

A dark blue, irregularly shaped graphic with a splatter effect, containing white text. The graphic is centered on a white background and has a rough, hand-painted appearance with various shades of blue and white splatters around its edges.

Supporting Young Children's Wellbeing



Aims of Presentation

- To establish what we mean when we use the term “Wellbeing.”
- To consider the current Covid-19 pandemic and the impact that this has had on our own wellbeing as well as that of our children.
- To discuss strategies that we can use to support our children’s wellbeing.

What is Wellbeing?

- “The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy” (Oxford English Dictionary).
- Completely subjective and dependent on the individual.
- Generally, for a person to be considered to have good wellbeing, balance is needed in the following life areas: physical, emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual and economic.
- Sometimes we talk about physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing as separate entities, although in reality they do go hand in hand.



What could influence our wellbeing in a 'normal' world?

- Lack of opportunities for exercise
- Diet
- Friendships
- Job/school satisfaction
- Intellectual challenge or stimulation
- Financial security
- Community
- Experiences that give us purpose



How has Covid influenced our wellbeing?

- Lockdown has forced closure of indoor exercise spaces, group exercises and most team sports. Travel bans can also prevent those of us not fortunate enough to live close to large green space seeking alternative exercise locations.
- There is a sense of alienation from friends, family and the wider community.
- Working from home takes a lot of discipline and many of us can drift off!
- Covid continues to have a huge impact on the global economy.



How does this transmit down to our children?

- Children are creatures of habit who depend on a stable routine. The first lockdown essentially took that away, with no time to prepare.
- Lockdown has forced the closure of many of places that young children can exercise – children’s gymnastics and dance classes, sports teams, soft play...
- Children have been separated from friends through school closures and household mixing bans which have also separated them from some family members.
- Children might not understand the concept of working from home and why one or both parents are physically inside the house but feel unreachable. For example if you have a home office where one parent works, children will be aware that the parent is in there but can not have their undivided attention which is tricky when you are 3 years old!
- Some children across the country have not been able to access comprehensive e-learning packages like the one that we were able to offer and so have suffered from lack of intellectual stimulation for months.
- Event cancellations such as holidays can cause malaise and rob us of opportunities that give us purpose.
- For religious families, closure of places of worship have had a detrimental impact on spiritual wellbeing as well as the sense of belonging to a community.
- Children hear the news and are familiar with terms such as “furlough” and “job loss” and may become worried of the impact that this will have on their family.
- Empty supermarket shelves are scary.
- Increased handwashing can lead to a heightened awareness of germs which can cause anxiety and even an unhealthy phobia of germs.
- A Children’s Society-led research programme found that these concerns were consistent with slightly older children (10-18 years) regardless of ethnicity or child poverty status. While Covid has exacerbated the poor/rich divide in so many ways, anxieties remain constant for children.



How can we support children's wellbeing

GOLDEN RULE-Make time for your own wellbeing. Children feed off of their parents and so awareness of parental stress will have a knock on impact on their own.

I like to compare this to airplane safety announcements which instruct adults to ensure that, in case of an emergency, their own oxygen mask is securely fitted before they help others. This may go against our instincts as we do just want to help our children, but the best way to ensure that we are helping is to ensure that we are fully operational first.



Using Talk to Support Wellbeing

- Children are amazingly perceptive and understand so much more about what is going on than we tend to give them credit for. They can also become frustrated if they feel that they are not being told the full story. Studies have shown that a significant proportion (around 90%) of 10-18 year olds do not feel as if scientists or the government are speaking to them when discussing the pandemic (British Science Association, 2020). It is essential that we offer children the opportunity to discuss and understand the pandemic in a manner which is appropriate to them in order to support their wellbeing. Remember, we are asking our children to undergo huge changes and following new and sometimes confusing guidelines, so we must engage them in these discussions.
- Consider setting up a worry jar.
- Ask your children how they feel (the most obvious answer really is the best!)

Using Activities to Support Wellbeing



- Social distancing should not mean social isolation. It has been proven that children's responses to adversity are better when they remain connected socially. You can create opportunities for children to get the quality time that they crave with caregivers and friends outside of the household - video chats, posting each other letters, sending each other video blogs of what they have been up to.
- To further support social 'connectedness' if one or both parents are working from home have "accessible times" that your child can understand for example an open door, displaying a certain time on your door and getting your child to match it on a clock etc. Try to make these as consistent as possible. This can be really difficult if you have irregular meeting times, so maybe consider taking a consistent lunch time where you can spend some quality time with your children, and have consistent start and finish times where possible. This routine will also support your own wellbeing.
- Engage your child in many exciting activities that they enjoy to keep them active and challenged.

Using Self-Efficacy to Support Wellbeing

- Using this extra time to help support your child's independence skills is a key way of supporting their wellbeing, as it gives children a greater sense of control and fulfils their need to find meaning in experiences.
- Give children independence in washing their own hands, preparing meals (maybe even consider involving your child in prepping some meals for the freezer so that they can see that they do not have to worry about running out of food, which is a concern for some children), looking after younger siblings, doing chores around the house and even helping with your own work from home where appropriate (children LOVE helping with filing or “catching” and organising pages from the printer!)





Useful Links

- NHS Every Mind Matters
<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/childrens-mental-health/>
- Centre for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Parental Resources Kit, Early Years
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/parental-resource-kit/early-childhood.html>
- NSPCC Supporting Children and Young People's Mental Health
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2020/april/supporting-children-young-people-mental-health>