

# Resilience and Well-Being: Parents and Carers

Staffordshire County Council's Recovery Plan has been devised in the context of COVID-19. This plan incorporates a number of projects across SCC services including the Educational Psychology Service to support educational settings in the aftermath of emergency restrictions. The EPS has devised materials in a number of areas with the aim of providing educational settings with support that can be accessed immediately in the new academic year, without the need to refer into the service directly.

**AIM:** This leaflet aims to provide parents and carers with information to help build resilience and promote positive emotional mental wellbeing in the aftermath of COVID-19.

This leaflet is divided into 4 sections:

1. Promoting resilience after COVID-19.
2. Resilience and well-being
3. Strategies
4. Toolkit: signposting to further resources.



## Promoting resilience after COVID-19

In 2020 the world has been affected by a global pandemic, COVID-19. Young Minds carried out one of the first surveys investigating the psychological impact of COVID-19 on young people. This survey was carried out between Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March (when schools were closed to pupils with exception of children of keyworkers/ vulnerable children) and Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March (when restrictions were tightened).

Young Minds surveyed 2,111 young people with pre-existing mental health needs. Although this is a snapshot study, it does give an insight to the psychological effects of coronavirus. Findings showed that: -

- 32% agreed their mental health had become much worse.
- 51% agreed their mental health had become a bit worse.
- 9% agreed it made no difference to their mental health.
- 6% agreed their mental health had become a bit better.
- 1% agreed their mental health had become much better.

Given these findings, researchers from Young Minds also asked young people what would be the most helpful during the pandemic to promote positive mental health. Apart from accessing face to face therapeutic support young people reported: -

- Online and digital support (information about online chat services).
- Guides on how to remain calm due to the uncertainty of everything.
- Information and tools on how to manage symptoms of anxiety (techniques, strategies).
- Information, advice, guidance and signposting to additional resources.

In conclusion, Young Minds suggested that young people need to know where to go for help during this time, with clear signposting and access to digital support.

It is also anticipated young people who may not have had pre-existing mental health difficulties prior to the pandemic may experience anxiety, trauma due to the five losses of routine, structure, opportunity, friendship and freedom (Carpenter, 2020).

## Resilience and well-being

Resilience can be defined in several ways, most referring to overcoming adversity (Grotberg, 1997) and being able to bounce back and adapt to challenging situations (Rae, 2019).

More recently, research exploring resilience has looked at ways it can be promoted over time. Thus, this suggests that research is a process rather than an internal trait. Therefore, resilience can change over time depending on the context or situation. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have, it involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. Thus, resilience can be promoted and enhanced; it doesn't matter how resilient someone is now they can change their behaviour to become more resilient tomorrow.

Dr Michael Ungar refers to key ingredients that are essential for children and young people to grow. Each ingredient is a protective process that helps everyone cope with adversity. Ingredients such as structure, having lots of strong relationships, access to basic needs, physical and psychological safety, having a sense of control and a sense of belonging and encouraging powerful identities (i.e. having a safe space to express strengths) are all important in influencing the development of resilience. Children and young people need help to make sense of what is going on around them and have space to talk about their thoughts and feelings, ask questions and share any worries.

***Resilience is not a special quality, trait or special power that only some children are born with. It is in fact considered to be a type of 'Ordinary Magic' (Masten, 2004) and some level of resilience is within reach for everyone.***

Resilience can change over time depending on the context or situation. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have, it involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in everyone. Thus, resilience can be promoted and enhanced; it doesn't matter how resilient someone is now they can change their behaviour to become more resilient tomorrow. Having a vision and sense of purpose is an important ingredient. Targets and goals may be related to activities, projects, within work and family settings.

Parents need to be able to keep their composure, solve problems and model how to regulate their emotions. This involves keeping calm and saving your energy for important things rather than the smaller everyday frustrations that may arise. It is about trying to see the cup as half full and that when things go wrong there will be a way to manage. This is helped with getting the right information, advice and support to help solve problems and steer through any difficulties as well as setting aside time for thinking and reflection in working towards meeting the needs and goals of your family.

Parents can show that when things go wrong it is an opportunity to learn from mistakes and persist in being willing to try again. There is a hope that with a willingness to work hard and persist with a situation, activity or skill success is something that can in the end be achieved.

Relationships and working together in a family for the good of all is important. Fostering kindness and building concern for our world. We all benefit from a support network and showing that we care for each other in small ways every day builds a sense of safety and value. Building positive relationships in different contexts such as school, work and home. Fundamental in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is the need for us all to be mindful about fulfilling our basic needs including sleep, nutrition, exercise, promoting good health and readiness for learning.

Parents and carers play a pivotal role in helping to build children's resilience. Parents and carers can buffer children from some of the worst effects of environmental adversity such as COVID-19 and can also nurture and promote opportunities for children to develop the key ingredients that help them to cope with problems and manage stress. Parents and carers can promote resilience by looking out for their children's strengths and finding opportunities to develop these capabilities. In this way parents contribute to the development of a set of processes that enable a child to engage their internal and external resources and realise good outcomes in the face of adversity. These processes develop and build up over time within nurturing and responsive relationships.

Opportunities to develop a growth mindset where abilities and skills can develop with practice, feedback and effort. Developing the ability to be persistent and have the willingness to try again and again, knowing that it takes effort and time to learn how to improve.

COVID-19 has made coping with the everyday challenges of parenting even more challenging. Additional stresses and anxiety may make you more easily worried, or depression may mean that you have low energy. However, it's important to remember that all parents have difficult times and there is no such thing as being perfect so try not to put too much pressure on yourself or give yourself too much of a hard time.

## Strategies

The following part of this leaflet provides strategies you can try to promote your emotional well-being.

### 1. Positive Psychology- PERMA Model

Seligman (2011) has suggested that our sense of well-being can be promoted by positive actions in the following five areas:

#### Positive Emotion

Spending time doing positive experiences that are enjoyable, fun, and where you feel happy and hopeful.

*Actions such as talking with your children about something you are looking forward to each day, something that you and they are grateful for, telling jokes, watching a funny programme, reading, listening to music, singing, walking and other forms of exercise.*

#### Engagement

Thinking about what your strengths are and your children's strengths and how to use and develop these in activities.

*Actions such as helping your children to name and recognise their strengths such as being organised, being kind, being sensitive to other's feelings, playing an instrument, writing, drawing, organising a video call with friends, helping or listening to a friend/ neighbour. Write a list of things you are good at. Also ask a friend or family member to write down your strengths.*

## **Relationships**

Connecting with others and receiving and giving support to each other to develop feelings of security and togetherness.

*Actions such as connecting with family and close friends via video call or 'phone call, encouraging acts of kindness and helping, playing team games, writing or telling others positive and kind comments.*

## **Meaning**

This about having a clear sense of purpose and acting in accordance with values and goals.

*Actions such as finding ways to be helpful, share knowledge and skills, help the members of you family and friends, doing a good thing for others each day and setting a personal goal.*

## **Accomplishment**

Achieving goals, no matter how small or how many and managing any setbacks.

*Actions such as completing a piece of work, having a to do list and ticking off a task such as tidying your room, thinking about learning something new such as juggling, reading a book, painting a picture, doing some exercise, taking on a new responsibility at home, in class or around school.*

## **2. Using mindfulness techniques to promote positive emotional well-being**

'Mindfulness helps train your attention to be more aware of what is actually happening, rather than worrying about what has happened or might happen' (Mindfulness in Schools Project). Therefore, mindfulness is paying attention to the here and now (Association for Mindfulness in Education) and helps develop self-acceptance.

### **Mindful activities**

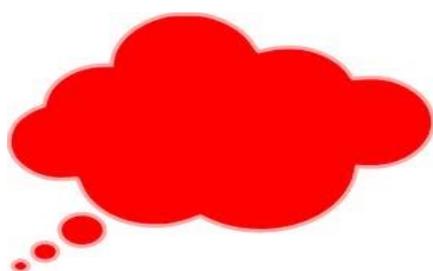
**Mindful walk**- take a walk either alone or with a family, friend. As you walk, pause reflect and listen to the sounds around you. What can you hear e.g. birds chirping? Can you smell anything e.g. flowers?

**Meditation**- this is when you sit comfortably in a quiet place and focus on your breathing. Mindfulness exercises for kids on  **YouTube**<sup>GB</sup> include: Still Quiet Place (Go Zen) also Mindful Minute: Quick Mindfulness Meditation Exercise for Kids by Go Zen. Alternatively, there are mindful apps such as Calm and Headspace.

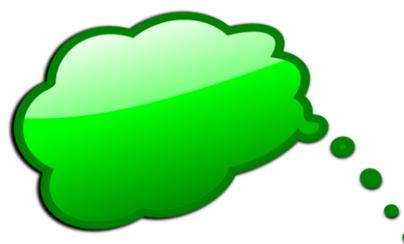
**Being grateful**- finding time to reflect on three things you are grateful every day can help to improve mental well-being. Create a happy journal or gratitude diary. Gratitude diaries have specifically been found to be beneficial for young people (*Diebel, Woodcock, Cooper & Brignell, 2016*). The diary could be a homemade book, traditional diary or blank notebook. For a free gratitude diary see: <https://heartandgratitude.com/lets-choose-to-be-grateful-free-gratitude-journal-for-kids/>

### 3. Challenging negative thought patterns

This strategy will help your children to challenge negative thought patterns. Our thoughts can impact on how we feel and behave in any situation. If we feel negatively about a situation this can affect how we think and feel in a situation. This can sometimes result in feelings of sadness, anxiety and stress. Therefore, if we challenge our negative thought patterns this can help us manage difficult situations and have a positive impact on our emotional well-being. Firstly, it is helpful to think of thoughts as being red and unhelpful or green and helpful (Rae, 2020). Rae (2020), suggests that we need to challenge red unhelpful thoughts by collecting evidence that challenges these negative thought patterns.



I can't do it!



I will get there in the end!

Thought	Support	Challenge	Others	Revised thought
What is the thought?	Evidence for this thought.	Evidence against this thought.	What would my friends/ family say?	What do you think now?

I am going to fail my maths GCSE.	I haven't concentrated in all classes. I am behind with my coursework.	I normally do okay in tests. My teacher has said I will have time to finish my coursework.	What would my Mum/ Dad or carer say? Mum would say I have plenty of time to revise.	I think I am likely to do okay in my GCSEs.
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#### 4. More tips for promoting well being

- Remember to look after yourself as well.
- Focus on one day at a time and do the best you can.
- Find exercises and activities that you enjoy.
- Stick to regular times for routine tasks like mealtimes and bedtimes.
- Create simple and time-saving systems such as for cooking and shopping.
- Eat a healthy diet for a healthy immune system and a clear mind.
- Keep hydrated- drink plenty of water and avoid lots of sugary drinks.
- Connect with nature for a rejuvenating boost.
- Develop self-help tools, such as mindfulness or relaxation.
- Make regular time for yourself with no external demands ('me' time).
- Plan ahead for busy morning times each evening by preparing lunches/bags.
- Have a clear and quiet homework space for your children.
- Be realistic about what you can achieve each day.
- Don't put additional pressure on yourselves or family members.
- Take time to play, for leisure and time out of the routines to rest.

- Build in some time of calm for your children.
- Reassure and help children with familiar and predictable routines.
- Show by your example skills such as handwashing and keeping calm.
- You need to be honest and where appropriate provide COVID information.
- Stick with clear and age-appropriate information.
- Take time to listen to your children and any concerns they may have.
- Children will need time to explain things in their own time and own way.
- Talk through worries and feelings that your children may be experiencing.
- Talk about ways you are managing feelings.
- Explain as simply as possible.
- Make regular time to talk to older children about how they are feeling
- Be available to listen if they are having problems or if they just want to talk.
- Answer questions as honestly as possible.
- Share and explore together different ways of taking care of each other.
- Maintaining routines so there is predictability, security in knowing what is happening and having structure to the day.
- Organise your days and work together as a family to make sure that you incorporate a varied range of activities.
- Make sure you all develop good habits such as sleep routines.
- Try to avoid playing on electronic devices before bedtime as they can stimulate the brain rather than calming you down.

- Write down family routines/timetables so all the family are clear and there is consistency.
- Have a family calendar.
- It is a good idea to keep track of your child's wellbeing, to make sure that they are OK and that their own mental health is not being adversely affected. If you keep an eye on how they are, you will be able to notice if they are having difficulties and deal with any issues quickly.
- Devise a simple way to check in with your child about their stress levels, for example 'On a scale of 1–10 how relaxed are you feeling? What is one thing that will bring that score closer to 10.
- Grow something in the garden or a pot on a window.
- Be creative – paint, redecorate, draw, colour e.g. [The Mindfulness Colouring Book](#)
- Volunteer and do a small act of kindness.
- Make a self-regulating box (see COVID-19 [www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk](http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk)).
- Spend time with pets.
- Explore the toolbox resources suggested below.

**To keep safe and well during COVID-19 it is recommended that parents and carers:**

Remember that your child may have different reactions to stress; be patient and understanding.

Stay connected to friends and family- although due to COVID-19 we remain socially distant it is important to keep emotionally connected to people for positive mental health (Perry, 2020).

Talking to your child honestly about COVID-19 may help to reduce any fears and confusion.

Monitor your children's health and keep them home from school if they are ill.

Ensure that safe drinking water is available

Teach and model good hygiene practices for your children. Wash your hands with soap and safe water frequently. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 65% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water, if hands are visibly dirty.

Toilets or latrines are clean and available at home.

Cough and sneeze into a tissue or your elbow.

Avoid touching your face, eyes, mouth, nose.

Ensure waste is safely collected, stored and disposed of.

Encourage your children to ask questions and express their feelings with you and their teachers.

Coordinate with the school to receive information and keep up to date with changes and safety procedures.

# Toolkit

Source	Where to find information and help
 <p>(with App suggested age ratings)</p>	<p>Calm – For sleep/meditation/relaxation. Ages 4+</p> <p>Calm Harm – DBT based help to manage self-harm. Ages 12+</p> <p>Chill Panda - A relaxation breathing exercise. Ages 4+.</p> <p>Feeling Good - Twelve relaxation/visualisation exercises. Ages 12+</p> <p>HeadSpace - Learn meditations and mindfulness Ages 4+</p> <p>MindfulGnats - Mindful/relaxation techniques. Ages 4+</p> <p>MindShift – CBT based approach for addressing anxiety. Ages 4+</p> <p>MoodGym – free interactive programme to help with low mood.</p> <p>Mood Kit – Tips and tools for everyday life. Ages 12+</p> <p>Mood Panda – A mood diary and support network. Ages 12+</p> <p>Smiling Mind - Meditations. Ages 7+</p> <p>Superbetter - Helps children tackle challenges. Age 13+</p> <p>Positive Penguins – resilience building app. Ages 4+</p> <p>Rise Above - Helps resilience with skills and knowledge. Ages 11+</p> <p>Youper – targets anxiety and depression. Ages 12+</p>
	<p><a href="https://www.annafreud.org">https://www.annafreud.org</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround">http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">http://www.childline.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.cosmickids.com">https://www.cosmickids.com</a> Services for families, including mental health and young carers' support.</p>

	<p><a href="http://www.family-action.org.uk">http://www.family-action.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="http://familylives.org.uk">http://familylives.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.giveusashout.org">https://www.giveusashout.org</a></p> <p>Information for single parents/carers. <a href="https://gingerbread.org.uk">https://gingerbread.org.uk</a></p> <p>Information about public services and benefits. <a href="https://gov.uk">https://gov.uk</a></p> <p>Local support networks for families with young children. <a href="https://home-start.org.uk">https://home-start.org.uk</a></p> <p>Mental health and general support services including helpline <a href="https://www.mentalhealthmatters.com">https://www.mentalhealthmatters.com</a></p> <p><a href="https://mensadviceline.org.uk">https://mensadviceline.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">http://www.mind.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="https://nationaldahelpline.org.uk">https://nationaldahelpline.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.place2be.org.uk">https://www.place2be.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk">http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk">https://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.samaritans.org">http://www.samaritans.org</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.themix.org.uk">https://www.themix.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="https://youngminds.org.uk">https://youngminds.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="http://minded.e-lfh.org.uk/families/index.html">http://minded.e-lfh.org.uk/families/index.html</a></p> <p>Support for children and anyone worried about a child. Includes Family Smiles groups for children who have a parent with a mental health problem. <a href="http://www.nspcc.org.uk">http://www.nspcc.org.uk</a></p> <p><a href="http://citizensadvice.org.uk">http://citizensadvice.org.uk</a></p>
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	<p>Beat (beating eating disorders) 0808 801 0711</p> <p>Child helpline: 0800 1111</p> <p>Childline- 0800 111 (24hr)</p> <p>Citizens Advice: 08444 111 444 (England)</p> <p>Gingerbread helpline: 0808 802 0925</p> <p>Home-Start freephone: 0800 068 63 68</p> <p>Mind: 0300 123 3393 (weekdays 9am-5pm)</p> <p>Men's advice line freephone UK: 0808 8010 327</p> <p>Mental Health Matters: 0191 516 3500</p> <p>The Mix- 0808 808 4994 (4-11pm)</p> <p>National Domestic Violence Helpline freephone: 0808 2000 247</p> <p>NSPCC adult helpline: 0808 800 5000</p> <p>Text Shout- 85258 (24hr)</p> <p>Samaritans- 116 123 (24hr)</p> <p><b>Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90 (24 hours, 7 days a week)</b></p> <p>Young Minds Messenger- text 85258 (24hr)</p> <p>Young Minds Parent's Helpline- 0808 802 5544 (weekdays- 9:30am- 4pm)</p>
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