

Mental Health and Wellbeing in Families

This is a booklet with activities and templates for families with children of any age to use and adapt. They have been collated/adapted from elsewhere or designed. The ideas are useful anytime but have specifically been designed with a period of self isolation in mind.

Section 1 – Template for daily activities based on CBT principles

Plan your day and ensure a healthy mind during this period of isolation	
1) Self – take some time to take care of yourself	
S	
2) Achieve – do something that will give you a sense of achievement	
A	
3) Family and Friends – spend some time with someone who is close to you	
F	
4) Exercise and Enjoyment – choose ONE-TWO exercise slots and also something you enjoy/fun	

<h1>E</h1>	
3 Blessings – 3 things to be thankful for from your day	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Date:	

Example of the above template filled in:

Here are some examples/ideas for each section:	
1) Self – take some time to take care of yourself	
<h1>S</h1>	<p><i>Pick from the list or choose something for yourself!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a soak in the bath or a long shower • Pamper – wash your hair, do a face mask, paint your nails • Spend time off your phone • Meditate • Mindfulness (see section 2) • Journal – identify how you are feeling today, what you have done etc • Do something creative/colouring etc • Play a video game / game on your phone • Dress smartly or do your make up • Cook something and enjoy it • Read a book • Listen to music • Do a puzzle

2) Achieve – do something that will give you a sense of achievement	
A	<p><i>Pick from the list or make your own</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix something that is broken • Do a piece of work • Tidy a drawer or cupboard • Sort through your inbox • Wash some marks off the wall • Clean something in the house or the car • Write someone a letter/card • If you have a garden, tidy it up or plant something. If you don't, plant herbs in doors. • Plan lunches for the week and prepare them • Create a story – draw inspiration from what is happening around us and create some form of story. It could be cartoons, a picture book, a play, a short story or the beginning of a novel. Have fun with the characters and plots, and ask other members of the family to feedback or add ideas. • Run a mini olympic event with household objects – who can throw something the furthest, the best paper airplane etc. There are lots of ideas online. • Create a podcast about something you like
3) Family and Friends – spend some time with someone who is close to you	
F	<p><i>Pick from the list or make your own</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play a board game with someone you live with • Phone or text an old friend or a family member you haven't checked in with yet • Phone/message or facetime someone you are close to • Share a funny video with each other • Eat a meal with someone in your house or facetime someone while you eat a meal • Hug someone you live with • Tea party – gather together for a hot drink • Have someone in the family make up a quiz for everyone else to take part in • Have a long and funny conversation with someone close to you • Check in on each other (for example, using the wellbeing cards with children) • Watch something with others (even if online) then talk about it
4) Exercise and Enjoyment – choose TWO exercise and	

also something you enjoy/fun	
E	<p><i>Exercise – pick or choose your own</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go for a walk or run • Make your own circuit in the house – sit-ups, step-ups at the base of the stairs etc • Follow an on-line exercise routine - many are free during this time (like Davina McCall or Joe Wicks) • A daily walk that involves some kind of scavenger hunt where you write a list of things to spot on the way • A daily walk with a photo challenge – for example, taking a photo of things that are 5 different colours that you have listed beforehand • Practice some boxing moves • Yoga • Dance
3 Blessings – 3 things to be thankful for from your day	
1.	<p>Make your own that are relevant for your day, but here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sun was out • A friend got in touch • Something I ordered arrived • Someone/something made me laugh • I made it through another day
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt angry but didn't express it poorly • Someone appreciated something I did • I managed to exercise • My exercise made me feel good • I forgave someone for something
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt hungry and had food to fill me • I'm getting more used to my situation • Achieving something / doing a task made me feel good • I had a good conversation with someone • Because I wasn't going out, I didn't need to get dressed and had a relaxed day
Date:	

The above is based on ACE ACTIVITY – comes from CBT practice

Aim for a healthy life balance: Achieve, Connect, Enjoy

Our mood can be greatly affected by what we do, when, and with whom.

In order to maintain a healthy sense of wellbeing, we need to balance what we do. We can use the acronym ACE to help us remember:

ACHIEVE - work, chores, study

CONNECT - with friends, family, community

ENJOY – play, fun, pleasure

When we feel stressed, we often spend more time doing things that help us achieve, but less of enjoyment and connecting with others. When we feel depressed, we withdraw and isolate ourselves and do much less, and when we feel anxious, we tend to avoid places or people where we feel anxious.

Make time for yourself each day - relaxation, fun, enjoyment. Create a healthy balance - allow time for activities which give you a sense of achievement, those that give a sense of connecting with and of being close to others, and of a sense of enjoyment.

These activities affect our brain chemistry by acting directly on the release of neurotransmitters, and are our natural anti-stress and anti-depressants.

- Achievement stimulates dopamine
- Purposeful activity stimulates serotonin
- Connecting with other people stimulates oxytocin
- Exercise stimulates endorphins

Therefore, making sure we keep doing these ACE activities every day, will help improve/maintain our well-being.

Based on model by Helen Shakespeare

Section 2 – an introduction to mindfulness for families

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. While mindfulness is something we all naturally possess, it's more readily available to us when we practice on a daily basis.

Whenever you bring awareness to what you're directly experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you're being mindful. And there's growing research showing that when you train your brain to be mindful, you're actually remodeling the physical structure of your brain.

The explanations of mindfulness on the headspace or smiling mind Youtube channels provide good starting points.

Why might it be useful for me or my family just now?

Firstly, we are being overwhelmed with information right now and taking time to be mindful helps us to focus on one thing at a time and see the present moment clearly. Getting into the practice of it can help to stop us from getting overwhelmed with what is to come tomorrow, and just get through today well instead. Secondly, although mindfulness can be done as an ongoing thing all day, taking time to do a mindfulness activity helps to slow down our bodily functions which are at risk of chronically being in a state of stress response just now. Lastly, building mindfulness into our day helps to create a “buffer” - it is basically shown to help us respond to information and situations, instead of simply reacting. Being mindfully present means we can notice that something triggers us and continue to observe ourselves as we have an emotional response, and choose how that response should look. This will be particularly important during this time of constant change.

What are some things I could try?

1 Guided mindfulness apps

Calm - free week then charges. Has daily calm sessions, music tracks engineered to keep you calm while doing other activities, Calm Body (guided videos on mindful movements) and Sleep Stories (narrated by celebrities like Matthew McConaughey, designed to help unwind and sleep).

Headspace - free download, has some packs free, was recently offering to be free for teachers (might still be). One of the best known. The 10-part basic course is a good starting point that lets you choose how long you have.

Portal - £3.99 to download. Focussed around relaxing sounds from nature.

Smiling Mind - Free to download. Australian narration. Asks you lots to pick our meditations they feel will be most suitable for you.

2 Take an online course

The NHS recommend [bemindfulonline.com](https://www.bemindfulonline.com) - it gives you a free trial and the whole course is £30. It is 10 sessions lasting 30 minutes and the NHS say they have seen reductions in stress, depression and anxiety in Scottish patients who have participated.

3 Mindfulness colouring: in order for this to be mindful, it requires focus. Mindful Colouring asks us to focus on how we choose and apply colour in a design to bring our awareness to the

present moment. This process is similar to meditation, we let go of any thoughts about tomorrow or yesterday, or what we are going to do when we finish. Basically - “in the current moment, I am colouring”, then when we catch ourselves thinking about worries or the future, we bring our awareness back to this.. “I am colouring in the circles red” and so on.

There are many suitable colouring sheets online or you can normally pick up mindfulness colouring in a local supermarket.

4 Body Scan

Key idea: Having an awareness of your body and how it is feeling is important. Your body reflects your mind and your mind reflects your body. Most of us only pay attention when something goes wrong like when we ache, or our back hurts or our neck is in pain or even we notice that we want to go to the loo! Most of us rarely stop and properly take care of ourselves until our body shouts at us in some way. Mindful awareness enables us to be more conscious of our body’s signal and take action early enough to prevent some problems from happening whilst also maintaining wellbeing.

Activity: This is a simple activity where you can ask colleagues to observe / get a sense of each part of their body – including breathing. 45 seconds to focus on each body part is a good way to strengthen participants focus as it’s not too long or short a time.

What to do: Ideally, you would do this with a partner so you can read this to them (alternatively, learn the order you do things in for yourself): You can start with them noticing their feet, wriggling their toes and getting a real sense of their feet. Noticing how they feel. Ask participants to bring their attention to their ankles, then up to their knees and thighs so that participants can scan their whole leg. Ask for participant’s attention to be on their hips and lower back. Take their attention to the top of their back and shoulders. Take their attention to the top of their arms going down to elbows, then wrists, then hands and fingers. Finally bring their attention to their chests and stomach. This part of the body is very expressive and so may feel heavy / anxious etc. Ask them if they feel heavy or anxious or worried then they should let that out as they breathe out. Here you might want to increase time from 45 seconds to a 75 seconds.

5 Gratitude practice Key message: “When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you.” Lao Tzu Sometimes we can end up focusing on what we don’t have and feel miserable for it. This can then feed our fears and other negative feelings. Gratitude helps put things in perspective by getting you to focus on things that you do have and as a result can help make us happier, benefit our relationships, improve health and reduce stress.

Activity: Could work as a family activity where everyone on rotation has to say something they feel grateful for. This could be anything, like breathing, having a comfortable bed, wearing

favorite shoes etc. Initially it might be difficult but the more you rotate the easier it gets! This could have a positive impact on person's outlook.

6 RAIN

Recognise - Identify the emotions you have just now (e.g. "Okay, I'm feeling anxious)

Allow - allow it - just let it be there. Don't try to fit or control or judge the emotion straight away.

Investigate it - Begin to identify where in your body that emotion is. Find out how it feels and breathe with it, with a gentle quality of attention.

Nurture - Allow yourself to nurture yourself. That might be putting a hand on your heart, or repeating a soothing message to yourself. "Anxiety, thanks for trying to protect me - it is okay right now" etc.

7 Mindful breathing: This exercise can be done standing up or sitting down, and pretty much anywhere at any time. If you can sit down in the meditation (lotus) position, that's great, if not, no worries. Either way, all you have to do is be still and focus on your breath for just one minute. Start by breathing in and out slowly. One breath cycle should last for approximately 6 seconds. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, letting your breath flow effortlessly in and out of your body. Let go of your thoughts. Let go of things you have to do later today or pending projects that need your attention. Simply let thoughts rise and fall of their own accord and be at one with your breath. Purposefully watch your breath, focusing your sense of awareness on its pathway as it enters your body and fills you with life. Then watch with your awareness as it works work its way up and out of your mouth and its energy dissipates into the world.

8 Mindful senses: this is particularly useful for children because it has strong anchors to focus us on the present. It involves first of all concentrating only on 5 things you can see just now, then moving to 4 things you can hear, then 3 things you can feel against you, then 2 things you can smell, then 1 thing you can taste.

9 Mindful immersion: The intention of this exercise is to cultivate contentment in the moment and escape the persistent striving we find ourselves caught up in on a daily basis. Rather than anxiously wanting to finish an everyday routine task in order to get on with doing something else, take that regular routine and fully experience it like never before. For example: if you are cleaning your house, pay attention to every detail of the activity. Rather than treat this as a regular chore, create an entirely new experience by noticing every aspect of your actions: Feel and become the motion when sweeping the floor, sense the muscles you use when scrubbing the dishes, develop a more efficient way of wiping the windows clean. The idea is to get creative and discover new experiences within a familiar routine task. Instead of labouring

through and constantly thinking about finishing the task, become aware of every step and fully immerse yourself in the progress. Take the activity beyond a routine by aligning yourself with it physically, mentally and spiritually. Who knows, you might even enjoy the cleaning for once!

Section 3 – wellbeing cards for families

Right now, I am feeling...



Awesome

Thrilled

Cheerful

Happy

Grateful

Proud

Excited

Calm

Ok



Unhappy

Upset

Unwell

Down

Lonely

Worried



I am feeling this way because...

Remember it's ok to feel not so great!

What do you want to do next? Have a look at the wellbeing cards for some suggestions.

Date:



Right now, I am feeling...

I am feeling this way because...



Awesome
Thrilled
Cheerful
Happy
Grateful
Proud
Excited
Calm

Ok



Unhappy
Upset
Unwell
Down
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Worried



Remember it's ok to feel not so great!
What do you want to do next? Have a look at
the wellbeing cards for some suggestions.



Date:



Talk it through

Share how you feel with a family member, a teacher, a friend or someone else that you trust.

You could tell them about how proud you are of something or you could talk through any worries you have.



Shred it!

Try writing worries or negative thoughts down on a piece of paper and shredding them!



Clear the air...

Go outside and get some fresh air. You could go for a walk, a jog, a bike ride, play in the park or just watch the clouds go by.



Rock Out!

Listen to your favourite songs! Dance, sing, rock out or just listen and enjoy!



Memes!

I have a collection of AWESOME memes for every occasion. If you think these will help, choose this card.



Wee note...

Need a wee note of positivity, kindness and encouragement? Or a terrible joke? Choose this card and I will write a wee note for you!



Doodle it!

Doodle or draw something. How about a pizza loving cat or a lama with a pineapple for a head? Take some time to doodle.



Make a fort

Make a blanket fort or a den outside!



Get creative!

Do something you really enjoy! You could make something for yourself or someone else, paint, code, invent, test! It's your choice.



Take a break

Take a break from everyone and everything. Have some quiet time.



Mindfulness

Listen to a mindfulness app like Headspace or Calm. This can help you relax when you aren't feeling great.



Play

Play a card or board game with someone.



Read

Take some time out to read a book, graphic novel or magazine. You could even listen to an audiobook too.



Chill

Lie down and chill on a beanbag / chair / sofa / bed for 10 minutes.



Cuddle

Give someone a cuddle. It could be a pet, a friend, a family member or a teacher.



Mindfulness jar

Create a mindfulness jar using water, glitter and dish soap. Shake it and watch the magic happen!



Laugh and laugh some more!

Watch some funny videos on YouTube. Animal ones are my favourite!

Tell some jokes or ask a friend, family member or teacher to tell you some!



Bubbles

Blow some bubbles. Watch them fall and blow away in the wind. Or try to catch as many as you can!

