ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Be the Change

WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

Coping with COVID-19

A guide to support parents & carers of children

SBNI
Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

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WHAT DID JUST HAPPEN?

This booklet is intended to offer helpful suggestions and resources for families to support parents, children and adolescents deal with stress and strengthen meaningful connections together.

Overnight our world has been turned upside down, or at least that's what it may feel like. As a result of this new virus we are living our lives in very different ways: our families' routines have been disrupted and for some we have been separated from the people we love and care about.

This may have caused feelings of uncertainty. When we are unsure of our future this can trigger stress reactions and feelings of anxiety. Our children may feel this too, they are just the same as us. We as parents and carers want the very best for our children but currently we are facing challenges which may make us feel anxious about the future for our families.

At the back of this booklet you will find some organisations that are providing resources to support us all in these difficult times.

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WHAT DID JUST HAPPEN?

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WHAT DID JUST HAPPEN?

IS THIS YOU? DO YOU FEEL LIKE THIS?

This is perfectly normal, we are facing difficult, unpredictable circumstances, experiences that we are unsure about. This may cause us to feel anxious. Anxiety is an emotion that can be triggered by stress, it can be known as a warning signal, very useful in times of threat, but sometimes can overwhelm us. It is important to recognise our feelings as this can help us to find ways to manage our stress.

We need to allow ourselves permission to acknowledge these feelings. Feelings are important because they can be telling us that we are overwhelmed, perhaps feeling that we can't cope as well as we normally do. Recognising that we are stressed can be the first step we take to managing it.

The human brain is amazing, it is constantly trying to keep us safe and find solutions to dealing with difficulties. However when the brain is bombarded with new unfamiliar challenges, feelings of stress can overwhelm us. Sometimes we may not even be able to answer simple questions, we may feel 'foggy' or just want to lie down, our brain is saying:

- stop
- pause
- look after yourself.

Sometimes we may not even be able to answer simple questions.

Let's look at what we can do to help ourselves first.

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WHAT DID JUST HAPPEN?

Here are some useful tips to help us recognise fears and anxieties that we might be feeling and what we can do to try to calm ourselves so that we can calm our children. The brain model shows us what is happening when we are becoming very stressed and ways we can calm ourselves. Work from the bottom up starting at number 1, this is the way the brain sends out warning signs of stress, so this is the way we need to calm ourselves to manage stress.

3 This is the reflective and problem solving centre. Connection techniques: Make contact with a friend or family member. Make a phonecall or connect on line with one of our organisations listed. Sit down watch funny videos or clips. Make time for play; play is so important in helping us to recover from stressful circumstances. Play helps us to form connections whether that be with our children or creating something individually. Listen to soft soothing music, which will help the brain to calm and release happy hormones!

2 This is the Emotional centre: as a result of stress you may feel tearful, angry, tired, or irritable. Calming techniques: Try to name these emotions, whilst taking deep breaths keep repeating I am safe, I am feeling anxious right now but I am safe. Try a 3-3-3 rule, look at 3 things that you can see, name them, then listen for 3 different sounds that you can hear, name them and finally focus on three parts of the body that you can move and move them. When you feel ready stand up and spend time walking about or even jumping on the spot. Any type of exercise will release chemical hormones that help to calm stressed minds.

1 This is the alarm system: you may have a rapid heart rate, feel sweaty, cold, shivery and your breathing may be shallow. Calming techniques: Concentrate on deep breathing allowing your stomach to direct your breath, as you breathe in through your nose allow your stomach to rise, let it fall slowly with your breath out. Stand or sit up straight with your feet flat on ground. Remind yourself that you are safe this feeling is temporary, keep repeating these patterns.

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WHY ARE MY CHILDREN/ADOLESCENTS BEHAVING LIKE THIS?

Children/adolescents have exactly the same emotions as us. Like tiny babies they need their care givers to soothe them. When our teenager says "I hate you right now, leave me alone"...their emotional brain is hijacking the rest of the brain and they are unable to regulate their emotions effectively.

Try not to take it personally, what they may actually be saying is " I am scared, I can't cope, I need space." Remember children learn from our actions, generally speaking, if we are calm, we are better able to calm our stressed children.

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CALMING STRESSED CHILDREN ADOLESCENTS

Here are some useful tips to help us help our children and adolescents recognise these fears and anxieties and try to calm themselves. Adolescents may not want hugs but they like to know that their parent/carer is close by. Reassurance that you are there for them is crucial. The brain model shows us what is happening and ways we can help our children/adolescents calm themselves. Again work from the bottom up starting at number 1.

3 This is the time to give lots of reassurance and praise, you have helped them to calm and only now will they be able to process information. Ask yourself is this the right time to settle down for study? Are they calm? Allow time and space for play. Playing allows children and young people to work through their emotions and feelings, helping them to relax, deal with uncertainty, allowing them to have fun.

2 Children may struggle to recognise their emotions so we as adults have to try and interpret their emotional states using sentences such as: "I am wondering if you are feeling…… right now" this helps children and adolescents to label their emotions. Allow them space, do not stand in front of them demanding eye contact. Follow the 3-3-3 rule that we used for ourselves. Allow them to move about, jump up and down, which will help to release stress busting hormones. Encourage short repetitive tasks, like popping bubble wrap or building blocks, pop on the tv, watch a funny video together.

1 Use a soothing tone of voice, this helps calm and regulate. Offer a warm blanket or hugs if appropriate. Stay close by, encourage deep breathing exercises. Offer chewy sweets as this helps to bring them back into the present moment. Constantly reassure them that they are safe with you.

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CONNECTION ACTIVITIES:

Finding something we really enjoy doing is an important way to managing and relieving our stress. Here are some examples to get you started:

Yoga and mindfulness can relieve stress by helping adults and children to focus on breathing and relaxation.

Physical exercise really helps relieve stress, increasing our mood and energy, 30 minutes of exercise a day can really help, such as walking or gardening.

Fun family activities strengthen family ties, create memories and teach children new skills, releasing their creative talents, such as cooking together, drawing together etc.

Playboard NI says: Play and playing provides valuable coping and learning opportunities for children and young people. During free play children are able to make their own choices. We know that when children have more opportunities for free play, they have better physical and mental health. Visit Playboard's website for more ideas. Click on logo below.

PLAYBOARD NI
LEADING THE PLAY AGENDA

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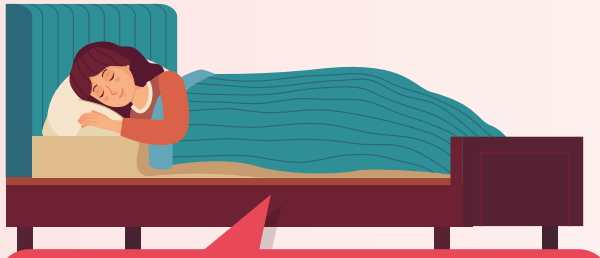
CONNECTION ACTIVITIES:

Talk to a member of your family or a friend: sharing your feelings with someone can help relieve stress and anxiety. Stay connected.



Sleep is essential for your well-being, both for you and your children. Getting enough quality sleep at the right times can help alleviate stress.

Remember the S Rule for healthy lives:

STIMULATION: new challenges, cooking, creating, activities, exercise

SLEEP: good quality sleep is essential for relieving stress

STRUCTURE: Build a daily routine which includes play, learning, exercise, mealtimes together and sleep

If you would rather talk to someone else here are some organisations that can help:

Parenting NI	Lifeline	childline	NSPCC
0808 8010 722	0808 808 8000	0800 1111	0808 800 5000

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Below is a list of some resources and support organisations that you may find useful:

The Belfast Trust have produced some wonderful videos that are very appropriate for not only those who are going out to work during this pandemic but also for those who are staying at home. Please click on the following links:

PREPARING FOR WORK AND MAKING THE MOST OF BEING HOME

HOPE IN WORK

This 5 minute exercise is hoped to allow you to focus your attention into the day ahead.

Hope in Work

JOY AT HOME

This 5-minute exercise is hoped to help you make the most of your time at home.

Joy at Home

HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL HINTS AND TIPS FROM BELFAST TRUST

HSC Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Self Help Materials

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

The Public Health Agency NI has produced a Directory of Services A-Z for each Trust Area in NI; click the link below for a list of helpful support organisations in your area:

Directory of services to help improve mental health and emotional wellbeing
Belfast area 2020
HSC Health and Social Care

FAMILY SUPPORT HUBS

These are multi agency support networks who help and support families please click on the following link for more information:

CYPSP
Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership

SBNI
Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland

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