

SPACE

Supporting Parents and Children
Emotionally

Factsheet Three: Understanding Resilience



To help support you during COVID-19, we have created a series of factsheets, designed to offer some support and strategies, whatever your situation, and are based on what we know about people's responses to traumatic events and what can help.

Being safe emotionally and physically is the basic need all humans have. It is often something we take for granted.

Living with COVID-19 has forced us all into a situation previously unimaginable. The safety in our lives we had previously taken for granted has gone and for many of us already living with fear and uncertainty this pandemic has only increased the sense of vulnerability. The situation may have highlighted difficult living arrangements that were just about sustainable before, but with the enforcement of lockdown, the stress of living as a carer (to elderly parents or sick children) or being dependant on someone else (due to illness or lack of finances) will have increased the lack of personal safety. Families used to being at work and children used to being in school face huge challenges suddenly being stuck together without the normal routines of daily life. With the schools shut we are also suddenly thrust into a world where we are expected to become teachers and maybe even support our children with subjects we know nothing about. Social distancing means outside access is limited and unless we are lucky enough to have gardens our children are stuck indoors with conflicting wants and needs.

The aim of these factsheets is to give you some strategies to look after your children by looking after yourself. If you have ever flown on a plane, you may remember the air steward safety briefing – 'in the event of loss of oxygen, a mask will drop down in front of you. PUT YOUR OWN MASK ON first before helping others'. In effect if you don't you will pass out before you can help anyone else. It's the same in this crisis, to help your children you need to be able to look after your own emotional health and safety first.

Factsheet three is designed to provide you with some information on 'resilience'. Resilience is individual and is something we may have developed since childhood. Sometimes those that have experienced the most adversity become the most resilient as they are constantly having to adapt, change and accept new situations. This current situation may be particularly difficult for people that have never faced any difficulties as they have never had to learn how to bounce back as life has always been pretty straight forward

Why is resilience important?

The ability to recover from difficulties increases the likelihood that individuals will be able to reach their full potential. Jody McVittie, M.D., co-founder of Sound Discipline (an organisation in the USA that offers comprehensive programmes that help schools connect with young people and address the root causes of challenging behaviour), identifies two things that influence how able a child is to 'bounce back' when bad things happen:

1. How they are able to make meaning of their life experiences.
2. The network of 'safe' connected adults they have in their lives. People do their best thinking and learning in the context of safe relationships.

This indicates how important it is for us all to have an understanding of what is meant by resilience and how we can develop it.

Building resilience in ourselves and our children

Have a watch of this video (Credit and thanks to Tracey Farrell for granting access to this)

<https://youtu.be/mlUuY9tUFok>

This video demonstrates how resilience can sometimes not be recognised for what it is and some of the ways we may cope that are helpful under the stress can cause difficulties when the stress is no longer there.

Nelly is nervous in the harbour and easily startled. The hyper-vigilance (being in a constant flight or fight) she needed to cope with the battles at sea, are misfiring when she is safe, getting her into trouble (bumping into other boats).

This might be happening for us and our children in Lockdown - there is lots of joking on social media about peoples food and alcohol levels being calorific and high to cope with the impacts of lockdown. However, in the long term these strategies will not be helpful and at some point people will be thinking of alternative ways to handle the uncertainty and anxiety caused by this situation.

Here's a video for children which explains resilience and the impact on the brain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjvDrT6N-mw&t=22s>

Have a look at this video suggesting what is needed to develop resilience (for you and your children).

<https://youtu.be/1FDyiUEn8Vw>

Sleep – how is sleeping going? The tendency might be to over or under sleep – sometimes our ways of responding to the anxiety is to be over stimulated with the fight or flight, and so find it difficult to sleep or we shut down in more of a freeze response and therefore want to stay in bed and pull the duvet over our heads.

Communication and connectedness – we have looked in the previous factsheets about connection and suggested some ways to reinforce it. But you might find that you and your children need more cuddles and hugs and smaller children may even be wanting to get into your bed at night to get reassurance.

Emotions – expressing them – try and encourage time for talking about how people in the family are feeling. This may not be something you are used to doing. If talking is difficult, you can use drawings or text emojis to keep each other connected about how you feel.

This video is from Sesame Street and ideal to watch with younger children:

<https://youtu.be/ZxfjicfyCdg>.

Or this one from Inside / Out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOkYKyVFnsS>

Setting goals – during this time of isolation this can link nicely to ‘keeping to routines’ we talked about previously. Setting small daily or weekly goals around the house can really help make some sense of what is happening. It might be focused around school work or relaxation time, e.g setting a goal of reading one chapter a day of a book.

Self-time – It’s really important for everyone in the family to have the space if possible, for some self -time. This might be taking yourself off to your room to practice your grounding or relaxation (coming later) or read or just enjoy time looking out the window.

Parental resilience

Using the following Handouts see if you can identify actions to fill in the boxes, identifying activities for both yourself and your children. All of these activities are ways we nurture our own and our childrens resilience.

Building resilience with your children

Have a look at the list below and think about your relationship with your child / children. Tick either yes, no or sometimes in answer to each statement

| CAN YOU...? | YES | NO | SOMETIMES |
|--|-----|----|-----------|
| Tell your child you love them | | | |
| Spend time with your child doing what they want | | | |
| Sit with them and let them talk to you Ask them how they are feeling | | | |
| Give them clear boundaries without shouting at them e.g. sitting in one place whilst having their tea | | | |
| Allow them to be cross with you if you are wrong e.g. late to pick them up | | | |
| Help them with their self-directed work without either doing it for them, or getting cross if they can't do it | | | |
| Tell them when they have done something good | | | |
| Play a game they want to play | | | |
| Feel supported in your relationship with your child | | | |
| Keep track of their daily routines | | | |
| Cook meals for them | | | |
| Praise them for being them | | | |

Building your own resilience

Have a look at the list below and think about yourself. Tick either yes, no or sometimes in answer to each statement

| CAN YOU...? | YES | NO | SOMETIMES |
|---|-----|----|-----------|
| Acknowledge what you are good at | | | |
| Spend time doing something for you | | | |
| Take time to share how you feel with friends | | | |
| Keep a mood diary | | | |
| Keep boundaries that are safe for you | | | |
| Allow yourself to feel cross with people who let you down | | | |
| Allow yourself to make mistakes | | | |
| Reward yourself when you have done something well | | | |
| Play games, exercise and have fun | | | |
| Feel supported in your relationship and friendships | | | |
| Keep daily routines | | | |
| Cook meals for yourself (not just heat something up) | | | |
| Give yourself treats / rewards for just being you. | | | |

Relaxation

Finally, this week we have included instructions on a method of breathing 7/11 which you can practice to help you manage stressful moments and to help to manage the emotional regulation we have discussed. It can also, if done with family promote connectedness, be part of our goal setting, count as self-care and help with sleep - so all promoting and developing resilience.

7/11 breathing techniques

- All forms of mental distress involve high emotional arousal states such as anger, anxiety or depression
- 7/11 breathing is an instant relaxation system
- 7/11 has an immediate beneficial effect on both your physical and psychological well-being
- Inhale to the count of 7 and exhale to the count of 11
- Exhaling the carbon dioxide stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system which is responsible for calming you down
- When relaxed you can't be anxious because you cannot experience two contradictory states simultaneously
- 7/11 breathing restores a sense of control
- 7/11 breathing allows us to access our rational brain
- 7/11 breathing lowers blood pressure
- 7/11 breathing can be used anywhere, at any time

Finally here is a link to a video about mindfulness and mediation – suitable for adults and older children:

<https://youtu.be/qzR62JJCMBQ>.

And here are some websites for young people to look through for support and information:

Websites Young Minds (for teenagers) <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

StartNow (Headstart Kernow) website for young people:

<https://www.startnowcornwall.org.uk/>

5 Ways to Wellbeing put together by Young People Cornwall