



# Managing anxiety

Over the past couple of months, we have seen the heavy lockdown restrictions slowly lifted and our lives are beginning to regain a certain level of normality. However, as health guidance becomes less clear and rules are easily broken or forgotten, it is easy for stress and anxiety to increase for many of us.

Below are a few suggestions to help you consider ways to manage stress and anxiety in yourself and other family members.

## Back to normality?



After spending the past six months being told how careful we need to be, for many people the transition out of lockdown is confusing and brings more anxiety than going in! We know that the virus still exists, however rules are being lifted and places are reopening.

Many children, young people and adults may still have concerns about contracting the virus and it is important to reassure them of the safety precautions that have now been put in place across the country. Discussing and practising things they can continue to do to keep themselves safe can be helpful.

Keeping routines such as everyone washing their hands straight away when they come home is not only following health guidance but can make home feel like an extra safe place. Some people may benefit from having the information presented to them visually or in an easy read format.

## Communicate your comfort zone



With social distancing rules easing, many people are taking the opportunity to see friends and family and or go back out

into the community. However, that doesn't mean everyone has to. It is important to know what is comfortable for you and your family.

Decide as a family what level of precautions you want to take and communicate them clearly to friends and extended family. If asking people to wash their hands or sit further away when they come to visit makes you or your family members less anxious then it is important that other people respect that.

## Write things down

With the family returning to school or work it is likely that as parents you will be juggling lots more daily tasks. Trying to remember everything solely in your head uses up a lot of thought processing energy and inevitably leads to feelings of stress.

Externalising "to do" lists and timetables by writing them down not only frees up head space but also allows your family to know what's going on and perhaps even help out without having to be asked! A simple





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whiteboard and calendar in a shared space in the house such as the kitchen or near the front door can be an effective tool.

## Reflect on the good parts of lockdown life

Try making a list of all the things that you enjoyed doing during lockdown. Perhaps it was going for family walks, or virtual quiz nights with friends.

As schedules return to normal try to find time to continue doing some of those things. Or perhaps try to have the occasional lazy day where you have nothing planned and the whole family all stay at home, watching a movie marathon in your pyjamas!

## Happiness hunting



Set yourselves a challenge to find (at least) one thing that genuinely makes you smile each day. This could be anything! From something very small like seeing a cute dog on your morning journey or a funny advert on the TV, to something more personal such as someone being kind to you or your favourite sports team winning a match. Whatever it is, make a note, take a photo on your phone or simply try to remember it, then as a family share what made you happy that day.

## Take a minute

As the pace of our daily lives picks back up it is easy to become overwhelmed by everything going on in your day and the expectations placed on you. So, throughout the day incorporate short one or two minute breaks – this could as simple as stopping to have a drink, stretch or step away from your work.

Encouraging children to do the same can be helpful but ensure that you communicate this with their teacher(s) so that they understand what they are doing. For children it may



also be helpful to have a timer so that they are able to know when they should re-focus on the task at hand.

## It's good to talk

Having a chance to talk about worries or concerns can help everyone manage their feelings. Some children and young people may prefer to write things down or draw picture. If it is difficult to talk about worries in person try finding an alternative, using items such as worry monsters/dolls or creating a worry box or bag to place written worries in to.

When talking about feelings, particularly things that are making the person upset or frustrated, it is important to give them time to speak and try to avoid responding in a way that might be dismissive of their feelings such as saying "you shouldn't worry about that".

We also tend to jump straight to "fix it" mode but often just simply acknowledging that person's feelings can be more powerful in the moment. Use phrases such as "yes that must be {worrying/frustrating/upsetting/annoying etc}". If you want to offer a possible solution you could revisit the discussion later saying something like "I've been thinking, and I wonder if {solution} might help with your worry".



## And relax....

We all have different ways to relax and what works for one person may not work for someone else. The aim of relaxing is to feel at ease and in the moment. Whilst some people achieve this through practising meditation or mindfulness techniques, others may get lost in an activity.

People often relax by doing activities such as reading, colouring, creating something, completing a puzzle or playing a game. It may also be a break to fulfil a sensory need or to simply daydream. Doing some sort of quiet, relaxing activity before bedtime can help the whole family get to sleep better.

