short rest.

Long breaks

It's important for them to take time out and do things they enjoy. There are currently restrictions (in some places greater than others), so some of their favourites ways to wind down are probably off limits (seeing their friends, attending a festival, going to the cinema, watching sporting events) but there are still other options, such as watching a film at home, catching up with friends (even if only by social media or the phone), going out for a walk, playing online games, listening to music, watching TV. Try to have some fun times as a family too – playing games together might inject some much needed levity and laughter at home. Doing something enjoyable gives the brain a chance to switch off, refocus and assimilate information, it's an important way to find an appropriate work-play balance to ensure a productive and happy life in the long term. Try and help them ensure their breaks include a variety of different activities so that they are not always doing the same thing during breaks.

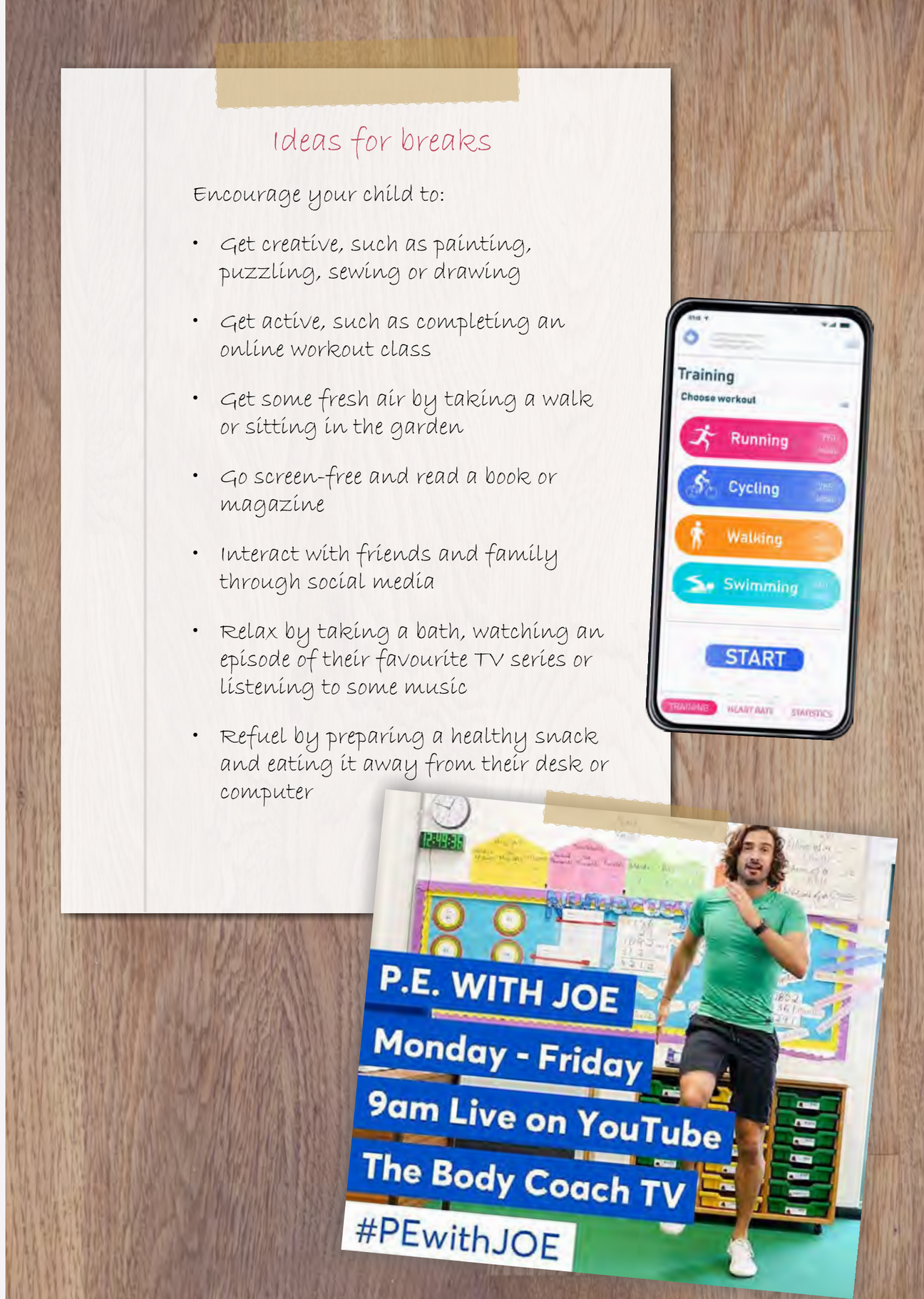
Taking a day off

From time to time, we all need to take a break. The events of the past few weeks have been very stressful. When things get tough, it can sometimes be helpful to step away from the problem and revisit it with a calm mind and renewed outlook rather than struggle on. If your child needs some time to adjust to how things have changed, give them a little space. You will know whether they need a rest or are making an excuse to do nothing. That said, they should maintain a typical school working week during term time, even if they are not physically able to attend school as soon as they can.

Gov.UK
Find your local park

The Body Coach
TV

Taskmaster
Daily challenge
Facebook



Helping your child with home schooling

Learning types

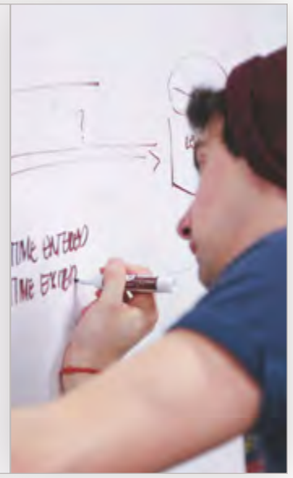
Don't worry that you are not an expert in their school subjects, there's still lots you can do to help your child continue their schooling at home.

Every child works differently and what works for one child may not work at all for another. However, in broad terms, there are four different learning styles and, whilst using a combination of these styles can be effective (and indeed, some styles overlap), some children (and as adults later) will exhibit a preference for one style over another – it just seems to make learning easier for them. If you haven't already, identify what learning style works best for your child and help them construct revision around this learning style to make study sessions more productive and less boring. If they have a preference for digesting information in a specific way, it will be more interesting and stimulating for them.

Visual Learners

Visual learners prefer colour and pictures, so they should work around these themes:

1. make their notes colourful, with different colour pens, paper, highlighters and post-its;
2. use images and pictures instead of words;
3. use maps and charts where possible;
4. adapt text to flow charts;
5. express change and ideas in diagrams;
6. use doodles when note taking.



Reading writing

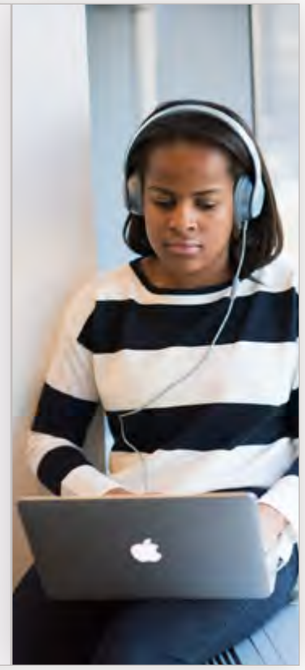
For some, the traditional method of reading and writing still works best, so they should work around these themes:

1. Take lots of notes (both during lessons and during study);
2. Re-write notes in different styles;
3. Do lots of practice papers;
4. Use post-it notes to emphasis key points;
5. Use highlighters to make important items stand out;
6. Read books, online articles, magazines and their own notes.

Auditory

Auditory learners prefer to listen and speak, so they should work around these themes:

1. listening to pod casts and audio books where the information they should learn is spoken aloud;
2. joining study groups so they can listen and talk over ideas with others;
3. listen to speakers/teachers/lecturers whether in live sessions or online;
4. engage with you by talking, discussing and explaining what they know;
5. using sound and music to help them learn;
6. teaching (or pretending to teach) others to demonstrate knowledge;
7. speaking answers to past papers aloud.



Tactile Learners

For others, their preferred method of learning is through action or movement. This is good for practical areas, such as experiments in science and drama, but can require a little extra imagination to help them translate theory to practice.

1. Where possible, do the activity themselves (cooking, carpentry, design);
2. Use real life examples to help them understand abstract concepts;
3. Take frequent breaks to enable them to be active;
4. Use art and drawing to help memorize ideas and themes;
5. Study in groups and act out the material;
6. Make study sheets and flash cards to help memorize information;
7. Watching videos of people doing the activity (when they can't do it themselves).

Ways to help

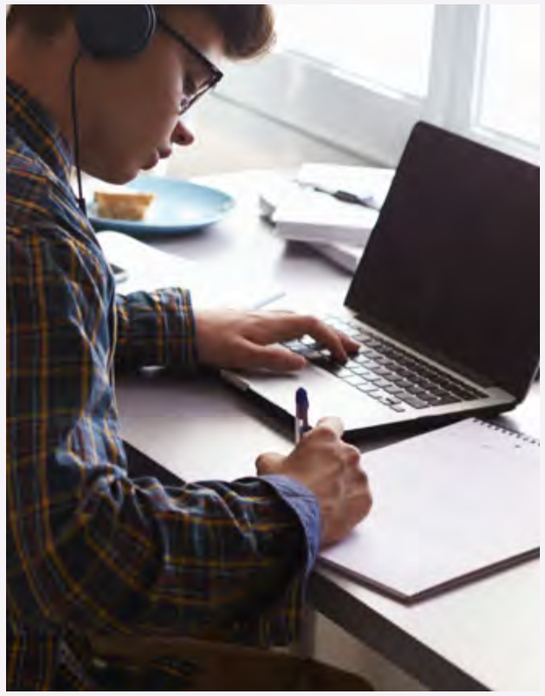
Practise and repetition

If you have the time and it's something they'd find helpful, give them the chance to recite, repeat and practise what they've learnt with you. Even if you don't know the answers, the opportunity to say out loud what's in their mind can help clarify whether they have grasped the concepts or whether they are still hazy. This style of revising might not appeal to those who prefer reading/ writing, but it's especially useful to aural and tactile learners.

Act as the student

Encourage your child to speak through their subject knowledge. By taking on the role of the student, ask your child to explain a topic from one of their subjects. Listen carefully and don't be afraid to ask them a question if you do not fully understand what they are saying. Studies have shown that one of the best ways to revise is by teaching others.

Other ways you might be able to help is using quizzes, mind maps, white boards, multiple choice or sound bites to see what they've learned.



Timed exams / questions

Even if your child is not taking examinations this summer, they will still benefit from completing a number of past exam questions. Help them prepare by creating an environment that resembles the conditions they would experience in the exam hall - minimise external sounds, setup a clear desk and if you can, locate a single clock to encourage your child to time manage under test conditions. Once the allocated time has come to an end, get your child to stop writing as they may be tempted to continue. If they did not finish get them to reflect on the reasons why. Do they need to do more revision, improve their time management or work on their exam technique?

As well as our recommendations, don't forget to check in with your child's school to get resources they recommend too. They've done lots of work to get the most relevant links for their school subjects.

Amazing Educational Resources

BBC Bitesize

Revision World

Memory

Research shows the amount of information we remember depends on how we receive it. Most people only remember 10% of what they have read for the first time, whereas they will remember three times more if they have watched a demonstration. It's a good idea for your child to use lots of different ways of reviewing the same information which will help them remember more over longer periods of time. Trying different ways will also help them discover which work best for them. Use this in combination with their preferred learning style (page 46) for maximum effect.

Motivating them to study

Don't be tempted to use bribery (such as financial incentives or exemption from chores) to get them to study. They are doing this for them, not you! Whether they are taking examinations or not, they will likely have to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways. Encourage them to be motivated by helping them visualise how their revision and work are connected to their goals and ambitions and rewarding them when they work hard with treats such as making their favourite dinner or watching a film together.

Examinations

There will be no examinations in May or June this year. The Government advises that students will still get their qualifications, both in academic and vocational settings, without them being disadvantaged. Their qualification grades will be decided by a combination of their predicted grades, mock examination results, coursework and class assignments and teacher input. This is why the work your child does between now and the end of the academic year is important. *To find out more, click here.*

If your child was due to take examinations this summer, such uncertainty is likely to make them anxious so read on to find guidance on protecting your child's mental health.

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GOV UK

Guidance on cancellation of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020

You may also be interested in:

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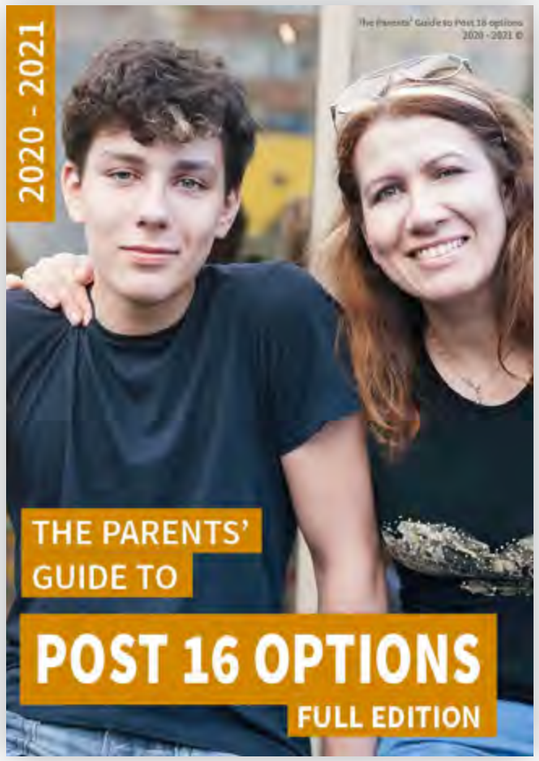

WWW.THEPARENTSGUIDETO.CO.UK

Scroll on for next chapter

Protect your child's mental health

We're already mentioned it, but we'll repeat it here in case you missed it earlier. Staying resilient and managing stress is very important to health and wellbeing and there are proven techniques you can use to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety.

It's perfectly natural for your child to be worried during these uncertain times, and that's likely to be increased if they were meant to be taking exams over the summer – you are probably worried too! In small doses, anxiety can be a good thing: helping your child to focus, get motivated and even recall facts they were unaware they'd learnt.

Prolonged periods or bouts of intense anxiety have a negative impact, but there are lots of ways you can help them manage this anxiety and use routines to help keep them calm. If you haven't introduced them to some of these techniques already, we've included some suggestions over the next few pages. If you and your family find yourself spending more time at home and aren't already using some of these ideas for relaxation, it's a great time to learn and will put you on positive footing for lifelong healthy habits.

In some cases there can be times when anxiety reaches exceptional levels and professional support is required. We've provided some guidance on how you can tell the difference and where you can reach out.

Coronavirus specifically

Adjusting to change

The rapid and far-reaching developments of Coronavirus have resulted in sudden, dramatic life-style changes for most people and this can cause anxiety for adults and children alike.

Lots of things we have previously taken for granted have changed, including our usual routines: most of us are now schooling or working from home; we have been advised to avoid using public transport (lots of stations have been shut with a reduced service operating); cafes and restaurants are closed; and most large gatherings (sports, festivals and concerts) have been cancelled. Walking on, or driving through, previously busy but currently deserted streets feels strange. Teenagers may be especially anxious about not being able to see their friends often, if at all.

So the first thing to do is to acknowledge that things have changed and that life as we know it at the moment is not normal. This is not to say that you shouldn't strive to introduce new structure and routines to create as much normality as possible, but recognising that things are different helps make that adjustment sooner. Remember also, these changes are temporary. Make sure you know the facts so you can provide reassurance.

Get talking

Talk to your children and explain what's happening and listen to how they feel. Their perspective and concerns are unlikely to be aligned with your priorities, so find out what's worrying for them. Help them understand that for most people, coronavirus will result in a short-term temporary illness from which they will fully recover; however, it is very contagious which is why strict measures have been put in place to reduce the risk of people passing it on to one another and to try and avoid everyone being ill at the same time.

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BBC
Managing mental health

Mental Health Foundation

Being online

Online resources are great for staying up-to-date and getting the latest information, but they are also a magnet for alarmist stories and scaremongering, especially amongst social media where articles and opinions are widely shared without first checking for accuracy. Check what your children are reading online and enforce regular breaks so they are not barraging themselves with information (or possibly misinformation) through every waking minute, as this can result in reinforcing panicky feelings.
Take care of their physical health by making sure they eat well, get plenty of sleep and stay active. Also, adopt practises to improve their mental health and reduce feelings of panic, such as deep breathing, meditating and spending time in a soothing environment. We've got lots more tips on relaxation techniques later in this chapter.

Importantly, stay connected. We may not be able to attend social gatherings and get together, but we can stay in touch with those we love using social media, messaging and telephone calls. It's very important to do this, as isolation and the possible over-thinking without distraction, is very poor for mental health.

Signs of anxiety and stress

It's good to be aware of the signs of anxiety and stress so you can watch out for them. A change in behaviour for a day or two might be nothing to worry about, but if you notice a regular change, then it's usually a sign that something is wrong. Some of the more common signs of anxiety include:

- Losing interest in things they've previously enjoyed;
- Behaving in the opposite way to usual – quiet children can become very chatty, chatty children can get withdrawn;
- Being grumpy and irritable;
- Lots of headaches and digestive problems (stomach aches, diarrhoea, constipation, vomiting etc);
- Worrying all the time, this can show itself in only picturing negative outcomes (what if I fail, I'm going to fail, I can't do this);
- Talking over and over the same concern and being unable to either stop thinking about it or to find relief;
- Physical symptoms (sweaty palms, shaking, fast heartbeat, aching muscles);
- Restlessness and being unable to stay still;
- Inability to concentrate (such as taking in what's happening in a TV programme);
- Panic attacks;
- Not sleeping.

Remember to keep perspective. If they have had several late nights, they are likely to be tired and this increases irritability. If they've been exercising, they might have aching muscles. If they've just run to meet you, they'll have a fast heart rate. Individual or a short-term combination of the above symptoms are normal.

How to help

If you notice your child is suffering, it's time to help them. That doesn't always mean you stepping in (that could add to the anxiety) although it's good to let them know you've noticed something's wrong and give them a chance to talk to you if they want to. Avoid broaching the subject in front of others, this could make them feel embarrassed or inadequate and make them feel worse (they might think they are doing a job good of hiding it). Don't forget, the aim isn't to eliminate anxiety but to teach them how to manage it.

There are two ways to help. Encourage them to take part in an activity that will provide a distraction so they stop thinking about whatever is making them anxious. Giving the brain some time out from worrying can help obtain a better perspective later.

Physical activities – it doesn't matter what activity - dancing, football, swimming, walking – so long as it's something they enjoy, gets their endorphins flowing and requires focus so the mind is concentrating on something different. If you have a garden or park nearby (and are not restricted to staying at home) make the most of it and get them to visit daily. If you are restricted to home and don't have a garden, try doing something active inside, perhaps following an online exercise workout, dancing or walking from room to room. Sitting still all day is a sure way to get cabin fever!

Music – Music has an amazing ability to transport you to a different time and place. Anything that evokes positive memories and experiences is a good thing. To reduce anxiety, it's better to listen to relaxing and calming music rather than something that stimulates.

Anxiety UK
Physical exercise

Young Minds
Parent guide

Talking – it may not be to you! A sibling, grandparent, family friend or friend at school or perhaps a charity chatline. Expressing worries out loud can sometimes make them feel less significant than when they're playing on loop in the mind. Talking aloud also encourages finding their own solutions – prompts such as 'what would need to happen to make you feel better', can help them reframe to seeking solutions rather than dwelling on troubles.

Avoiding stimulants – bright lights, loud music, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, too much excitement (a thrilling computer game, exciting movie) can all promote adrenaline production and increase feelings of anxiety, so these are best avoided.

Reducing lighting (have dimmable lights or table lamps in the bedroom) also helps to increase feelings of calm and can help prepare for sleep.

EXPRESSING WORRIES OUT LOUD CAN SOMETIMES MAKE THEM FEEL LESS SIGNIFICANT

How to help

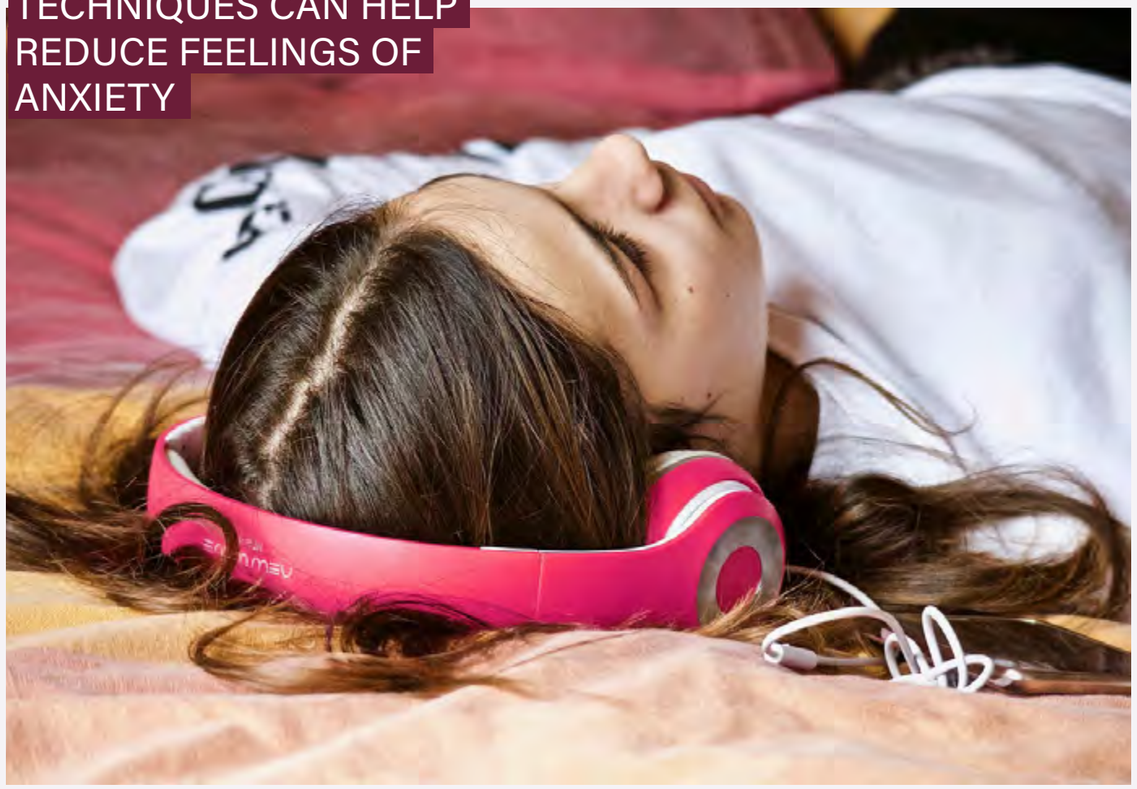
The second way to help is to provide an opportunity for them to learn some proven techniques which help reduce anxiety. It's a really good idea for your child to practise some of these methods when they're not anxious, so they can familiarise themselves with the approaches and get comfortable with the experience and how it makes them feel. Then, should anxiety strike, it's something they're relaxed about doing. Regularly practising relaxation techniques helps keep anxiety at bay too. Some good choices are:

Mindfulness with meditation, breathing techniques, visualisation or yoga. Anxiety can induce rapid, shallow breathing which encourages the heart to beat faster to try and compensate for lack of oxygen. Learning slow breathing and how to take deep breaths has an immediate physical effect and is particularly useful in preventing anxiety escalating. Meditation, visualisation and yoga all encourage positive breathing techniques.

Apps like Headspace can be loaded on the phone so your child readily has help to hand in any place at any time.

Headspace

PRACTISING RELAXATION TECHNIQUES CAN HELP REDUCE FEELINGS OF ANXIETY



Practising yoga regularly has been proven to improve the heart rate as well as physical strength. Meditation transports the mind to a completely different place and experience. There are many different types of meditation including auditory (describing experiences) and visual (looking at something). These activities can be done in short or long bursts and alone or in groups, which makes them ideal to put into practise when on the go or needing a ready tool when nerves strike.

Herbs and smells – For centuries we've used herbs and smells to invoke different atmospheres. Essential oils can be burnt in diffusers, added to baths, placed on candles, mixed with water as a spritz or poured on a tissue (great for on the go and to pop in a pocket) and are inexpensive to buy. Some useful staples are: lemon (promotes concentration and calming); lavender (reduces stress and can help sleep), jasmine (uplifting and calming), peppermint (invigorating so helps to clear the mind) and rosemary (acts as a pick-me-up).

Herbal teas are a great caffeine free hot drink and, as well as benefiting from the smell, the herbs work within the system too. Try camomile, peppermint, lavender or lemon balm.

Reflecting on your own behaviour

A common reason for children being anxious is the expectation their parents have and the worry that they cannot live up to that. That's why it's a good idea to focus on effort rather than outcomes: "I'm really impressed that you finished your revision this afternoon" gives positive reinforcement for something good that's been achieved, rather than "Well done, now you'll have more time to learn about XYZ" which sets an expectation for a future event yet to be achieved.

Where to get support

Professional support

Professional support includes more than counsellors and psychiatrists (although both these approaches can be helpful). There's a range of professional options available including:

- Teachers at school – both in an academic capacity to help understand subjects better, as tutors to help create better ways of working outside school and pastoral experts who can help with emotional issues. Remember, schools may be closed but teachers are still available and can be contacted (in term time);
- Some schools have an independent counsellor available with whom your children can talk in confidence (i.e. they will not relay the information to the school);
- Peer support networks – these can be very helpful as speaking to someone of a similar age can sometimes feel easier than speaking to an adult, or speaking to someone just slightly older, who has more recently been through a similar experience can be very reassuring;
- Charities – most now offer both online and telephone support. This anonymity (i.e. not being face-to-face) can make talking over problems and worries easier.

Too much anxiety

If your child is showing several signs of anxiety on a regular basis (several days each week) over a prolonged period of time (several weeks) then do seek help from external support services mentioned above. We are currently experiencing exceptional circumstances likely to increase anxiety levels in all of us, so try to introduce daily exercises proven to reduce stress.

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my website

mind for better mental health

SAMARITANS

AnxietyUK

BIG WHITE WALL

Don't forget to look after yourself

Finally … don't forget about yourself. These are challenging times for your child and they're challenging times for you too. Our lifestyles have changed dramatically in a very short space of time, so it's natural that you are feeling stressed and anxious. Be sure to include some much needed time for you to try and ensure your needs are being looked after to give you the strength to support those closest to you.

This is a period of temporary change. As you begin to create a new daily routine for your children, take this as an opportunity to develop new habits and hobbies for yourself too.

You might want to:

- learn a new skill;
- gain a qualification through completing an online course;
- develop a fitness regime;
- set up an 'online' book club with friends or family;
- listen to a podcast;
- get creative and produce your own artwork;
- redecorate or carry out some DIY;
- learn some new recipes;
- reorganise your clothes or spare room;
- watch a television series;
- try some new relaxation techniques such as meditation or yoga;
- learn a new language;
- play board games;
- reconnect with old friends via telephone or video streaming; or
- watch an online gig, opera or theatre performance.

Some businesses are currently providing their online services for free of charge, whilst others are adapting their services to accommodate government guidelines for social distancing. Take a virtual museum tour, 'attend' an online concert or host a Netflix party with friends from your own houses.

Some examples of what's out there:

Netflix Party	**Stage it** Online gigs	**Futurelearn** Online courses

Final words

Coronavirus has created an unprecedented experience, but it is temporary, and things will go back to normal. You cannot eliminate all the stress surrounding your children, but you can certainly contribute to reducing the stress and helping them find the most constructive ways to cope, study and revise well, alongside reinforcing healthy lifestyle habits.

Where there are two parental figures at home, whether step-parents or biological parents, it's important to work as a team and keep messaging consistent. Likewise, for those parents with joint custody, agreeing boundaries and working together to provide similar home experiences is the most helpful way forward, though this can be difficult, especially when split-ups have been especially painful and personal wounds are yet to heal. A child that has two completely different home rules depending on which parent they are staying with receives mixed messages and will likely choose to follow the rules they prefer (which isn't necessarily the ones that put them on the best path for happiness and success). This is especially important when the world around them has changed so dramatically within a very short timeframe. They need reassurance and a sense of certainty.

These are very unusual times, but they might have given an opportunity for you and your children to do lots of things together to help positively reinforce your relationship. There's no doubt that for the next few weeks, most of us will have much more time than we usually have so let's try and focus on the positive aspects of this.

Join us

If your interested in regular updates about other ways you can help your teenage children, **click here** and join our online community or follow us on social media.

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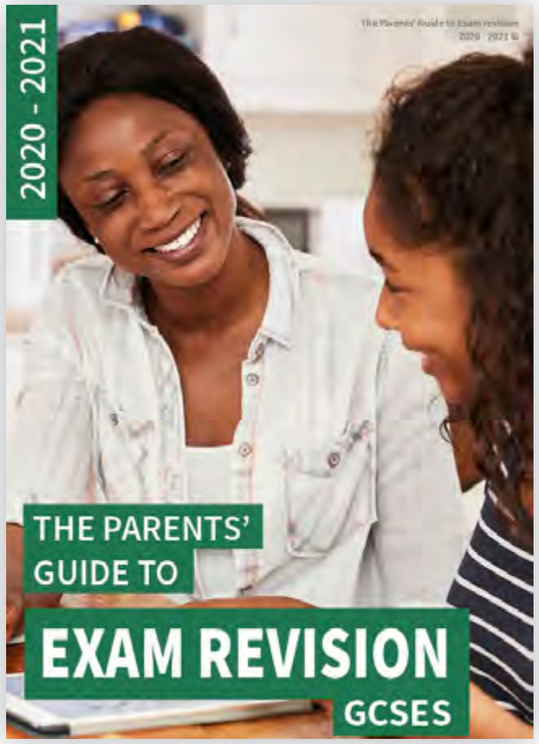

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The Parents' Guide to

Coping with school closures

The Parent's Guide to: Coping with school closures
info@theparentsguideto.co.uk

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