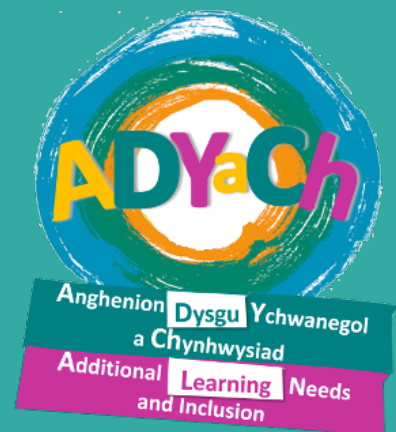


COVID-19: SUPPORTING CHILDREN DURING SELF-ISOLATION



APRIL 2020

Advice and Guidance for Families:
*Gwynedd & Môn Educational Psychology
Service*



Foreword

On coronavirus

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK, we have all faced significant changes in our day-to-day lives that pose difficult challenges. In particular, the decision to close schools in Wales and the rest of the UK for the children of non-keyworkers has forced both parents and children to adapt to self-isolation at home. As a result, stress and anxiety in both parents and children are expected to increase as we collectively try to make the best of our current situation. While we do not have the power to change this situation or how long it will last, we do have control over how we respond to it. This guidance document from your local educational psychology service aims to help parents and guardians elicit a positive experience while self-isolating with their children. The Educational Psychology Service has made a statement which can be found [here](#).

"It is natural that children will have questions and worries about Coronavirus. Giving them the space to ask these questions and have answers is a good way to ease anxiety."

– British Psychological Society

Communicating the Situation to Your Child

Adults may need to support children to understand their emotions and help them to find activities that will reduce their stress level. Music, exercise, play and other creative activities are good choices.

Our advice can be summarised as:

- Be truthful but remember your child's age.
- Allow children to ask questions.
- Try to manage your own worries.

[The British Psychological Society has published more details on how to communicate COVID-19 to children.](#)

Maintaining Wellbeing during Lockdown

Being out of school for an indeterminable duration, with reduced access to the outdoors, social spaces and play facilities is likely to be difficult for many families. For families living in overcrowded conditions, this will add to the stresses of daily life considerably. Families living nearby for extended periods are likely to find this to be stressful.

Parents will need to be aware of their own stress responses and try to identify how their children's signs of stress. Symptoms of pressure will vary for each child. Some children

may articulate their worries, while others may become withdrawn. Some children may display challenging behaviours.

Before going into detail, here are three simple steps to managing stress and anxiety during this time of social distancing.

1. **Keep a Routine:** Whether its work or school that is postponed, keeping a routine is very challenging when our usual routines are disrupted. If you are working from home, try to find a dedicated space to work and save as many elements of your working routine as possible (but don't criticise yourself when this isn't possible!). For children, dedicated time to play and the use of educational resources from school or free websites such as [twinkl](#), [Scholastic](#), [Quizlet](#) or [BBC Bitesize](#) can help fill that gap (But no one expects a full timetable at this time!).
2. **Be aware of Media:** While staying up to date is essential, try to limit this where possible. If social or broadcast media is a trigger for stress or anxiety for members of the family, you must reduce your exposure to it.
3. **Look after yourself:** For parents and guardians, you must prioritise your wellbeing as hard as that may seem. Remember that you can't look after others when you're not well! *Enough sleep, the right food and enough daily activity are the most essential elements of self-care.*

Radical Acceptance

One of the most challenging things about our current situation is the lack of control we have and the uncertainty we're all experiencing. Stress and anxiety will likely be even more prevalent if we resist accepting a situation for what it is.

Radical acceptance means accepting life for what it is and not resisting what you cannot or choose not to change. Radical acceptance is about seeing life factually and accepting the degree of your control. Remember that you can accept a situation that you disagree with – you're not approving a situation through acceptance, but you are saving a lot of mental energy by not resisting it! *A useful video on Radical Acceptance can be found [here](#).*

5 ways to wellbeing

12 years ago, the New Economics Foundation reviewed over 400 scientific papers to come up with guidance on how to improve our mental wellbeing – they then published these [5 ways to wellbeing](#). We have also added a 5 ways to wellbeing resource [on our webpage for coronavirus resources](#).

1. Connect with Others

While very important, this is particularly challenging during this crisis. Guidelines are clear that self-isolating means that we must only socialise face-to-face with those that we are living with. Online platforms such as video calls have sprung up to enable us to see friends

and family. While it may seem unnatural to contact our loved ones in this way, it is a useful method of staying connected.

2. Be Physically Active

Government advice state that everyone (in groups of no more than two from the same household) can go out each day for a walk, cycle or run. A host of free online group workouts are available, from dance classes to yoga. There's a vast range of different physical capabilities due to health conditions, age and ability, so find the right form for your family.

3. Keep Learning

Learning something new or improving a skill you already have is a way of shutting out the outside world for a bit and giving you a sense of self-confidence. Think about what you have wanted to do or things you'd like to improve a means of starting.

4. Give

There are many ways you can help others while still following government guidance. Giving blood is more important than ever and still possible to do during the lockdown. Virtual support can also be provided to friends and family who may be self-isolating alone - some are even bringing essentials to family and neighbours that may be elderly or have physical or health problems or donating to local food banks (if you can afford it).

5. Be Present and Mindful

This is often assumed to be mindfulness. In current circumstances, it's difficult to avoid worrying about the future of our home, our family or workplace. Taking some time each day to talk about how your family is feeling may be helpful. If you're fortunate enough to spend some time outdoors, take the time to notice the sounds and sights of nature or the company of others.

The NHS have a [webpage on the 5 ways to wellbeing](#) and the think tank that published them have [written information on using the 5 ways during a time of social distancing](#).

Self-care (sleep, eat and exercise)

Unsurprisingly, how well we look after ourselves physically has a massive impact how well we are emotionally or mentally. The three most important factors to consider here are 1) *are we getting enough sleep?* 2) *Are we eating enough or are our meals balanced and nutritional?* And are we getting enough forms of physical activity?

The Educational Psychology Service

The EPS provides assessment and intervention for children with additional learning needs as well as consultation and support to school

staff and families. You can find out more about the service and what we provide [here](#).

In this document we aim to provide useful advice and resources that can be used for families during self-isolation to support education and mental health. On [the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service website](#) you can download the coronavirus resources we have collected.

Tell us how can we help

Like many of us, the Educational Psychology Service is trying to adapt to the changes following the closure of schools and the wider UK lockdown. We are still in the process of finding the best possible way to support families, teachers and children in both their education and psychological wellbeing as well as provide a response to the new challenges coronavirus has brought.

If you have any questions or feedback on how we can better support families or schools, please get in touch with us on twitter @seicolegol or via email:

GweinyddolADYaCH@gwynedd.llyw.cymru

A Reminder of Government Announcements in Wales

The Welsh Government has published considerations before sending children to school [here](#). The Welsh Government has also advised that schools will be closed to most children with the exceptions of:

- Children of **key workers** working in sectors deemed of national importance such as *blue light services, health and social care, transportation, food and essential resources and key areas of local or central government* (a full list of keyworkers can be found [here](#)).
- **Vulnerable children** – broadly defined as *children with a social worker i.e. those children classed as 'Children in Need', on a Child Protection Plan, or in local authority care.*

The Welsh Government has also indicated that there will be provision for children who are eligible for free school meals. Kirsty Williams, Education Minister, announced that schools will have the flexibility to provide meals to children eligible for free school meals. Details from the Welsh Government regarding free school meals can be found [here](#).