SEND **PARENT/CARER**

Wellbeing Letter

Spring 2020

What's Included?

- Looking after yourself, looking after your children.
- Coronavirus: supporting children's wellbeing.
- Useful links and where to look for information
- How to deal with Coronavirus anxiety.
- Lots of ideas for self isolation to keep everyone active!

Welcome!

Welcome to this special edition SEND Wellbeing Letter.

Infectious disease outbreaks, like the current Coronavirus (Covid19) can be scary and can affect our mental health. While its important to stay informed, there are many things that we can do to support and manage our own and our children's wellbeing during such times.

In this letter you will find information, tips and links that will help you, your family and your friends to look after your mental health

Looking after yourself, looking after your children

There is a lot of uncertainty around the current COVID-19 outbreak, particularly given that the situation is constantly developing and the information about the virus remains incomplete.

Understandably, this is causing a lot of worry and anxiety for people. Having children and young people at home, often when people are trying to work themselves, adds another layer of stress. It is therefore important to not only consider our physical health during such challenging times, but also to pay attention to our mental health. It is normal to feel worried, stressed and anxious when we are faced with uncertain situations, but the sooner we acknowledge and learn to take care of our mental health, the healthier and better equipped we'll be to cope with the situation we're having to face.

Looking after yourself

Taking care of our mental health and checking in on others is something that we can all do, and we need to remember that by looking after our own mental health, we'll be best placed to look after our children. Remember when they tell you on aeroplanes that you need to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others, it's like that.
Time is precious, especially when looking after children. However, try to plan your days or weeks to include something from each of the '5 ways to wellbeing' (developed by NEF)

BE ACTIVE

Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise every day. You Tube has lots of exercise videos for kids and adults. Get children involved in planning their own 'indoor PE'.
If current government advice permits, try to get outside once a day either into your garden if you have one or in a place where there are few people. If you can't go out, open the windows for some fresh air and take some time to look at the world outside.

Looking after yourself, looking after your children

TAKE NOTICE

Take a break from the news and social media and concentrate on what's happening in the here and now in your family. Notice and appreciate the small things.
Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing.
There's lots of good mindfulness apps to try, but if that's not for you, just getting into something you enjoy e.g. cooking, drawing etc. and really focussing on it can be just as good.

CONNECT

Social connection is one of the most important ways that we can look after our mental wellbeing. Social distancing is going to make that trickier, but we're lucky enough to have technology to help us out. Think physical distancing, but social connections.
Social media is great, but if you can, try to have phone calls or even video calls.
Arrange to FaceTime/Skype a friend for coffee, phone relatives more often than usual.
Whilst it can be helpful to share worries, try to find other things to talk about too.

GIVE

Research tells us that giving back to our community helps people to feel valuable and makes us happier. We might not be able to contribute to our community in our usual way, but many people will still be able to find ways to give back.
Lots of community groups are setting up schemes that aim to help vulnerable people at this difficult time. If you want to get involved, check out local social media for ideas.

KEEP LEARNING

Learning a new skill or honing an existing one gives us a sense of purpose and achievement.
Whilst we're busy learning, we're less likely to experience anxious thoughts and worries.
Social-distancing will bring new challenges, but it will give many of us the time to start a new hobby or learn about an area that we've always been interested in.

Coronavirus: Supporting Children's Wellbeing

Wellbeing tips for families:

- Talk to your children, and answer their questions. Ask about what they have heard about the virus and the situation so that you can correct possible misconceptions and reassure them.
- Avoid being too immersed in media coverage. Be mindful of the amount of things you are reading and watching, including social media – as this may add to worry and anxiety. Consider a few updates every day from trusted sources.
- Remember that people react differently to significant events. Some people – adults and children – may feel worried, some excited, some nothing much at all. Be reassured that different reactions are normal and ok.
- If your child seems worried, it may be good to distract themselves with something that takes their mind off their worries. You might also want to set aside 10-15 minutes each day for them to talk about any worries, and to reassure them.
- Remember to keep things positive and give children hope. For example, tell children that now many people are working to make this better and that even though it is serious, everyone is doing their best to help people.
- Try to keep familiar routines. Well-known routines in everyday life provide security and stability.
- Do nice things together, and keep active. Make a plan and suggest some regular family times where you can play games, do some exercise together, or do other things that you know most of you like. Try to find a good balance between time together, and screen time.
- Keep in good contact with family and friends (via FaceTime, Skype WhatsApp etc.; following NHS guidance on 'social contact'). This will help children connect with others and know that others are thinking about them. It will also reassure them that others are well.
- As a parent you may be concerned yourself. Take care of yourself and make sure you have breaks, time to relax, and ask for help from others if you need.

Some useful links...

NHS advice:
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

Talking to children about Coronavirus:

Advice on talking to children about Coronavirus, by British Psychological Society:
https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Talking%20to%20children%20about%20Coronavirus.pdf

How to talk to your child about coronavirus, by Unicef:
https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19

Child-friendly explanation of Coronavirus for Primary age students:
https://660919d3-b85b-43c3-a3ad-3de6a9d37099.filesusr.com/ugd/64c685_319c5acf38d34604b537ac9fae37fc80.pdf

Information video on Coronavirus for Primary age children (KS2), by Brainpop:
https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/

Information video on Coronavirus for older children/adults, by WHO:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOV1aBVYKGA&feature=youtu.be

Looking after your wellbeing

Coronavirus and your wellbeing, by Mind UK:
https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/

5 ways to wellbeing, by Mindkit:
https://www.mindkit.org.uk/5-ways-to-wellbeing/

Information on SEND in Telford & Wrekin
www.telfordsend.org.uk

Some more useful links...

Mencap - Easy Read guide to Coronavirus https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20SS2.pdf also the attached for ALD

https://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/easy-read-advice-on-the-coronavirus-v1.pdf

Young Minds - Talking to your child about Coronavirus and 10 tips from their Parents Helpline to support family wellbeing: https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/

Carers UK - Guidance for carers: https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19

Covibook – an interactive resource designed to support and reassure children aged 7 and under, designed to help children explain and draw the emotions that they might be experiencing during the pandemic: https://www.mindheart.co/descargables

Amaze - information pack for parents https://amazesussex.org.uk/faqs-about-the-coronavirus-for-parent-carers-of-children-with-send-brighton-hove/ really like this link within the site: https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/calming-coronavirus-anxiety-children-everyone-else/

Public Health England have produced an easy read version of their Advice on the coronavirus for places of education. You can download it here.

How to cope with Coronavirus anxiety

As the coronavirus spreads, more and more people are becoming anxious about what it might mean for themselves and their loved ones. It's completely understandable (and normal!) to feel anxious about this emerging health crisis. As part of efforts to take best care of body and mind, here are some tips that might help in tolerating these uncertain times.

When stressed, our brains want us to be able to predict and consider the worst case scenarios to help us prepare and protect ourselves. This is great when there is a way of problem solving the situation – not so great when there isn't. Our brains are predisposed to focus on threat. We will forget the "everyday" and bring full attention to things which are scary, without taking time to really think about the facts.

For example, we might think nothing of getting in our cars everyday but be scared of spiders, even though the evidence suggests we are more likely to be at risk in a car than from a spider.

Furthermore, as a species we are not very good at tolerating uncertainty, something that in the current climate we might need to allow! Our minds want us to have explanations so when we can't find them our brains will fill in the gaps, and if anxiety has any say these explanations will be usually based on our biggest fears.

Anxiety can snowball; we start with one worry and before we know where we are it's grown and grown and we're now headed for a full on catastrophe (the "what if".. "but then what if…" scenario), even when the likelihood of each possible thing coming true may be minimal. Anxious thoughts get in the way of our minds taking in what we need to know and deciphering fact from fiction.

The uncertainty of the coronavirus is scary. And scary gets our attention! However, it might help to try to stay grounded and get the facts instead of allowing our minds to make up the information for us. Try to find a source of information which is reliable. Snippets of information from social media may represent one person's worry thoughts, rather than the actual risk/facts. Make sure you are informed but not overloaded – consider limiting your exposure to information. For example, by restricting where you go to find information to reputable sources (such as the NHS, Government sites, World Health Organisation), or by setting boundaries around how much time you will allow yourself to read/listen to the news.

How to cope with Coronavirus anxiety continued

Now we know thoughts can be catastrophic, uncontained, and can snowball, when you notice your mind back on the topic of coronavirus try to step back. Labelling thoughts as thoughts can help, for example instead of "I have coronavirus and I could die", try to rephrase this "I recognise I am having the thought that I have coronavirus and I could die". Emphasising the difference between what is reality and what is a thought can help gain perspective. We can't stop ourselves from worrying (the example that if you are asked not to think about a penguin on ice skates, let's notice where your mind goes!), but we can train our brains to focus on something else. Make time for worry, but also put in boundaries with how much mental space you will allow coronavirus to take. Think about what is in in your control and what is not. Worrying about coronavirus will not guarantee a better outcome, so to help you in the moment schedule some coronavirus free time where you can put your attention onto something else.

Take steps to minimise coronavirus related risk. The advice that resonated for me was to assume you are a carrier and to put reasonable and appropriate precautions in place to prevent the risk to others. Act in a way which could minimise the risk of infection to others, rather than acting from a place of avoidance or fear of contamination yourself. Coronaviruses are spread through everyday contact, through touch, a cough, or a sneeze. If you're sick, stay home. If you're not sick, stay away from close contact with a person who is and engage in healthy habits when it comes to cleanliness. Listen to the advice from the medical professionals around how to practice good self-care and reduce risk of infection.

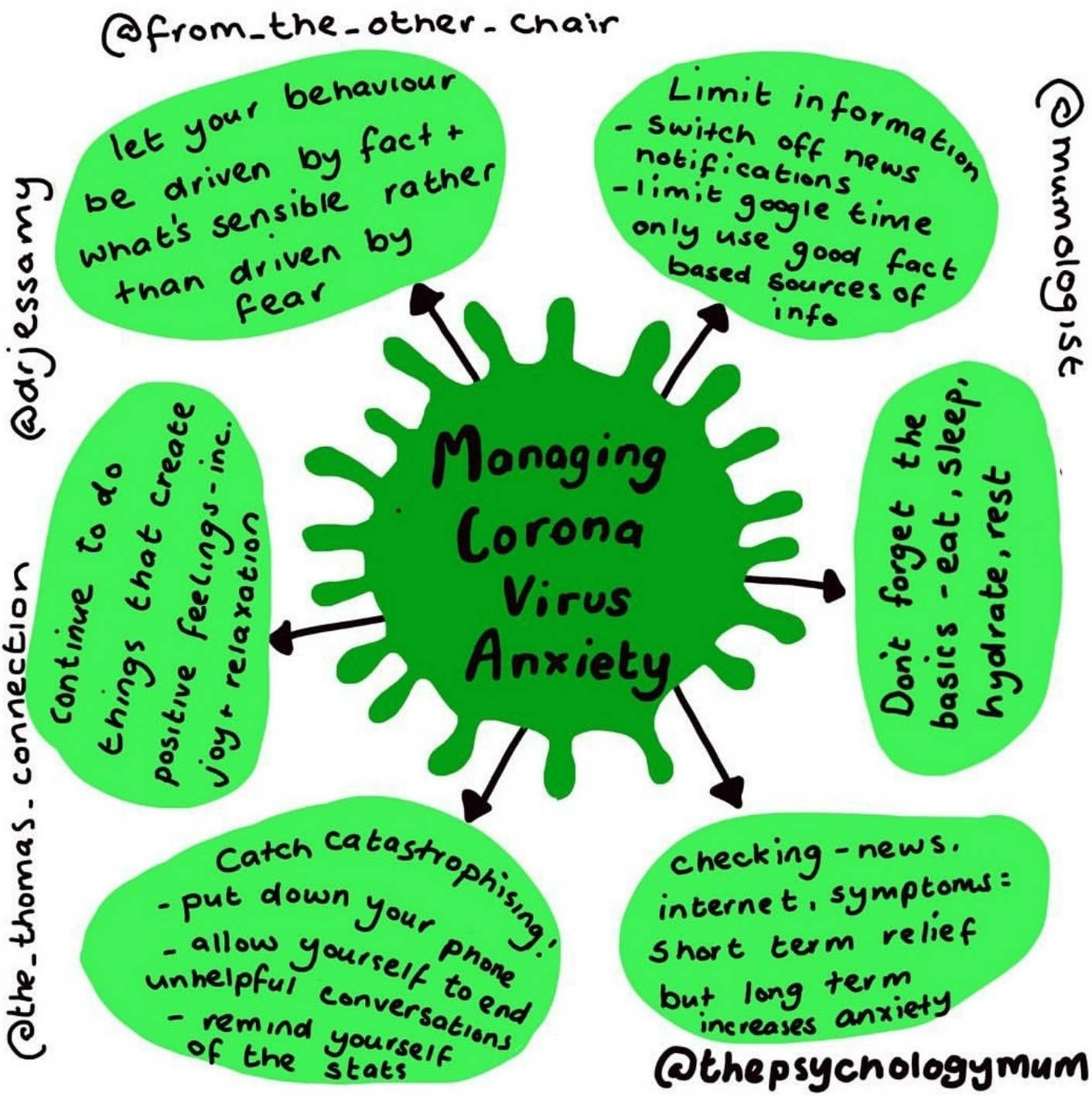
Stay connected. We are always much better at offering advice and reassurance when it's someone else going through a tricky time – remember our loved ones can do the same for us! They could provide a space to have your thoughts and feelings normalised and offer you some distraction or reassurance. Particularly as more and more of us are opting to self-isolate, remaining in contact with others will be even more important. You might need to get creative! Think about substitutes for face-to-face contact if you believe yourself to be a risk. If you are not able to speak with your friends or family, think about how to connect with those further afield. Suggestions could include writing a letter to a distant loved one, finding a new online group for your local community, or finding an online forum about a hobby or interest that you have.

How to cope with Coronavirus anxiety continued

Use your past coping skills. Think about what has helped you in the past when you have felt stressed or overwhelmed. It could be yoga, relaxation, mindfulness, trying a new recipe, talking with a friend, distracting yourself with a puzzle, making time for self-soothing (taking a nice bath for example)… the list is endless! What helps will be different from person to person – use what works for you.

Consider the 5 steps to mental wellbeing. The more you nurture your mental health, the more resilient to anxiety and stress you will enable yourself to be. Strategies for mental wellbeing include: staying connected with other people; be physically active; learn new skills; give to others; pay attention to the present moment. You might need to adapt some of these if you are self-isolating or unable to participate with your usual activities. Some ideas include: trying a new exercise regime at home; making time for a long phone call to a friend; finding a new hobby; practising a mindfulness exercise. There are some great resources online that can help with activities during periods of self-isolation, why not try www.dothinkshare.com or check out our list of self-isolation activities.

Information from the media is changing day by day. This can make times feel uncertain and the future unpredictable. Thinking too far ahead can feed those “what if..” thoughts. Breaking your day into chunks could help you to step back. Instead of thinking about the whole day, think about the “now and next”. What are you doing in this moment, and what do you plan to do in the next. Think in terms of the present and immediate future. You’ll deal with anything that comes up as you need to, but contemplating something that hasn’t happened yet can be a playground for anxious thoughts.


@from_the_other_chair
Managing Corona Virus Anxiety
let your behaviour be driven by fact + what's sensible rather than driven by fear
Limit information
- switch off news notifications
- limit google time
only use good fact based sources of info
@mumologist
Continue to do things that create positive feelings - inc. joy + relaxation
@drjessamy
Don't forget the basics - eat, sleep, hydrate, rest
@the_thomas_connection
Catch catastrophising!
- put down your phone
- allow yourself to end unhelpful conversations
- remind yourself of the stats
checking - news, internet, symptoms: short term relief but long term increases anxiety
@thepsychologymum

Top tips

Top tips with 10 activities that can be done with your children during this period of time off nursery/school: Here are some preparation top tips:

1. **Setting Up a Family Meeting** – calling a family meeting is important to set ground rules and expectations for the duration of this situation. Ask all to participate and look into what is their understanding of the situation, what this means and why are we doing this…it will give everyone a sense of purpose and meaning. Validate emotions as children may feel like things are not fair. Write together a poster with ground rules, decide on the ground rules together, like how many hours of devices and games for example, chores, cooking and ask for everyone's contribution to the family household.
2. **Setting Up a Schedule** – Having a calendar or a schedule outlining different activities will help create a routine and establish predictability. It can be done visually using colour coded signs, see picture above. Although not necessarily needing to be equally dispersed across the day, deciding on a schedule together will help family functioning.
3. **Deciding on Different Activities** – When discussing different activities, it is important to ensure that all family members' needs are met. For younger children, they may need play and unstructured times, as for older children, it may mean learning online with structured educational activities set by the school. For parents, it may mean the need to have some time to work and communicate with colleagues. Remember it is also important to allow for self-care and time for you, like putting the oxygen mask on you before someone else! What activities can we do from home? You may think it will be a long haul! Here are some ideas of different educational, cognitive and creative activities that can be done at home…

10 Activities to try

1. **Setting Up a Den in the house or a Camp in the garden** – This activity can be useful to create a safe place for children and a place they know they can have some quiet time, such as, reading a book, playing with little people, teddies or puppets. You can ask them to contribute to set it up with you, make decorations, put up lights and a sign. Children will find this fun and different. It can create an imaginative world for the child.
2. **Setting Up a Learning Place in the house and Do Learning Together** – It is important that children feel they have an allocated space in the house where they can concentrate and focus on learning. It does not have to be a big space and can even be a shared space. It is more about how we use this space and what we do when we are learning. Setting up some ground rules for this will also be helpful. With a schedule, allocate time to learning in short and fruitful bursts, it is more about the quality and the positive experience of learning rather the quantity and speed at which we do these learning tasks. When you are noticing that learning is no longer fruitful, have a short break, a snack, a glass of water, some movement breaks. Family learning can be rich as we can all learn together and share understanding, problem-solving and information.
3. **Cooking Together** – Cooking is great as it also includes literacy and numeracy tasks, such as, reading recipes or counting and measuring ingredients. Involving children in cooking can be fun and full of joy as they are involved in producing a tangible product at the end. You can also ask the children to finish off the cookies, cake, etc. by decorating them, lots of time can be spent on this.
4. **Puzzle, Lego, Visual-Spatial Activities** – These activities tend to be calming as the brain focuses on putting things together rather than verbal or emotion demanding tasks. Offering these activities in the house will be of benefit to everyone as it will help all involved to be grounded and calm.
5. **Setting Up a Fun Project** – It is important to vary activities, like a carousel. Start with one and move on to the next. When activities are designed to promote different areas of development, children will find this more engaging than if it is tapping into the same type of skills so it is important to also have something creative, a fun project you will enjoy doing together. A fun project could be: making a scrapbook of different drawings, paintings, making characters out of modelling clay, picking up leaves from the garden and finding the name of the tree online, taking photographs of wildlife in the garden such as birds, animals, painting rocks with emojis on them, drawing a cartoon strip or writing a collection of short stories, inventing characters and drawing these, so many things that can be done. Some children may like the challenge of a research project.

10 Activities to try

6. **Starting a Collection, Playing Board Games** – Stamps, stones, leaves, labels and lots of other things can start collections. Board games, such as snakes and ladders, can be made using templates on the web.

7. **Sending Messages, Letters and Postcards to Family and Friends** – Keep in touch with your social networks via different communication modes either video call or messaging.

8. **Learning a New Skill Together and/or Teaching a New Skill** – There are lots of youtube videos nowadays that can teach skills step by step. Learn to say words in a different language, learn how to do sewing, knitting, crochet, slime, scrapbooking, photography, design a webpage together or design cards online.

9. **Implementing Routines for Self-care and Mindfulness** – It's ok for all involved to feel this is not a normal situation. It is important to keep communicating, being transparent, responding to questions, presenting the facts as well as not bombarding with facts. Children are curious and like to find out about the world so it is a good opportunity to open their thinking by sharing information, exploring maps, countries. It is also important we are aware of feelings and able to recognise sensations, feelings and actions. Implement some self-care activities together such as doing a calming activity together, reading a book, relaxing, watching a film.

10. **Exercising** – Don't forget to move and for the full family to move. You can set up some an obstacle course in the garden for example. This can be done using household items like a skipping rope, bottles, a ball. Like do 10 jumps, 10 skips, 10 hoops in the basketball hoop, knock 3 bottles down, etc. You can set up a challenge and time them going through the course. Walking the dog and playing with an animal can also be part of the routine.

Even more ideas to keep everyone active!

- Clear out your wardrobe or cupboards
- Give yourself a manicure/pedicure
- Read/write a book
- Do a crossword/Sudoku/word search/ colouring in
- Binge watch a must-see boxset/film series or old feel good movie
- Make a photo album of phone photos websites/apps like Snapfish and Freeprint will send you up to 50 photos for free (you just pay for postage)
- Gardening- mow the lawn, plant some flowers
- Start a blog
- Have a go at Baking
- Learn a new recipe
- Learn how to knit/crochet
- Have a dance
- Exercise try home workouts, YouTube videos (Bodycoach TV), yoga
- Make a travel bucket list
- Learn a language- websites/apps like Duolingo and Babbel offer some languages for free
- Do some DIY- redecorate a room.
- Call a friend or family member- video calls (Skype, Whatsapp, Facetime)
- Play a game- card games, board games, computer games or design your own!
- Learn to play an instrument
- Bird watch, create a bird feeder
- Make jams or preserve
- Have a home picnic
- Learn to give yourself/someone else a massage
- Have a digital detox- clear you email inbox, delete old files, update your passwords
- Sort through paperwork
- Research a topic of interest
- Do a jigsaw puzzle
- Sort through photos on your phone
- Learn a magic trick
- Listen to a podcast, radio show or audi-obook- websites/apps like www.digitalbook.io and https://librivox.org have free public domain audio books
- Arts and crafts
- Enter a competition
- Create a home spa- bubble bath, face masks, foot spa
- Listen to music
- Sign up to a free online class/course- try places like www.reed.co.uk/courses/free and https://www.futurelearn.com/courses
- Create a time capsule
- Design a magazine or newspaper
- Online shopping
- Spending time with pets- teach them a new trick?
- Try a science experiment
- Look through old photographs/home movies
- Write a letter to a family member/friend that you can send once your well
- Take a virtual tour of a museum
- Find things to donate to charity (once it's safe to visit!)
- Create your own cinema- make tickets, popcorn, lay down a rug.

Local Offer
for Special Educational Needs and Disability

Discover everything you need to know about education, health and care services in your local area for children and young people with SEND 0-25yrs at...

www.telfordsend.org.uk

SEND Local Offer

Telford & Wrekin COUNCIL

SEND **PARENT/CARER**

Winter 2019

PARENTS OPENING DOORS PARENT CARER FORUM

01952 458047

0777 534 2092

info@podstelford.org

www.podstelford.org

PODSForumTelford

PODSTelford

PODS (Parents Opening Doors)

P O Box 772, Telford, Shropshire
TF7 9FD

Information Advice and Support Service

SENDIASS
TELFORD & WREKIN

01952 457176

info@iass.org.uk

IASS Telford & Wrekin

The Glebe Centre, Glebe Street,
Wellington, Telford
TF1 1JP

Family Connect

01952 385385 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)

0779 787 5385

familyconnect@telford.gov.uk

Looking forward with future focus

01952 388988

future.focus@telford.gov.uk

Southwater 1, Southwater Square,
Southwater Way, Telford
TF3 4JG

Local Offer for Special Educational Needs and Disability

Discover everything you need to know about education, health and care services in your local area for children and young people with SEND 0-25yrs at...

www.telfordsend.org.uk

Key features...

- Search for clear and accessible information, advice and sources of support.
- Explore leisure, fun and short breaks activities.
- Find out about specialist services and education health and care plans.
- Learn how schools support special educational needs.
- Use the interactive map showing what is available near to where you live.
- Have your say through our online feedback form.

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Telford & Wrekin COUNCIL

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