

Staying positive- Routines

We are all used to going through our daily lives on a schedule with places to be at certain times and specific things to fit into allotted times. Suddenly we have all lost our usual routines, ways of doing things and structures which have for so long supported our every day lives. While it may feel great for a few days not to be constrained by the usual demands on our time after a while it can become less appealing, boring and we may begin to struggle. This can leave us feeling unmotivated, directionless and low in mood as well as giving us plenty of time to focus on worrying about the future and the things which we are unable to control.

It can be of real value for both adults and children to have some sort of daily routine or structure to support well-being and mental health. While this routine may be flexible it can provide a sense of stability through its predictability and role in clarifying expectations for ourselves and our children. Maintaining a routine around meal times and bed times will also help our bodies know when it is time for sleep and food which supports feelings of well-being and our general health. There are several other things which need to be considered and included for us to create a healthy balanced routine:

- **Pleasure.** When our everyday lives have suddenly changed so dramatically and we may be worrying or anxious about the situation it is very easy to lose touch with the activities which we enjoy and give us pleasure. It is vital that we continue to engage in activities which bring us joy as these support our sense of well-being, mental and physical health. While there are some activities which we may no longer be able to do there may be alternatives. The pleasurable activity does not have to be huge it just needs to be enjoyable and give a sense of pleasure. Examples include reading a good book, watching a comedy, singing or dancing to your favourite songs, having a relaxing bath or even eating one of your favourite foods.
- **Achievement.** When we feel as though we have achieved or accomplished something it makes us feel good and gives us a sense of satisfaction. In the current situation we may be unable to work or gain a sense of satisfaction at an achievement or job well done in the way we would usually do. This can lead to feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness, frustration and boredom. Again this is important for both adults and children. Examples include doing school work or tackling school work and persevering even when it is difficult, general things which need doing such as housework, decorating or gardening (it can be great to get the children involved in these activities too), allotting 15 minutes a day to a task you have been meaning to get round to for a while such as sorting out paperwork or tackling the pile of stuff which has inexplicably piled up in the corner of the room (breaking the unpleasant

task into smaller chunks can help it feel more achievable and less overwhelming), a sense of achievement can also be gained by trying something new (such as cooking a new recipe) or completing an activity you have set out to do (such as completing a daily exercise routine).

- **Connection.** We are social creatures and need closeness and connection with others for our well being. (It may also be useful if you are in a busy household to identify quite times and ways in which to have your own space or breaks from each other)! While we are unable to socialise face to face it is important for both adults and children to maintain social connections. This can be over the phone or through online video chat (please be aware that some of these online products have age restrictions and will need to be set up in a way to ensure your child's online safety). Examples of creatively maintaining social connections online include arranging a time to meet a friend online for lunch or coffee, keeping in regular contact with friends and family, meeting up online to play games with friends such as Pictionary, guessing games or charades (there are lots of ideas like this online), setting up a shared online group or club with your friends (such as a book or film club), you could also explore online neighbourhood groups and find if there are ways to support your local community.
- **Distraction.** If you are worrying about the current situation you may find it can effect your ability to focus on what you are doing. This can effect children as well as adults. It can be useful if we are finding our worried thoughts are getting the better of us is to find a form of distraction from them. It may be useful to take some time out of what you are doing to find something which will engage you more fully (even if its just for a few minutes) to distract yourself from worrying. This could include a pleasurable activity, speaking to a friend, playing a game, identifying goals, writing a to do list or other strategies or activities to manage worry.
- **Staying active.** As we all know regular exercise and being active is important for maintaining our physical health and also has a positive impact on our mental health. It is really important to identify ways in which we can continue to stay active and get enough exercise when many of our usual routes for this are unavailable. There are many exercise videos available for free online for kids and adults (such as on You Tube) while care needs to be taken with these so that you don't injure yourself it may even allow you to try an exercise type or class which you have always wanted to try but have never got around to. I am aware that some exercise classes are going online in various forms, if you do a regular exercise class or know of one it may be worth investigating to see if they are now offering an online option. Walking, running and cycling are all good exercises (whilst maintaining the

appropriate distance from others) for adults and children. Activities such as skipping, playing catch or kicking a football around in the garden can also be good forms of exercise for everyone as well.

If you are setting out a new routine or schedule it may be really useful to get everyone involved (especially with young children as it will give them the opportunity to have input on some things they would like to do and a sense of control and value). Remember that it is a tool to give your day structure and meaning to support you and your child's well-being as a certain amount of flexibility may be needed to make it work. It may also be useful to keep it under review to allow for changes and developments as you all get more used to this way of being. Some children will need more and clearer structure than others. It can also be useful to go through what will be happening that day in the morning and help them visualise what the day will look like.