

SPACE

Supporting Parents and Children  
Emotionally

# Factsheet Five: Understanding Emotions and Healthy Relationships



**To help support you during COVID-19, we have created a series of factsheets, designed to offer some support and strategies, whatever your situation, and are based on what we know about people's responses to traumatic events and what can help.**

Being safe emotionally and physically is the basic need all humans have. It is often something we take for granted.

Living with COVID-19 has forced us all into a situation previously unimaginable. The safety in our lives we had previously taken for granted has gone and for many of us already living with fear and uncertainty this pandemic has only increased the sense of vulnerability. The situation may have highlighted difficult living arrangements that were just about sustainable before, but with the enforcement of lockdown, the stress of living as a carer (to elderly parents or sick children) or being dependant on someone else (due to illness or lack of finances) will have increased the lack of personal safety. Families used to being at work and children used to being in school face huge challenges suddenly being stuck together without the normal routines of daily life. With the schools shut we are also suddenly thrust into a world where we are expected to become teachers and maybe even support our children with subjects we know nothing about. Social distancing means outside access is limited and unless we are lucky enough to have gardens our children are stuck indoors with conflicting wants and needs.

The aim of these factsheets is to give you some strategies to look after your children by looking after yourself. If you have ever flown on a plane, you may remember the air steward safety briefing – 'in the event of loss of oxygen, a mask will drop down in front of you. PUT YOUR OWN MASK ON first before helping others'. In effect if you don't you will pass out before you can help anyone else. It's the same in this crisis, to help your children you need to be able to look after your own emotional health and safety first.

Factsheet five is designed to provide you with some information on emotions and healthy relationships. There is no doubt that during this really difficult time relationships within our families can become strained, you as parents are struggling to be everything; cook, cleaner, worker, teacher etc. and your children who may all be different ages and have different demands may be finding the isolation difficult.

This can lead to some emotionally explosive outbursts at home as children attempt to work through their sadness, anger and frustration at the situation. This is normal and your child's way of trying to communicate how these complex emotions are making them feel.

Dan Siegel Hand brain Model: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CJ74Oxw&t=39s> explains what happens to our brain when we 'flip our lids'.

In Factsheet 1 we explained ways in which you can create an emotionally safe environment. Other ways you can support your child is by using the grounding techniques we shared in Factsheet 1 and revisiting the expressing emotions section in Factsheet 3.

A great way to familiarise your child with emotions is introducing - Name it to tame it... This can help your child to better understand their emotions by helping them to name their feelings. For example I notice that you are sad today... the child (and adult) will feel instantly validated which helps to both understand and dissipate the feeling.

All relationships experience what we call the rupture-repair, (in basic language - falling out and making up) - this is a normal part of healthy relationships. We cannot be fully attuned/ aware/ understanding of each other all the time. Recognising when there is a rupture (fall out) and taking steps to repair (make up) and then reflect on why it happened is the key to maintaining good relationships, building resilience and learning how to manage difficult emotions. 'Making up' really is more important than 'messaging up'.

Another practical approach to support your child to self-regulate is to use PACE....

**P**layfulness  
**A**ccepting  
**C**uriosity  
**E**mpathy

The PACE model (Bomber & Hughes, 2013), actively communicates empathy and acceptance of the individual child while providing him/her with the comforting and containment needed to explore feelings and emotions. PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe, and focuses on how parents connect with their children.

### **Playfulness**

This is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means learning how to use a light tone with your voice.

### **Acceptance**

Unconditional acceptance is at the core of the child's sense of safety. Acceptance is about actively communicating to the child that you accept their, feelings, thoughts and emotions underneath the outward behaviour. This doesn't mean accepting behaviour, which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or to self. As a parent you can be firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the emotions and feelings that resulted in the behaviour.

## **Curiosity**

Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children become aware and reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour, and then communicate it to us as the parent. Curiosity is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Curiosity lets the child know that the adult understands. In that moment the feeling or emotion is validated. Asking a child “What do you think was going on? What do you think that was about?” or “I wonder what...?” which is different from “Why did you do that?” helps the child to understand what happened and why.

## **Empathy**

Empathy lets the child feel the parents’ compassion for her. Being empathic means actively showing the child that the child’s emotions and feelings are important to the parent and he or she wants to be with the child when things feel hard for them.

**WIN/ WINE** further supports the use of PACE by helping you stay curious and can help guide conversations.

W.I.N. = I wonder... I imagine... I notice... can also appear with an E for empathy.  
I wonder if you are finding it hard not seeing your friends... I imagine that would make anyone feel sad... I noticed you looked unhappy about that...

This way of communicating helps to emphasize positive use of ‘I’ statements, uses empathy and validates feelings and emotions.

You can find lots of resources at the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families to help you work through both your and your child’s emotions:

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

This exercise can be used to stimulate conversations about emotions or introduce Thoughts – feelings – behaviours (for older children and adults) how they co-exist and influence each other:

## **The iceberg exercise**

Living together under these conditions can put a strain on our relationships and lead us to behave in ways we might not usually. This exercise can help us to see that these behaviours are usually driven by underlying feelings like being scared or frustrated.

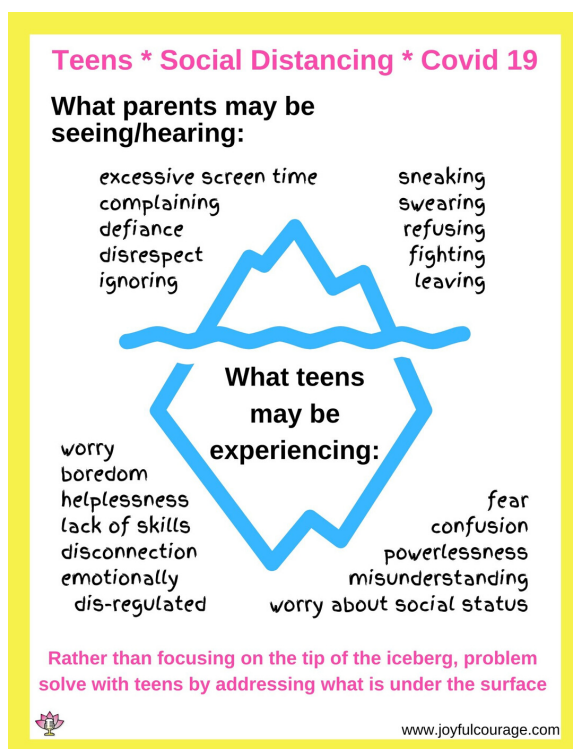
Ask anyone in the family that wants to join in to draw an iceberg and put their name on the paper.

Start with each person writing on the top/ visible section of the iceberg their ways of behaving in the family, e.g stays in room, shouts, wants lots of cuddles, needs to be close to everyone, cries etc. Pass the sheets to each other and family members add any behaviours they have observed but not written down.

Then get each person to complete the hidden/ underneath part of the iceberg to identify what emotion/ thoughts might be prompting the behaviour. E.g. I'm scared, feel unsafe, is the family safe, I'm lonely, I don't feel understood, I'm worried about the future, I'm going to fail at school/ work, what will happen if I get ill?

It's time as a family or parent to talk through some of these worries and acknowledge that this is a very difficult time and all these worries and emotions are normal.

Here is an example of what it might look like:



Next watch the video and see indeed if people want to make their own emotional intensity chart:

<https://youtu.be/ckQIOVjxmfs>

This video looks at emojis and what they mean and can be used with younger children as an opener to talking about emotions, if you are watching it with you children, pause it every so often and ask them to show tell you how they express some of these emotions, upset, angry, scared or you can have paper and crayons and get them to draw new emojis about how they feel: <https://youtu.be/pFkRbUKy19g>

Many of us are keeping in touch via social media which in itself can start to become exhausting. There is also an increased need to be aware of who our children are connecting with on social media as sadly, we know that children are targeted online for abuse and we need to be ever vigilant. This helpful advice has been produced by Devon and Cornwall Police and as well as reading it can be useful to share with your children.

## **Online grooming and child exploitation during COVID 19 lockdown**

The current lockdown means that children and young people are likely to be spending more time online than they would if they were at school.

To help keep young people safe and protect them from offenders who might attempt to target them online, we have collected information to support both parents/carers and young people to spot the signs of online exploitation. There is also information about who to talk to and where you can get help.

Online exploitation can affect anyone, boy or girl, from any community. Please remember - **it is never the child's fault.**

**Remember – if you are in immediate danger you should always contact the police.**

### **What are the risks online?**

#### **You never know who you're talking to**

You don't always know who you are talking to online. Unless you can see the person (not just a still image of them), hear them and you know them in real life, it's difficult to be sure that the person you are messaging is really who you think they are.

#### **Constant contact**

Because social media is "always on" you can be constantly bombarded with messages. This pressure can then be used as a way to watch, coerce and control what you do. Log out – give yourself space to breathe and think. If you are worried – talk to someone you trust. There are more links to support on this page.

## Sharing images

Because you don't always know who you're talking to you also don't always know who you're sending that selfie to. Sometimes a criminal will pressure you to send a nude selfie or other indecent picture or share sensitive information which they will then use to force you into sexual or criminal activity. Remember you should never do anything which makes you uncomfortable. If you aren't sure talk to someone you trust or contact one of the support organisations listed on this page.

## Sharing information

Criminals will also use any information – including pictures – you share about yourself publicly to get to know you and pretend to a friend you can trust. Once they “befriend” you, they can groom and manipulate you into sexual or criminal activity. Again you should never feel pressured into something you don't want to do. If you are worried – talk to someone.

## What can I do to help protect my child?

There are things you can do to help protect your children from online exploitation:

- Check games content and features (Is it appropriate? Will they have online access?)
- Remember to use privacy and parental controls
- Turn location settings off in mobile apps
- Make an agreement with your child about time online and stick to it.

## What signs should I look out for that my child could be being exploited?

If you are a parent or carer the following might indicate that a child needs help:

- Talking about older/new friends they've met online.
- Talking about gifts/money they've received online
- Becoming withdrawn and secretive
- Having a new phone or more than one phone
- Receiving a large number of calls or messages
- Worried about being away from their phone

These are only some of the possible signs and ways you can help. The Children's Society offer more information on risks, staying safe and spotting the signs:

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/tackling-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines/online-exploitation-resources>

## Where can I go for more information and support?

### Thinkuknow

This website is full of useful information for children and their parents and information is organised by the age of the child. They have also launched a new section to support parents during lockdown.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/>

### Children's Society

The Children's Society have published advice about keeping children safe on line during lockdown.

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/news-and-blogs/our-blog/invite-only-parties-and-staying-safe-online-during-covid-19-lockdown>

They have also published an emoji dictionary to support parents' understanding of the use of certain emojis:

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/emoji-dictionary.pdf>

### NSPCC

The NSPCC has a section devoted to online safety. It covers different kinds of online channels and the risks as well as advice on how to talk to your child.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

### Parent Info

Help and advice for families in a digital world.

<https://parentinfo.org>

### CEOP

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command) is the specialist team from the NCA and where you can make reports of online exploitation.

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

**Remember: if you're worried that a child or young person is at immediate risk of harm, you should call the police**





However warnings about the threats and dangers also needs to be balanced with some thinking about what a good relationship either online or in person looks like:

<https://youtu.be/UB9anEZx9LU>

This simple video about relationships really sums up what makes a relationship healthy, and whilst it is aimed at children, it says a lot for us as adults as well!

If you want to continue the discussion with your children you can compare what is said on the video by discussing some favourite TV shows e.g. EastEnders, Love Island, Home and Away, Too Hot to Handle, Sex Education.

Ask your children where in these programmes do they see examples between characters of, negotiating, respect, listening to each other, accepting other points of view, bullying. It might be interesting to find out what they observe – maybe it will challenge your views of the programmes as well!

If you have any concerns about your children's safety as they become sexually active this is a great video to start discussions or just give the link to them to watch:

<https://youtu.be/oQbei5JGiT8>

*(Copyright ©2015 Emmeline May and Blue Seat Studios)*

This is another good video to watch Mental Health Foundation: Relationships: the missing piece of the wellbeing puzzle:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=112&v=B4ZxMECJobo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=112&v=B4ZxMECJobo&feature=emb_logo)

Continuing from previous factsheets its important to keep being aware of and talking about emotions at this time.

This video shows parents and their offspring in a quiz – some if it is quite explicit so be warned!

[https://youtu.be/WDBb\\_FBnxBU](https://youtu.be/WDBb_FBnxBU)

This is a really lovely video about empathy and sympathy and how we connect to our children and others:

<https://youtu.be/1Ewgu369Jw>

Finally here's a little video of positive actions people are taking to support each other: (warning it can be emotional watching it)

<https://youtu.be/YVGi57fNPCc>