

Police Mutual Helping Parents

During lockdown some parents have had to work as a key worker whilst worrying about whether they are putting their children at risk, others have had to work from home whilst home schooling the children and other parents have also had the concern of a reduced income due to being furloughed. You or members of your family may have been unwell, which is an added worry. In these unprecedented times, it's been tough for us all but even harder for parents with children of school age. You are now a teacher as well as a parent.

During this time you will want to protect your children by not showing them how you are feeling, but to never have any moments of anxiety or frustration is almost impossible especially at the moment. So, it's important to recognise these negative emotions, understand that it's normal to have these feelings and find a way to deal with them. If you can find moments to be calm and relaxed, these positive feelings will spread through the whole family.



Take
each day
at a
time

There are many different family situations, you may be a single parent or guardian or separated from your child's other parent.

The Government has said, for families where parents are separated, children under 18 can move between both homes. Some things to consider when deciding whether a child should visit both homes are:

- the children's health
- whether there's risk of infection
- if there are vulnerable people in either home

But it's important to do what's safe and right for everyone.



It is more important than ever that you factor in time for yourself.



Amidst the frustrations of present day family life, some of the suggestions below may help you as a parent to look after your own wellbeing.

Be kind to yourself

You may have a planned structure and timetable for your children to follow each day, which is great, but you need to be realistic, things will go wrong. When this happens don't be so hard on yourself. Instead feel proud of what you have achieved, however small you feel this is. If you feel good about yourself, you will be happier, this will then pass on to the other people around you, your children. Encourage your children to feel proud of themselves too.

It's understandable for you to be worried and anxious, we are living in uncertain times. If you are feeling stressed or low, this may be due to normal every day family life, not just due to coronavirus. This could be due to traumas at meal times or bed times, try and keep as much as your previous family structure as you can, for example, bedtime routine.

Ensure you spend time for yourself, as a parent, you usually put yourself at the bottom of your list of priorities, during lockdown your list has become longer, with home-schooling also to factor in to your day, so you may feel you have even less time for yourself, but it is more important now than ever that you look after your own physical and mental health. This may just be 20 mins to sit and read or relax in the bath, find a time when you are less likely to be interrupted or when your partner is looking after the children.

Physical exercise each day is vital to your overall wellbeing, this may be outside for a walk, run or cycle or inside doing an online exercise class, yoga or dance. This doesn't have to be for a long period of time, 20-30 mins will help uplift your mood.

Try to avoid listening to the news all day, as this may cause you to feel anxious.

You will have days when you feel completely overwhelmed with the situation, but remember this will pass.

Share the load

You may feel you have to do everything to ensure tasks are completed properly but that isn't the case, it may take your partner or child longer to complete the chore than it would you.

It may not be as perfect as you would like it to be, but it's good for you and for them to be involved with household chores and to feel like they are contributing.

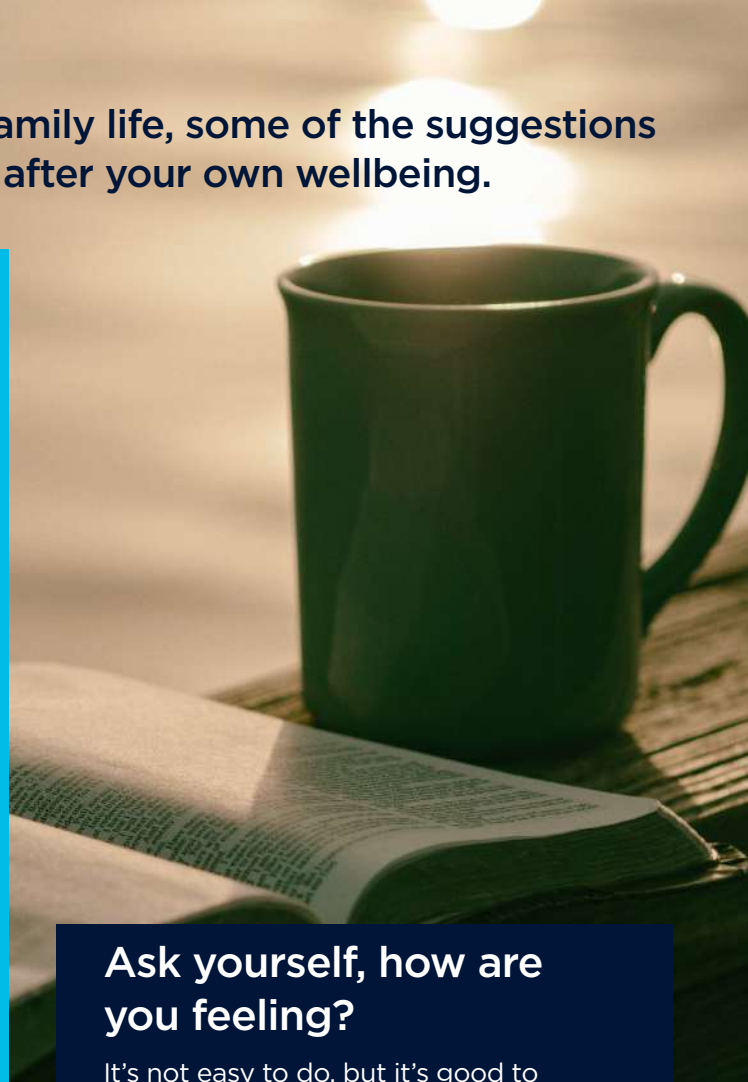
Even very young children can tidy the toys away and put dirty clothes in the wash basket.

If you and your partner are both working from home, share the home-schooling between you, agreeing a timetable in advance working around both of your work commitments. If you are a single parent, this may be even more difficult, perhaps ask a grandparent to help with a lesson online.

Ask yourself, how are you feeling?

It's not easy to do, but it's good to regularly check in with yourself, how are you feeling today, why do you feel that way? The more self-aware you are, the easier it is to find out what may have caused you to feel that way. You can then put things in place to reduce the impact. If you do feel low, do something different, this may be exercise, having a bath or listening to music.

It's also good to ask other members of your family the same questions and tell them how you are feeling. Encouraging open conversations about emotions will lend to less stigma about mental health. It's valuable for children to understand that it's ok to not be ok.





Create a routine

Most children and adults struggle without a structure, having a daily routine in place helps our wellbeing. Staying focused, knowing what happens next and feeling proud of achieving our goals makes us feel good.

Working parents are often stressed and feel like they aren't spending enough time with their child, under the current circumstances, we now also have to fit in home schooling and be chief entertainer for our children as well as working from home. This is not easy and most of us will feel like we aren't doing a good enough job at either role.

Routine can help children feel safe, secure and reassured so if you are separated parents keeping to your usual contact arrangements, as long as it's safe to, will help maintain consistency and routine. Talk to each other and to your children about any changes and explain the reasons for these so they feel involved.

A routine is important to gain some control, it can be as simple as your child getting up, washed, dressed and eaten breakfast ready to start the day by a specified time.

Stay connected with other parents

We all miss the face-to-face contact we would usually have with friends, but we can still find ways to reach out to them and to support one another. Talking to other parents who are in the same situation about how you are feeling will enable you to talk to someone outside of your household who understands what you are going through. You will be there to support each other, have a laugh, and discuss different activities and home schooling techniques & ideas.

We are all in this together and whilst everyone's circumstances may differ slightly, it's important to know that you are not the only parent who is struggling and feels the way you do. You may feel confident about teaching your child maths but not English, by reaching out to other parents, you may be able to help each other. Online parents groups can be really supportive. Try not to compare yourself to other families who you feel are coping better than you are, they may have other stresses that you aren't aware of.

This connection is even more important if you are a single parent.

Remember you can only do your best to support your child with their school work, you are not a qualified teacher with years of experience, you are a parent with different skills, use these to teach your children other things. This may be making a cake, gardening or decorating, all useful skills for the future.

If your children are old enough ask them to help with the timetable for the week, if they've helped produce it they are more likely to want to stick to it. Have some rewards included during the day, including physical and fun activities.

Exercise can be linked to home schooling, a walk with your children or an online fun workout, can be their P.E lesson.

Whilst routine is important it is not essential, if it goes wrong and your child refuses to do the maths they have been set, putting a DVD on for them instead is not the end of the world, you can try and do the maths in a few hours or on another day.

Family harmony

We are currently spending more time with our families in close proximity to one another, this makes it difficult for family members to find their own space so it is completely understandable if there are more arguments, misunderstandings and disagreements in your family at the moment. It may also mean that small or trivial problems feel magnified, and this could increase tensions and cause arguments to break out.

When this does happen, don't worry or give yourself a hard time, just try to sort things out as soon as you can, however, if you or your child needs time to calm down that's also fine. Once you are all calm, talk it through, ask your child what they think will help the family to avoid arguments and apologise. Ensure you and your older children all have time on your own. This should reduce the chance of the same thing happening again.

Being honest with your children, and asking them to do the same with you, will lead to a more open family life and will help the whole family's wellbeing.

Ensure you still have fun and spend time as a family, this may be playing in the garden, watching a family film or playing a board game.

At the end of each day, talk to your children and encourage them to write down a few positive things or what they are grateful for, about their day. This boosts morale, encourages a more positive outlook and can help to let you know as a parent that you are doing a great job.

You will get stressed, frustrated, annoyed, but this doesn't make you a bad parent. Remember you are doing your best.

- The most important thing to remember is that you and your children are safe. If you are struggling with working from home read our guide [here](#).
- Like adults, children will respond to the current situation in different ways, if you feel your child is struggling with the current situation, read our Supporting Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic [here](#).
- To keep your children occupied for a few hours, they may like the Police Mutual activity pack, which can be found [here](#).

For more information about the products and services available from Police Mutual:

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