

HOW TO MAKE
THE 'NEW NORMAL'
FEEL NORMAL



**Time sensitive routines
to help you adapt during Covid-19**

Dr. Mike Kelly

HOW TO MAKE THE 'NEW NORMAL' FEEL NORMAL

TIME SENSITIVE ROUTINES TO HELP YOU ADAPT DURING COVID-19

These days, maintaining good family routines isn't as simple as it sounds. In fact, it can be downright difficult and often we fail at the simplest of tasks as parents. But now, more than ever, many of us are trying to navigate family life under circumstances where words like "Covid 19", "pandemic", "lockdown" and "quarantine" are the new normal.

Without a clear picture of what's coming next and the unprecedented impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on all of us, each day we worry for the security for our loved ones, our jobs, our finances, our own health and our children's wellbeing. It is totally understandable if you are feeling consumed, overwhelmed, stressed, anxious, fearful, worried and even angry about your future during this unprecedented time of change and uncertainty.

In early years, high-quality parenting and a positive home environment are crucial for child development and wellbeing. A positive home routine is vital for children to feel secure and safe, instil a sense of belonging and connection, develop resilience and have normalcy in their environment.

Taking care of your own wellbeing is essential because it means that you are better placed to support your children and loved ones. It is also important to remember that no two families are the same and we all suffer and are challenged in different ways. In some families the challenge is finances, in others it could be housing, conflict, hidden harms, mental health issues, loneliness and feelings of inadequacy.

All of the information, tips and bite sized activities have been designed to be completed together as a family. We encourage you to really engage with your children, observe and listen and really hear them. Hug and kiss them, encourage them, play at their level, guide them and laugh with them and enjoy the fun bonding activities with your whole family.

By all working together towards a common goal, whether you be in the role of parent, grandparent or caregiver, you're helping your children to appreciate the value of creating meaningful healthy routines and life skills to support their resilience and wellbeing. On completion of this Kit, I hope you will feel closer, more connected, cohesive and continue to grow as a family.



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5 TIPS FOR SELF-CARE

1. **First things first - be kind to yourself** - It is important that you take care of your own wellbeing first, so that you can take care of those who are important to you. When we're feeling stressed and insecure in our lives, we tend to be harder on ourselves and can start to feel overwhelmed. But this is the time to be self-compassionate and treat ourselves the way we would a good friend. Acknowledge your feelings. Don't ignore things in the hope that they will just go away. Remind yourself that you're doing your best, particularly during times of uncertainty. Write things down to get to the root of the real problem you may be facing. Paper dialoguing/keeping a journal can help get things out of your head and can help track your thoughts
2. **It is ok to ask for help** - Remember we all have low moments; don't beat yourself up. You may be worried about your relationship, elderly or vulnerable family members, finances, work or, you may be missing social human connections rather than worrying about the coronavirus itself. Talking to someone or seeking professional help about how you are feeling can help you feel better and manage feelings of distress and difficulties.
3. **Be aware that babies and children can pick up on anxiety** - Even if babies and young children are not directly exposed to the trauma of the coronavirus outbreak, they can recognise and be affected by stress, anxiety and worry in the adults and older children they live with. This will take its toll on them, even if they do not yet have the ability to put this into words. Adults need to be mindful of this when expressing their own feelings when children are present. Reassure children that you are here to keep them safe.
4. **Acknowledge that this too shall pass** – Can you think of a time in the past when you went through a major change, surrounded by uncertainty, yet things seemed to work itself out OK? Reflecting upon and even talking about that experience might soothe your fears, strengthen your hope, help you to gain perspective that things will not always be difficult or stressful.
5. **Make time for play and creativity** - Just because we're adults doesn't mean life has to be all about work and parenting. Whilst play is crucial for child development; it's also beneficial for people of all ages. Play is important for your wellbeing and can add joy to life, relieve stress, help improve relationships and your connection to others and the world around you. There doesn't need to be any point to play, just give yourself permission to play with the joyful abandon of childhood - be inquisitive, curious and let your imagination create! Get together with friends and family members on zoom and host a quiz/game night, play with a pet, learn a new hobby and get out in nature.

I've included this colouring page, borrow your children's pens and take 10 minutes to explore your creativity.



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THE ‘FAMILY’ FACTOR

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN BUILD RESILIENCE FOR THEIR WELLBEING

Children rely on their parent/caregiver to provide them comfort and support during times of need or uncertainty. As a parent, you help your children cope with change by...

Providing a loving home - Not necessarily opulence but one with structure, rules and good consistent routines.

Spending quality time - When spending time with your children, make sure you are present and engaged and use eye contact.

Being a positive and consistent role model - In most cases parents/caregivers are a child's first teacher. Children are always watching, listening and learning, so aim to consistently model positive behaviour and language.

Practising self care - Lead by example and teach your child about the benefits of taking care of their minds and bodies.

Keep things in perspective during times of stress and uncertainty - This encourages your child to maintain a sense of optimism and adaptability during difficult times.

Teaching your child from an early age about life's uncertainties - Sharing what is going on with your children in an age appropriate way rather than shielding them from bad news, enables them to develop resilience.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURE

DAILY ROUTINES ARE IMPORTANT FOR PARENT AND CHILD WELLBEING

Create a sense of family stability - Many of us have had our usual routines disrupted. It's important to create new routines that can be repeated on a daily basis, or to re-establish existing ones to take care of your wellbeing and mental health.

Timings - Keeping regular mealtimes and bedtimes, setting a daily time for exercise and relaxation (reading, meditation or simply quiet reflective time listening to music) is a great place to start in helping us manage uncertainty and build family resilience in the home.

Help strengthen family relationships - Doing things together help to strengthen family relationships. When building your family routines, make them fun and create moments to spending time together such as reading stories before bed or going for a family walk. These are special moments for you and your child to share and will become special memories and new traditions.

Give children predictability - This provides a sense of security and freedom their environment. When life is organised and consistent at home, children feel safe, secure and looked after, especially during stressful times or during difficult stages of development.

Can help limit poor behaviour and outbursts - Hunger, tiredness or overstimulation can often trigger bad behaviour. As much as possible stick to regular routines at mealtimes and bedtime routines.

Help children learn essential life skills - Learning how to perform everyday tasks via simple daily routine provides a basis for children to learn other essential life skills such as basic hygiene, time-management, self-control, self-care, responsibility, independence, confidence and resilience. Routines such as getting dressed, brushing teeth, putting away toys etc teach children how the world works and what they need to do in order to interact successfully in it.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILD

The coronavirus crisis affects everyone, including babies and young children. They might be affected by the anxiety of their parents, huge changes and uncertainty to their routine, or by a variety of other losses, like losing their grandparents and or caregivers in the community, not being able to see family members or no longer having contact with playmates can cause emotional challenges for your child.

You have to pay attention to your child, listening attentively allows you to figure out what they are thinking and feeling. They will intuitively sense that you understand them better because you took the time and energy to really care by paying attention and responding appropriately. You will make more sense of their emotions and it will strengthen your relationship with your child.

Communicating with children has to remain constant and whilst it may be difficult, it is actually a relationship glue. These 7 tips will help you tune in when your child needs your full attention...

1. **Listen with your whole body** - Face them, make eye contact, kneel down to get on your child's level if necessary.
2. **Pick up on the emotion** - This sends the message that you are taking them and their feelings seriously.
3. **Acknowledge your child's feelings** - Empathy is one of the most powerful and comforting responses we can give to another person, especially a child. When you acknowledge those feelings, you validate them.
4. **Delay correction and gather more information** - You are likely to get more cooperation when you are willing to hear your child's concerns versus simply correcting them.
5. **Try to see the situation through your child's eyes** - Try to step into your child's frame of reference before reacting. We often expect our children to understand adult-like ways of thinking and we don't give consideration to how they might be thinking or viewing the situation.
6. **Avoid shaming your child, rather focus on behavior** - A child doesn't know how to correct being defective but he can learn to correct his behavior if given instruction in a supportive and encouraging way.
7. **Encourage your child to think proactively about solutions** - When we encourage our children to become part of the solution, they often have greater motivation for resolving it.

6 STEPS FOR BETTER FAMILY CONNECTIONS

1 - Eat together - Sitting around the table is a great time for everyone to engage in a group conversation and for you to find out what's happening in your children's lives. Setting up some routines around mealtimes can also provide a sense of security and comfort – especially for younger children. This sense of familiarity can help with creating a state of stability, comfort and routine.

2 - Get children involved in preparing meals - Encouraging kids of all ages to be actively involved in preparing meals can help make the time that you sit down at the table as a family even more meaningful. Small children can help you wash vegetables and set the table. Older children may even be interested in helping you prepare a traditional family meal from your cultural background. This is a great way for children to bond with their cultural heritage and traditions.

3 - Exercise, chat, play and read together - Getting some fresh air and exercising can be a fantastic way to bond as a family. Try to find a fun, outdoor activity that the whole family can get involved in. Depending on the age of your children, establish set time in the day to chat more, play together and read aloud, or complete a family workout. Family exercise is also a great way for kids to develop important skills, and for everyone to build in valuable movement into the day. These simple activities can be safe way for your child to tell you what they are worried about and for you to pick on any signs of stress.

4 - Be interested - It may seem obvious, but when it comes to family bonding, it's very important that you take an active interest in your kids' lives – not just by taking them to nursery or ferrying them around in the car. Get down to their level and be interested in what they are doing. Ask them about their friends, their activities and what they like and don't like. If your child shares something with you – perhaps expresses a fear or reservation – be sure to follow up at a later date to show you've remembered and let them know that it's important to you too.

5 - Have one-on-one time too - As well as spending time together as a group, having one-on-one time with individual family members can go a long way towards developing strong, trusted relationships. If you have several children, make sure that they feel your attention is equally divided – and not forgetting your partner (if you have one).

6 - Strike a healthy balance between screen and family time - The pandemic has meant that screen time has taken over most of our lives. Children develop healthy screen-use habits when they see you using screens in healthy ways. Healthy screen-use is about what you use screens for, when you use them, and how long you use them for. You can send powerful messages about screen-use by making regular, screen-free time for family activities. When you're with your child, focus on your child and minimise distractions like your phone.

THE ‘NEW NORMAL’ FAMILY ACTIVITIES

3 ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE FAMILY COHESION

You will need - To be as creative as you can, use pens, paint, paper, glue, glitter and any other exciting your family enjoys. Each activity should take approximately 30 minutes.

1. Our daily planner

In times like this, when everything feels anything but normal, we must structure our day as best we can to create routine and our own sense of normality. Use this planner to help you organise your daily activities – You may need one for each family member.

- If you are working from home, schedule breaks at the same time as your child.
- For toddlers and pre-schoolers – Adjust some of the daily routines they are used to from nursery.
- For older kids at school, include learning activities as recommended by the school.

2. Our weekly Planner

Have a long distance view of your week by planning weekly. Actually this will help you with your daily plans and vice versa. Observe the difference between weekdays and weekends. Finally, ensure that you have some quiet time for yourself penned in the planner.

3. Our Family rules

Family rules is a great exercise to open conversations with your child about your expectations of each other and your behaviour. It helps everyone in the family get along better and make family life more positive and peaceful.

4. Our family mantra

A family mantra is a powerful bonding tool. It should be authentic, heartfelt, and meaningful. Repeat your family mantra as often as possible, especially at bedtimes.

OUR DAILY PLANNER

A daily timetable or schedule can be used each day to help you and your family develop structure and cope with being at home during this time. Have realistic expectations (both for yourself and your child) around home learning and family fun time.

DAY

Time	Activities
7:00	
8:00	
9:00	
10:00	
11:00	
12:00	
13:00	
14:00	
15:00	
16:00	
17:00	
18:00	
19:00	
20:00	

OUR WEEKLY PLANNER

DATE: _____

PRIORTIES

MON.....	
■	
■	
TUES.....	
■	
■	
WEDS.....	CHAT
■	
■	
THURS.....	
■	
■	
FRI.....	PLAY
■	
■	
SAT.....	READ
■	
■	
SUN.....	
■	
■	

OUR FAMILY RULES

Together, create a list of 10 family rules. Rules can be about things like physical behaviour, safety, manners, routines and respect. Good family rules are positive, specific and easy to understand.

1. They say exactly what behaviour you expect, for example: “We say please when we ask for something”.
2. They are easy for children to understand, another example is: “Use a quiet voice inside the house”.
3. They tell children what to do, rather than what not to do, for example: “Put your clothes away”, rather than, “Don’t be messy”.

THE FAMILY RULES

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OUR FAMILY MANTRA

CREATING BOUNDARIES AND MODELLING GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Using age-appropriate wording, discuss with your child the following:

- What do we (as a family) stand for?
- What kind of family do we want to become?
- What kind of feeling do we want in our home?
- How do you hope people describe us?
- How do we want to give back to others?
- What do we do (as a family) if one of us is upset?
- How do we (as a family) resolve disagreements?

Then use the template to create your mantra. It should be authentic, heartfelt, and meaningful. Make it short and easy to remember.

In our house we

We believe

We love to

We choose to

LOOKING FORWARD

Take 10 minutes to make a note of what you've enjoyed, what you've learned and what were the most positive aspects of the kit. Think about how you'll make it a part of everyday family life.

A. What are the three most important things you've learned from doing the activities in this kit?

1.....

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2.....

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3.....

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B. What aspect(s) do you intend to continue?

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C. How can you make sure you keep the momentum going?

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FINALLY - FOR NOW

Whilst we're following the guidelines, and navigating our way towards this new normal, it is important that we don't lose sight of our focus on the family.

Possibly the biggest challenge in the life of a parent, is to remain influential, in a positive way, to those in your care. There are so many distractions that children face, therefore, if you can make the home a place of peace and safety, bonded together by love and affection, ring-fenced with clear boundaries, you will undoubtedly be giving your child an environment where they can flourish, their wellbeing will be boosted and their life chances will improve – they will ultimately become good neighbours, family members, friends, colleagues and an asset to society.

It is important to remember that loving your children doesn't have to be extraordinary, extrovert or elaborate, it simply has to be just enough.

All the very best.

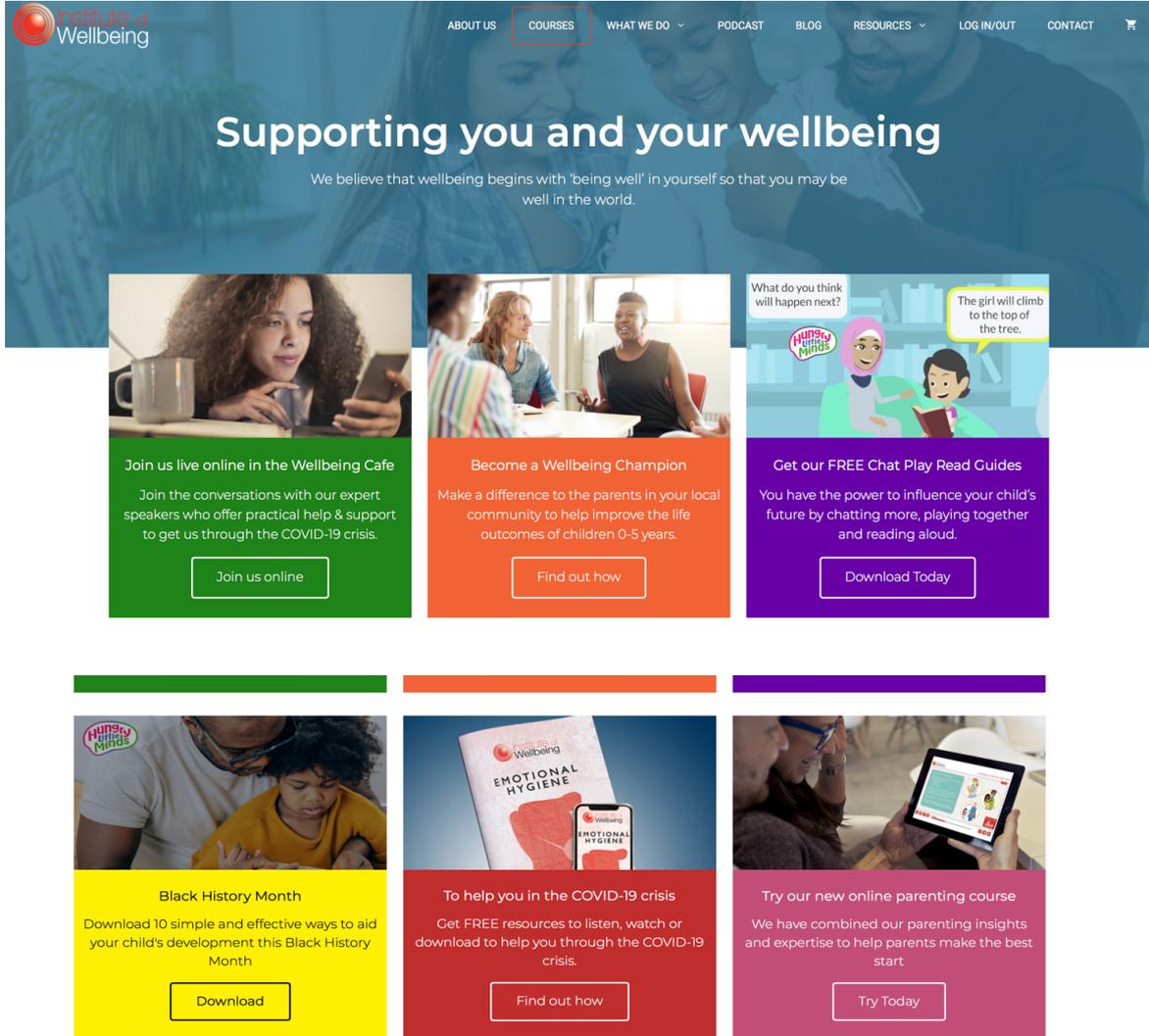


Dr. Mike Kelly

Think well, Live well and Be well.

For more Early Years resources, activities and support: please visit

<https://theinstituteofwellbeing.com>



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Institute of Wellbeing website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for ABOUT US, COURSES, WHAT WE DO, PODCAST, BLOG, RESOURCES, LOG IN/OUT, and CONTACT. The main heading is "Supporting you and your wellbeing" with a subtext: "We believe that wellbeing begins with 'being well' in yourself so that you may be well in the world." Below this are three featured cards:

- Join us live online in the Wellbeing Cafe:** "Join the conversations with our expert speakers who offer practical help & support to get us through the COVID-19 crisis." Button: "Join us online".
- Become a Wellbeing Champion:** "Make a difference to the parents in your local community to help improve the life outcomes of children 0-5 years." Button: "Find out how".
- Get our FREE Chat Play Read Guides:** "You have the power to influence your child's future by chatting more, playing together and reading aloud." Button: "Download Today".

Below these are three more cards:

- Black History Month:** "Download 10 simple and effective ways to aid your child's development this Black History Month." Button: "Download".
- To help you in the COVID-19 crisis:** "Get FREE resources to listen, watch or download to help you through the COVID-19 crisis." Button: "Find out how".
- Try our new online parenting course:** "We have combined our parenting insights and expertise to help parents make the best start." Button: "Try Today".