



HELPING  
FAMILIES  
TEAM

**NHS**

South London  
and Maudsley  
NHS Foundation Trust

# PARENTING GROUNDWORK:

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FEELING CALM AND CONNECTED  
DURING COVID-19



**CPCS**  
THE CENTRE FOR  
PARENT & CHILD  
SUPPORT

# INTRODUCTION

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Families are currently under enormous stress, facing practical issues such as overcrowded housing, fear and uncertainty, and reduced options for relaxation and enjoyment.

It is normal and understandable to be finding this situation difficult. It can be even more of a challenge if you are already experiencing mental health difficulties.

You can use parenting groundwork to help you to feel calmer, more connected to the present, and in control. Focusing on managing your own emotions first can also make parenting easier.

We hope these ideas help you and your children to feel a bit better.

**Email us:** [HelpingFamiliesTeam@slam.nhs.uk](mailto:HelpingFamiliesTeam@slam.nhs.uk)

**Website:** [Helping Families Programme](#)

## **Helping Families Team**

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# KEEP DOING WHAT WORKS - FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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Think about what normally helps you maintain your emotional wellbeing or mental health. Is there a way to continue doing these things?

- Stick to a routine, including a regular bedtime and waking up time
- Look after yourself by getting dressed and washed every day, eating regular healthy meals, avoiding alcohol and drugs, and remembering to take medication
- Do something different on the weekend so it does not feel like one endless week



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

If you find that part of your routine is slipping, like taking medication, think of a way to remind yourself of this.

Could you set a phone alarm or put a post-it note on the fridge?

# MEANINGFUL AND ENJOYABLE ACTIVITY

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Meaningful and enjoyable activity is crucial for your emotional wellbeing. Try and plan a mix of activities every day. Could you write a timetable for yourself?

- Think about what you have enjoyed before and see if you can adapt the activity so you can do it at home
- Be careful of too much screen time
- Try your best to focus fully on the activity you are doing

## **Here are some ideas for things you could try:**

- Listen to Music
- Read a book or magazine
- Paint your nails
- Cook a new recipe
- Have a bath
- Start a journal
- Look at old photos
- Clean out a cupboard



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

For the week ahead, aim to schedule one thing a day for yourself that is enjoyable, meaningful, or gives you a sense of achievement. It may help to write this down and display it somewhere.

# KEEP MOVING, EXERCISING AND SPEND TIME IN NATURE

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Exercise is great for our mood and health, as is spending time in nature. Take your children with you if they can't be left alone; it's good for them too!

- Aim for outside exercise every day if possible, even it's just a walk to the end of the street
- Notice any nature around you; this has proven benefits to health. If your children are with you, ask what they can see
- Exercise at home. Ask your child what they'd enjoy or try finding something on YouTube:
  - › Yoga
  - › Pilates
  - › Cardio
  - › POPSUGAR Fitness - [YouTube](#)
  - › PE with Joe Wicks – [YouTube](#)
  - › Dance to music
  - › Vacuum quickly
  - › Step up and down your stairs



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Plan what exercise/movement you will do tomorrow. Plan a walking route, or find an online exercise class in advance.

# STAY CONNECTED TO OTHER PEOPLE

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Humans are social animals with a very strong need for connection to other people. We tend to get low in mood without this contact, so try and connect with others by:

- Using video calls, and sending messages: WhatsApp, FaceTime, or Zoom, calling people on the phone, or sending texts
- Think about who you could call. Ask your keyworker to put you in touch with a voluntary service if you cannot think of anyone to speak to
- Keep using services. Many NHS and social services are still operating and it is important you continue seeking help as needed. Get in touch via a phone call.
- If you are tempted to contact someone who has previously hurt you, please let your keyworker know or contact Refuge on **0808 2000 247**
- If you are distressed and need to talk to someone, you can call the Samaritans on **116 123**. The SLAM Crisis Line is **0800 731 2864**.



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Schedule a video call with a friend or family member.

# MANAGING ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY

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Most people are currently anxious about COVID-19 and are unsettled by how unpredictable life currently feels. It may feel particularly difficult if you were already struggling with stress.

**Acknowledge difficult feelings** – accept difficult feelings will come and go. Acknowledge the feeling, and then either sit with it, or do something to distract yourself

**Limit exposure to news** – too much information will increase anxiety. Try limiting yourself to checking a good quality news source once per day for a short period, for example, BBC News. Ask your friends to limit what they share with you or mute WhatsApp conversations.

**Focus on the positive** – at the end of each day, each family member could share their three highlights of the day. This will help focus your attention on what is going well.

**Remember this will pass** – although we do not know exactly when the end point might be, we do know that it is definitely going to pass at some point.



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Choose one strategy from the above list to focus on this week.

# PRACTICE BREATHING EXERCISES, RELAXATION, AND MINDFULNESS

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We hold a lot of physical tension and anxiety in our bodies as well as our minds. Try doing these exercises on a regular basis to increase calm feelings and think more clearly.

**Deep breathing** - Sit or stand in a relaxed position, slowly inhale through your nose, counting to five. Let the air out from your mouth, counting to eight as it leaves your lungs. Breathing deeply will mean both your chest and tummy should move in and away from your body together. Repeat several times. It takes 3 minutes for breathing to return to normal when stressed.

**Guided exercises** – search YouTube for guided instructions on breathing exercises and an introduction to Mindfulness. The [SLAM Recovery College](#) has some classes on this too.



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Plan what exercise/movement you will do tomorrow. Plan a walking route, or find an online exercise class in advance.