

Wellbeing for Parents and Carers



In your role as a parent or carer of a child or young person, you may be familiar with the concept of “putting on your own oxygen mask, before helping others”.

This information is part of a series of supports for wellbeing and the focus of this guidance is two-fold. It encourages you to consider your own wellbeing first, with a view to being in a stronger position to support the wellbeing of your child.

It pulls together some of the most effective psychological advice to support wellbeing for people of all ages and if you feel that you are able to do so, is designed to help you to support your child, through a shared conversation.

Human beings are sometimes said to be social animals. This means we are designed to want to be around others to thrive and survive. Positive relationships are key to our wellbeing and feeling connected.

There are also times when we feel a range of less positive emotions and this is perfectly normal. For example, we might feel anxious, angry, sad, worried or confused and these feelings can be very strong some of the time. This can lead to self-isolation and children and young people are likely to require support as they navigate the ups and downs of life.

The strategies within the six building blocks to wellbeing have been shown to make a difference to wellbeing for people of all ages. So thinking about how you use/might use some of the strategies is a good first step that you might then use to help your child/young person to identify areas to prioritise.

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Kindness and Gratitude

Life can be tough and at these times, remembering to show kindness to others and extending this to ourselves through self-compassion will make a difference to our wellbeing. While teaching children and young people this concept, it is important to apply it to ourselves.

Being kind makes others feel better, but it has also been shown to strengthen our own wellbeing. Even small acts of kindness such as making a kind comment to or helping someone with something can make a huge difference to how they feel. Noticing the difference that makes, makes us feel good too.

Within the family environment, stresses are a fact of life and we may get it wrong at times in our interactions. Children and young people also make mistakes – that is how they learn. So, for all of us, mistakes are normal and when they happen the most important thing is to acknowledge what has happened and move on positively.

Sometimes we can be very hard on ourselves. When we feel we have got it wrong, it can be helpful to think about what we would say to our child or a friend if they were in the same situation.

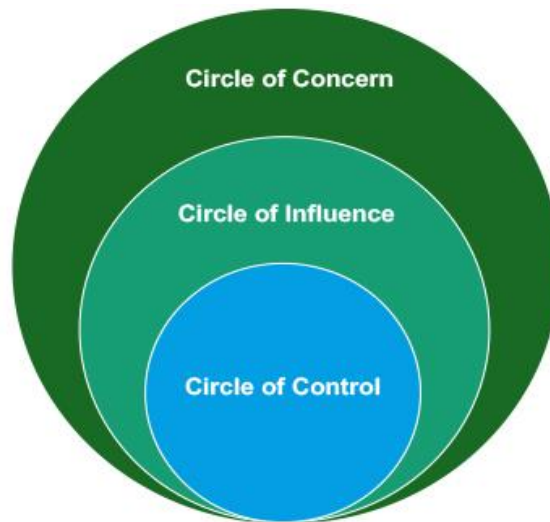
As families, building good routines, making healthy choices and having fun together are all ways of nurturing and being kind to ourselves.

Thinking about what we are grateful for is a way to combat anxiety and low mood. Reflecting, identifying and naming 3 positive things which happened in a day is a useful activity, eg we had a nice breakfast together, we all enjoyed watching the film.

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Circle of Influence



Circle of Control - things we can directly control or impact through our thoughts, words or actions

Circle of Influence - things we can do something about. Although we can't control the outcome, we can have influence over it

Circle of Concern – things we have no control over

To support good wellbeing, we need to identify where we can make a difference and direct our attention, energy and actions to those things. This is our circle of influence and will help give us a sense of purpose and control. There are:

Things we can control or influence - often our own behaviours, such as when we go to bed, whether we exercise, eat healthily, prioritise family time over social media, take a deep breath and walk away if we're feeling things are tough. As parents and carers, it is important to set boundaries for our children, to ensure they get adequate sleep so that they can manage the demands of their day. We can also support them to make the right choices through our discussions with them. How we act, behave and respond, will influence our children's responses. Setting boundaries for ourselves as adults is also important when considering our own wellbeing needs.

This can sometimes be difficult to do, so being realistic and kind to ourselves is important. We might think to ourselves; "At this point in time I have these resources available to me, these relationships available to draw on, this amount of time for this task, this amount of energy and so what actions can I take?"

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Connectedness and Relationships

Social connections and a sense of belonging are key to wellbeing. However, there are many situations where opportunities feel limited – we may have just moved into a new area and are struggling to meet new friends, we may not be working or working from home and have limited access to colleagues. If we feel that our child or family are isolated, it is important to know that it is okay to ask for help. Schools are a good place to start as they will be able to signpost us to sources of support.

While access to social media can be useful, it is not a substitute for face-to-face relationships and we should set limits for ourselves and everyone in the family.

Enhancing our Neurotransmitters

Our brains naturally produce “feel good” chemicals which can help to protect us from the effects of anxiety and other negative emotions. We can increase our levels of these chemicals by engaging in the following activities.

- Dopamine:** Listening to music, relaxation, mindfulness
- Serotonin:** Good consistent sleep, being outside, nature, laughter and comedy
- Oxytocin:** Positive interactions with others, stroking pets
- Endorphins:** Exercise and dancing

This is useful to think about for ourselves and our children. Building in times during the day for feel good activities helps keep our own energy topped up and aids our capacity to provide support to our families.

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Making a Plan

Unpredictability can increase anxiety; however, we can create some predictability by developing simple daily structures and routines. When creating our plans we need to remember:

Set realistic goals - don't over plan for the day, keep it simple.

- Routine times can help - eg for eating and sleeping - this can help us make things predictable and stay rested and energized.
- Plan to take a break if you feel that you are becoming short tempered/overloaded - parents and carers need a break too!
- Schedule pleasant events - eg reading, calling a friend, cooking, bubble bath.
- Don't overthink it if those goals are not achieved - tomorrow is another day.
- Be kind to ourselves - sometimes life takes over.

When creating a plan it can be helpful to identify obstacles that might get in the way. After trying out our plan we should review it as to how it went so we can amend it if necessary, eg a plan to have a fun family time, remove obstacles to this by switching off mobile phones and picking an activity everyone enjoys.

Shaping our thinking and feelings

It is normal to experience strong emotions at times, and feel anxious, scared, unsettled or powerless. Taking time to name and acknowledge these difficult feelings will make them more manageable and help limit the experience of constant anxiety. This can be done by naming and acknowledging feelings or discussing them with others.

Talking through a tricky day can help us process it and then we will hopefully feel more able for tomorrow. While making plans is helpful, it is important to acknowledge that difficult feelings may remain. If thinking about the past or the future makes us anxious returning our focus to the present moment may be helpful.

Another strategy is to spot negative thoughts and then to practice replacing with positive thoughts, eg Red (negative, unhelpful) thoughts, such as - bedtime is always a nightmare, I can't see it getting any better - catching this and replacing with a Green (helpful) thought, such as - bad times don't last, there are things I can try and I'm doing my best.

Revisiting key messages of resilience also helps in reframing our thoughts, being optimistic and having hope for the future.

- This won't last forever; things will get better.
- Don't be afraid to ask others for help and support.
- Remember, everyone faces challenges sometimes, not just me.
- Keep things in perspective - this is tough but I can be thankful for the good things in life.

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The Educational Psychology Service are there to support your and others' wellbeing. Please do not hesitate to get in touch:

Tel **01738 476242**

Email **EdPsychologists@pkc.gov.uk**

For further information - follow us on X **@PerthEPS** and use the **#buildingwellbeing**

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