

relate ni
the relationship people



Supporting Relationships

Keeping Your Relationships Healthy During Lockdown

About Relate NI

Relate NI, funded by FSCN, provide counselling in 13 primary schools in West Belfast. During lockdown, FSCN and Relate NI are continuing to work remotely to provide support and guidance to schools and families. Relate NI continue to provide web and phone based services at this time in order to ensure the people and communities have access to high quality counselling and support. Our services include counselling to children over the age of 10; relationship counselling for individuals and couples and family therapy at this time.

If you feel you could benefit from support at this time, contact office@relateni.org and we'll get back to you about how we might be able to help you and your family during lockdown. You can also phone us on 028 90323454

As well as our counselling services, Relate NI are developing resources, like this book, to help you and your family during lockdown. Visit our website for more guidance on maintaining healthy relationships during Covid19. The address is

www.relateni.org/covid19relationshipsupport



@relateni



@RelateNorthernIreland

85%

of respondents said that they wished they had attended Relate NI sooner*

*Relate NI's 2018/2019 Evaluation Survey

tel. 028 9032 3454

www.relateni.org

About FSCN



The FSCN aims to raise educational attainment by working in partnership to address the educational needs of children, their families and the local community of Upper Springfield and Greater Falls.

FSCN are currently providing additional home-working packs to Schools, children and families as well as participating in Zoom sessions to provide homework support for children and families.

FSCN are also posting regular additional resources on their facebook page to support home learning.

FSCN can be contacted via ann.pendleton@fscn.org.uk



@FullServiceCommunityNetwork

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Introduction

Healthy relationships have never been more important than they are right now. Lockdown means that families are spending more time together than ever before; physical distancing limits our opportunities to spend time with our wider family and friends; and families & communities are experiencing a host of unique challenges, financial and other, which have arisen over the last number of weeks. Relate NI are here to help you at this time.

This book aims to support you with strategies and resources to reduce the impact lockdown is having on you and your family. Together with our partners in Full Service Community Network (FSCN), we want to support families with information and guidance at this time.

Relate NI aims to:

- **Promote Healthy Relationships** – supporting everyone to form and maintain safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with friends, colleagues, at school, with family, neighbours and communities, and with partners.
- **Prevent**, as far as possible people's relationships from falling into difficulties, particularly during times of transition.
- **Protecting** people at times of crisis such as relationship breakdown or when their relationships are under most strain in order to better support people's health and wellbeing.





When Will All This Be Over?

Answering your children's questions during the
pandemic.

When Will All This Be Over?

This is probably a question that parents and carers around the globe are hearing from their children on a regular basis. So how do we answer and address the uncertainty and fear surrounding the pandemic with our children?

Everything is very uncertain and the truth is we don't know how long it will go on for and what life will look like afterwards. It is hard for any of us to tolerate and make sense of this level of uncertainty.

For children it can be so much more difficult to make sense of as a few weeks and months can feel like an absolute lifetime. However, helping them to learn how to manage this uncertainty is an important lifetime skill and can help to build resilience.

So how do we answer the question, 'when will this all be over'?

Leading experts shared their guidance;

Firstly, they advise to **Lead With Honesty**. The most important thing is to be honest, truth is we do not know how long it will last or what life will be like after. Explain to your child that while you cannot give them an exact answer you are following the news/ media coverage and will tell them once you find out. Give clear, age appropriate information based on your child's temperament and personality. You don't need to give all the sad and upsetting facts to very young children, a simple and clear explanation that some people are very sick and that the doctors are working very hard to try and make them better is enough. It is also useful to explain to children that although we don't have all the answers scientists and government officials are doing everything they can to try and work out solutions and cures.

Make it an ongoing conversation - If you haven't already explained what is going on firstly ask your children what they know about Covid-19, this gives you an opportunity to share facts and clear up any misinformation. Children know that something big is happening and by parents avoiding talking about it will only make them worry even more and assume that it is even scarier than it is.

Validate their feelings- It's important to explain to children that you understand how they are feeling and it is ok to talk about it. This has been very unsettling for children, their routine, school life and home life have been completely turned upside down. They are not getting to socialise with their friends and extended family. Encourage them to say how they are feeling and express the worries and concerns they have. It's useful to also let them know that sometimes you too feel angry, scared, worried and sad and share the ways you deal with those emotions.

Emphasise safety and security - Provide reassurance. In the egocentric world of children what they really need and want to hear is that they are safe and who will be there to take care of them. Giving children lots of hugs and reassuring words like 'we love and care about you' is so important. The most important approach when children ask 'when will this all be over?' is to stress safety and security at all times.

Focus on the present- Encourage children to take each day at a time and not to give too much energy to the future. Remind children of fun times you have had as a family during lockdown, which shows them the benefit of living in the moment and learning to enjoy every experience. Rather than focusing so much on 'when' try looking at your own and your children's anxiety and stress levels and how to manage that.

When Will All This Be Over?

Highlight what is in their control- Focusing on the here and now and what they are in control of, for example regular hand washing, wiping down surfaces, maybe offering to help an older neighbour. Also putting out little notes for the bin men, postmen thanking them for their work. Painting rainbows for your windows and letting them take part in 'clap for our carers'. Getting children to write lists of things they look forward to doing once this is all over can help them to feel a sense of control and independence.

Promise to keep them updated- Let your children know that you will keep them updated about any change in circumstances and updates about when they should be returning to school etc. Reassure them that you are watching the news but be mindful to not expose very young children to coverage as this can be distressing and developmentally inappropriate.

Stay Positive- The power of positivity cannot be overstated in times like these. Use a calm and collected voice when talking to your children, this helps to convey a sense of confidence and a feeling that everything will be ok. One positive thing you can share with your children is that, although we don't know exactly when this will end we know that it will end eventually. Remind them that it is only temporary and is not going to go on forever and you will get back to your normal lives.

Other Helpful Resources



Hello! My Name is Coronavirus

An illustrated resource book for talking to young children about the Coronavirus. Available in different languages at <https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>



Maintaining Healthy Relationships

How to manage conflict during lockdown

Maintaining Healthy Relationships

During the uncertainty that we are all facing it is only natural that such changes in our lives can and will be affecting our relationships. So being mindful of this it is important to try and be extra patient and understanding not only with each other but also with ourselves.

Here are five quick tips for nurturing healthy relationships from the Mental Health Foundation;

Give time- put more time aside to connect with your family and friends

Be present- this means really paying attention to other people in your life and household. Try not to be distracted by your phone, your work or other interests.

Listen- really listen to what others are saying and try to understand it and to focus on their needs in that moment.

Let yourself be listened to- be honest when sharing how you are feeling, and allow yourself to be heard and supported by others.

Recognise unhealthy relationships- harmful relationships can make us unhappy. Recognising this can help us to move forward and find solutions.

Everyone will be feeling frustrated and frustration can create a domino effect for the entire family. While the dynamic at home may consist of home schooling and parents trying to work from home it is important to try to talk about scheduling time, together time, connected time and try to schedule time, even if it's 15-20 minutes to be apart, alone time. People have different needs but

everyone benefits from some alone time especially when we are all on top of each other at home at the minute.

Due to the strain on relationships this can lead to **conflict** within the family unit. Such as;

1. Parenting disagreements- Before the pandemic in a family household with two parents it may have been common for one parent to have taken the lead on day-day parenting decisions. This may now have shifted and there may be a 'fight' for this position. Decisions like how much screen time is allowed? How closely school work should be monitored and how much sugar is too much?

Strategies for managing parental disagreements;

- Reflect on the bigger picture- in years to come what do you want your children to remember from this time at home?
- Flexibility is key- most daily parenting decisions are not going to make or break your child. Try to be more relaxed on the specifics. Continued conflict will have a negative impact on your child as opposed to compromising on something that perhaps takes you a little out of your comfort zone.
- Nurture your partner - many parents are finding they have less patience with their children at the minute. Rather than criticise your partner, take the opportunity to soothe your stressed partner and connect around your challenges.

Maintaining Healthy Relationships

Schoolwork- one of the main stresses for parents is supervising and managing their child's education. This can be very stressful especially if your child experiences learning challenges. The classroom is a powerful structure that creates favourable learning conditions. It is impossible to mimic this setting at home so don't stress and just do the best you can.

Strategies for managing schoolwork

- Prioritise certain material or subjects, be clear on boundaries around when to hold your child accountable and when to let things go.
- Make use of reward systems to motivate your child. Rewards can actually increase intrinsic motivation when tasks provide a child with a sense of accomplishment. Be mindful not to set the bar too high or leave it too long to make the reward.

Behaviour challenges- without the usual structure of school and child care, many parents are exhausted with the effort to manage their children. For parents with children who display challenging behaviours such as intense tantrums, aggression, defiance or emotional outbursts each day can feel like a marathon.

Strategies for managing behavioural issues

Decrease demands on your child. It is normal for parents to make requests of their children. Try to count how many times in one single day you do this, if you are in double figures then you need to scale back the demands.

Ignore mildly negative behaviours often labelled as 'attitude'. Parents usually have

little control over attitude in their children. If your child is complying even with some grumpiness it is still a win-win.

Annoying behaviours are another area families may benefit from *adjusting expectations*. If ignoring a behaviour is too painful and hard for you try a different technique. For example, instead of saying 'stop bouncing that ball inside', you might say 'please take the ball outside for bouncing'.

Reduce punishments such as taking away toys. Punishment is easy to overuse and can often exacerbate the problem than help it. Be mindful not to pick something as a punishment that also punishes you, maybe letting them watch the TV for 30 minutes while you prepare dinner is in fact helpful.

Sibling Conflict- While siblings can be a great comfort and company to one another during these times there can also be an increase in sibling disputes. With many parents struggling to know how and when to get involved.

Strategies for managing sibling conflict

- Allow siblings to resolve their own conflict when possible.
- Teaming up, when multiple siblings 'gang up' on a single sibling - this should not be allowed.
- Do not allow them to be physically aggressive to one another. While there are other issues you can let slide, aggression 100% of the time needs to be contained. Be consistent and keep your emotions out of the equation.



Looking After Your Emotions

Helping families to emotionally regulate during
Covid-19

Photo by Michael
Morse from Pexels

Looking After Your Emotions

As we navigate our way through these changing times with work interruptions, family disruptions and health concerns, it is clear that none of us are immune to the increased stress and anxiety as we cross into the unknown. The current stress and tension can often affect our ability to adapt to the new 'normal'.

So the question is how can we help our children when we need help ourselves?

Child psychologist Dr, Bruce Perry has a helpful guide for parents on how to stay regulated and handle stress during these uncertain times.

Firstly, let's look at what self-regulation is? Self-Regulation involves learning to control your behaviour, emotions and thoughts and the ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses.

This is something that parents can help children to develop, especially during these uncertain and stressful times.

Perry suggests 7 useful tools to help families emotionally regulate during the pandemic.

Structure your day- Children appear to be much more tolerant to stress when it presents in predictable ways, such as daily routines and bedtimes etc. When stress is unpredictable children become more vulnerable rather than resilient.

Having meals together- Having meals together helps to maintain a structure and routine as well as letting you check in and stay connected with your children.

Limit media - While technology can be a great tool to stay connected with family and friends at the minute, relying too much on media can replace time that should be spent

easing each other's stress and connecting emotionally.

Exercise- When children are in a fearful state they also have a heightened state of arousal. Rhythm and movement can help to regulate them such as, walking, running, dancing and singing.

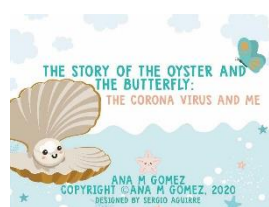
Reach out- Connecting with others is so important, even though we have to be physically distant we can remain emotionally close. Taking care of your own needs is SO important. An unregulated child cannot be regulated by an unregulated parent!

Get a good night's sleep- Due to current worry and stress it is normal for us to be feeling more emotionally and physically exhausted. To help us sleep better try to exercise in the morning/afternoon and wind down with calming activities. Avoid late night screen time.

Stay positive- If we as the adults try to stay calm and regulated our children will feel less distressed. In turn everyone will feel socially, emotionally and physically healthier.

As we practice self-care, rely on others and connect with the people around us. Our families will come out of this with greater personal strength, stronger relationship connections and better resilience.

Other Helpful Resources



The Story of the Oyster and the Butterfly

An illustrated resource book for helping children regulate their emotions. Available in different languages at

<https://www.anagomez.org/covid-19-resources/>

What Next

The tips and guidance contained in this book are aimed at helping you and your family maintain healthy relationships through this unprecedented period. You may also find counselling support from one of our trained counsellors beneficial. Use the details below to contact us to find out how we can support you.

Relate NI services continue to be available through this time via telephone and webcam. If you would benefit from speaking to one of our trained counsellors, contact us on 028 90323454 or on office@realteni.org

www.relateni.org/covid19relationshipsupport



Call Parentline NI today for advice, support or guidance.

 **0808 8020 400**

Our partners in **Parentline NI** are also available to support parents. Call the Freephone number to speak with one of the team.

