

Home Learning Opportunities

Your School's Family Support team continue to be available to support you whilst you are at home with your children following the school closures.

This week, week commencing 18th May is Mental Health Awareness week, so this week's newsletter is dedicated to providing you with some tips and techniques to support your child's emotional wellbeing as well as your own wellbeing as a parent.

Coronavirus has caused everyone's lives to change and the future feels very uncertain. Both change and uncertainty can be big causes of anxiety. So it's not surprising that worry is a feature of our lives at present. With the continued uncertainty of whether schools will re-open or not, and then the anxiety or dilemma you may be facing as to whether your child should return to school, there are many reasons for us to be facing worry and pressure to make the right decision.

Within this newsletter we have provided a range of tips and techniques to help you to support your child - whatever their age - at this difficult time. In addition we have also included a range of advice on how to support yourself as a parent but the wider family at this time.

Remember to contact your family worker if you feel you need additional support.

Visit www.gadeschoolsfamilysupport for more information.



The following are specific tips and techniques to support your child if they are feeling anxious and worried at this time.

Recognise their Anxiety

Everyone gets anxious sometimes. We know that children tend to worry about different things at different ages, and their anxiety is influenced by what's going on in the world around them. Every child is different, but as parents and carers, you are the experts at recognising when your child is anxious. Do they want to stay closer to you than usual? Do they ask lots of questions and seek reassurance? Do they get tearful, or cross and grumpy? Do they talk about 'feeling ill', and having headaches or tummy aches? Recognising that your child is anxious is the first step to helping them.

Create a Space to Talk

Let your child know you are available to talk, but don't force them to. Children and young people often find it easier to talk while doing another activity, like drawing, doing some baking, or playing a video game together. Avoid big conversations about worries at bedtime, which is a time for calming down and going to sleep. But if this happens, encourage them to make a note (maybe in a 'worry box') so you can both talk about it the next day. Then move on to a calming and distracting activity to help them settle for the night.

Model a Calm Response

Parents and carers get anxious too! We worry about the impact of coronavirus on the world and on those we love. We know that children are good at noticing when others around them are anxious, and will watch the behaviour of others to work out whether they should be anxious themselves. Even if you're feeling anxious on the inside, you can help your child by trying to model a calm response on the outside. This will help to reassure them that things might be difficult, but they are manageable.

Be Curious and Listen

Spend time listening to your child, asking questions, and being interested in how things are from their perspective. Be accepting of their worry, anger and sadness about how things are at present. Let them know that their thoughts and feelings are understandable. Explain that, although the physical feelings we get in our bodies when we are anxious can be unpleasant, they are normal.

Manage External Stresses

Constant exposure to news and social media, and changes to routines, increase anxiety in children. Keep an eye on what your child is reading, watching and listening to. Be aware if they hear news reports which they might find upsetting. Try to keep to a routine, with activities across the day (e.g. schoolwork, exercise, relaxing, keeping in touch with friends, sleep). Don't add to the pressure if they seem overwhelmed. Instead, emphasise the importance of being kind and looking after themselves.

Emphasise their Strengths

Anxiety in children is reduced if they believe they have the ability to cope with difficulties. You can help by showing your child that you are confident they can manage. Help them to problem-solve where there are solutions to be found. But also help them learn to manage worries that you can't do much about (e.g. by distracting themselves in fun and absorbing activities).

Be Realistic and Kind to Yourself

Things will rarely go according to plan, particularly now that all our routines are different. Don't be self-critical. Feel proud of what you achieve, however small. If we can 'pat ourselves on the back', we

feel good about ourselves, happier, and less likely to feel down. Let your children hear that you are proud of your own achievements as well as theirs. This will help them learn to self-praise too. Not all stressful feelings at present will be to do with coronavirus. Many daily stresses will relate to normal family struggles and the stages which your children are at. Distraction techniques can be a good way to be kind to ourselves, calming us down and improving our sense of wellbeing. This might be through activities with other family members, watching a film together or exercising. Even if you can't easily join in older children's activities, showing an interest might help them feel closer to you

Notice what is on your Mind

It's sometimes easy not to notice how we're feeling. You might feel stressed, without having noticed how this started. It's good to do regular checks about how you are feeling, but also ask how others in your family are feeling. Have gentle conversations about emotions. Some days will be stressful, when things don't go to plan or arguments erupt. Let those around you know that we all go up and down a bit in our emotions, and that's OK. When children see their parents doing this without blaming others, it also helps them to regulate their own feelings. Find the calming activities that work for you and where possible make this a regular part of every day. Sometimes the simpler, the better. Find out what works for you.

Connect with other People

To support our own wellbeing, regularly talking to friends, family members or professionals has never been more important. Talking with people who are supportive and good at listening (without judging, criticising or competing) is a very human need. While we may miss the face-to-face contact we would usually have with trusted friends, we can still find ways to reach out to them and to support one another. Within your own network of family and friends, there will be someone else who is feeling unconfident about home schooling or keeping to new routines. Reach out to them and problem solve together. When we feel well supported as parents, the calmer we tend to feel - and the more space we will have in our minds to support our children.

Create Routine and Rules that Work for YOU

Our wellbeing is often nurtured by having a daily routine, a structure to our lives. If the day feels endless and without a plan, anxiety can easily be triggered. At present, juggling the multiple roles of parenting, home schooling and working can leave parents feeling that they are spread too thinly - and that we're not doing a good job at any of our roles. This is hard. Try having achievable routines. Involve each family member to have a sense of their own timetable or routine and involve time for shared/family activities or quiet time. Most importantly do what is realistic for you and your family and try not to compare your routine to others.

Be Honest and Say Sorry When you Can

We promote our own wellbeing by knowing when we do and don't get things right. It's not about getting it right all the time. Misunderstandings, disagreements and differences of opinion are normal. They happen for all parents and in all families, and they aren't a sign that things are not OK. It is important that we have the courage to acknowledge that we don't always get things right and share this with our children. Being able to say sorry can be enormously helpful in getting everyone get back on track. Being honest and open with your children, and sharing with them what they need to know, will boost both their wellbeing and your own.