

Dear Parents,

I am an educational psychologist working in Loughborough schools. I have put together some ideas and materials that you may find helpful whilst you are at home.

I think it is really important that we all recognise that this situation is not the same as choosing to educate your child at home. We are experiencing a national crisis and an emergency situation. There is a lot of advice online, but remember, you as the parent are the expert in knowing your own child. The most important thing at the moment is that children and their parents are physically and mentally healthy and able to manage a very difficult and anxious time.

Some children may:

- need lots of routine and structure and may feel uncomfortable if they are not doing work and 'keeping up',
- be more anxious and need lots of reassurance and non-educational distraction activities.
- work better in the morning, some later in the day.
- Like doing everything and then resting, others having lots of short breaks.

Parents too need different things:

- they need a break from the children,
- time to work,
- time to manage their own anxieties,
- time to connect with friends and families.

There is no right or wrong way to manage this situation; you need to find something that suits you and your child(ren).

For children who prefer to have very clear structure and routine, **visual timetables** are often used at school, to show a child what is going to be happening that day. They don't need to be really detailed but could give an idea of the day. Maybe you could consider including connecting with friends time, timetabling when meals will be, tv and gaming time, some physical activity, and when you might be available to help them with work etc. Children can enjoy ticking things off the list as they go through them. A written list, set of pictures or photographs can be used, and it doesn't have to be anything fancy.

Social media can be a great place for children to find connection and support. It can also reinforce their worries and anxieties. Maybe talking to them about limiting their time looking at news items would be helpful. I ask myself a set of questions when thinking about the news, which you could adapt, model and discuss with your child(ren):

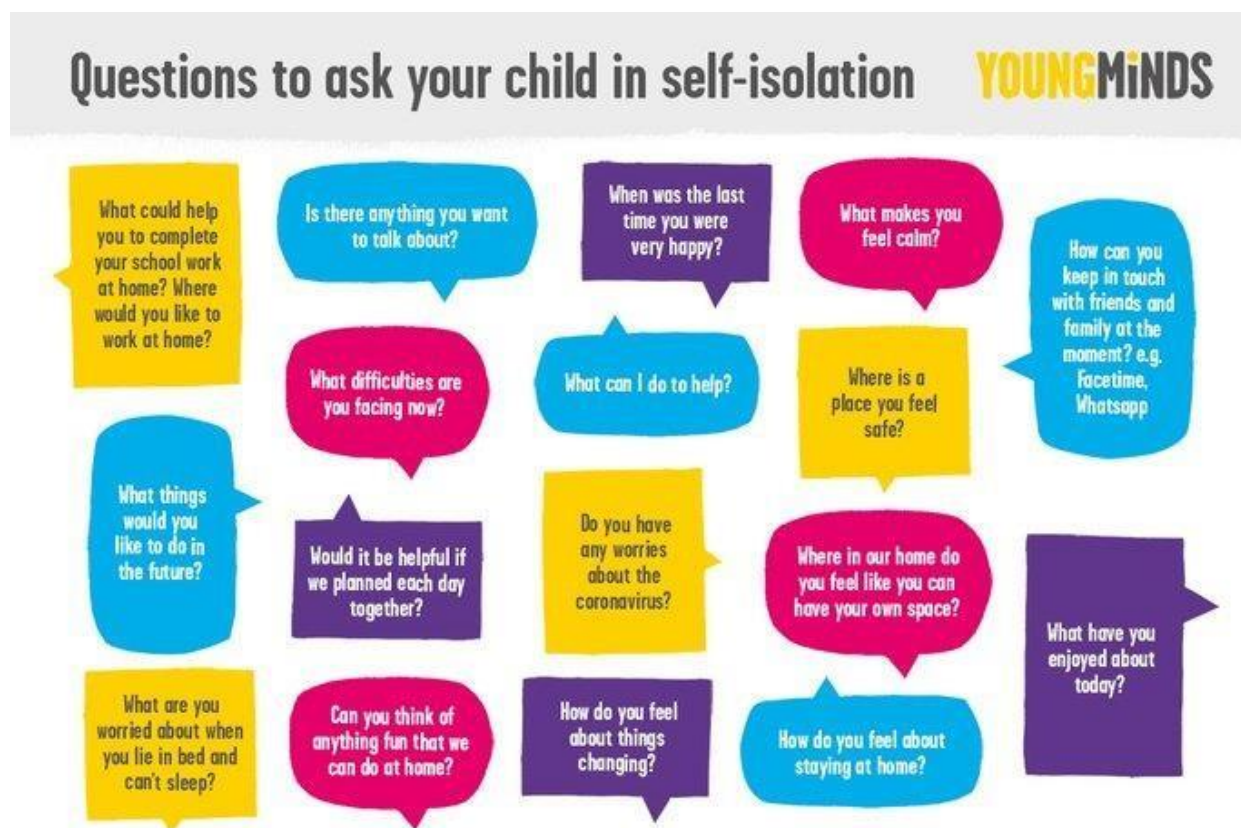
- Am I reading this to find out something I need to know?
- Is this repeating things I already know?
- What impact could reading this have on me; is it worth it?

Children, and adults, can get into a cycle of reading worrying things, trying to find out everything there is to know, trying to get some control. It's not possible to get all the answers at the moment, so if children are reading things that cause them worry, that's a good clue to try and reduce the amount.

It is also very important to remember that this is crisis time, and it is not surprising that adults and children are sometimes feeling anxious, sad or frightened. These are normal reactions to such a difficult situation. Some children may also be feeling fine, and in fact happy they are not at school, which is also a very normal reaction.

It is good to talk and share and be with your child(ren) in the moment, if they express their feelings to you. If they see you are feeling the same, that's ok, reassure them that you will be with them and you will get through it together. Some children may find it hard to talk about how they feel and will need us to make sense of it for them; we can ask a question like "I noticed you haven't eaten breakfast, are you feeling worried about something?" which could help them open up. Also texting or writing messages or letters to them, so that they can reply in their own time and hold on to your words of reassurance can be a useful way of keeping connected.

Here are some ideas of opening questions from **Young Minds**:



If your child likes to use relaxation ideas to help them to feel relaxed: For the next few weeks, **Mindful Schools** will be offering free live mindfulness classes for children. These might be helpful anchors to give the day some routine and structure.

<https://www.mindfulschools.org/free-online-mindfulness-class-for-kids/>

There are also some very helpful ideas for children who are worrying, on this website:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

If your child is beginning to feel extremely anxious they might show behaviours such as:

- not eating,
- disrupted sleep
- inability to settle and concentrate
- temper tantrums or meltdowns that are unusual for them
- withdrawing and not communicating with you
- hurting themselves

then you may need to look for additional help and support.

Some helplines below may be useful for you, to talk to someone about your child:

The Young Minds Parents Helpline is also available for those concerned about how their child is managing their mental health, the number is: **0808 802 5544**

Call them for free Mon-Fri from 9.30am to 4pm – available in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Out of operating hours, you can contact the Parents Helpline [via our online contact form](#). They will endeavour to reply to emails received within three working days. If you are in need of urgent help, [these contacts can help you](#).

Anxiety UK also has a helpline for parents who are experiencing high levels of stress or worry: Tel. 03444775774

A message to give to your child(ren) is that it is good to talk about however you are feeling with someone you trust. If your worries are so big that it feels scary to hold them, they should talk to a trusted adult, or they too can also text for advice:

Young Minds has an urgent text line that children or young people under 25 can use: If you need urgent help text YM to 85258

Childline is open 24 hours a day, every day, for children and young people up to the age of 18, to talk about any worries or concerns, big or small. Tel. 08001111

If you experience a bereavement in the family at this very stressful time, the following two websites have very helpful advice:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/supporting-a-bereaved-child/>

I hope you are well and looking after yourselves as best as you can.

Best wishes, Helen

Helen Clifford (Educational Psychologist)