

Managing wellbeing in you and your family



Neurodiversity 101:

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This is an extraordinary time for everyone and there are very few people who are not feeling anxious at some time. For parents with children of all ages it has also meant having to balance their children's needs and wellbeing alongside their own.

In addition, juggling home working with trying to support children's learning means there is a fine line between coping and not coping at all and feeling overwhelmed. Anxiety can come along in waves when you are least expecting it, and at these times it can feel like we have lost control.

Every child will also be trying to cope with a new reality with no timelines or certainty on the horizon. They may be trying to make sense of what is happening in their own way depending on their age. Some will be able to verbalise this, while some may become angry, irritable or withdrawn. They will certainly be picking up on your concerns and the way you act and behave with them.

This article explains some reasons for our feelings and also provides some practical strategies and activities that you and your family can use to help.

One way of thinking about this is seeing ourselves as a 'bucket'. Each one of us has so much capacity. Varying elements in our lives fill up our buckets and they can fill at different rates. If our bucket becomes too full and overflows, we then feel overwhelmed. In normal circumstances we would find ways of coping by reducing the level in the bucket. This could be achieved, for example, by taking exercise, meeting friends, or talking to others. At the present time there is a lot flowing in but less choice of how we empty the bucket! By understanding your own anxieties, you can help your children as well as yourself

Why do we feel anxious?

This may be for example:

- Changes in the person's routines
- Lack of control over choices
- Fear about our wellbeing of others
- Uncertainty about the future (and the present!)

At the moment, we have all of these things going on and hence this makes us all feel more anxious because we can't be in control.



Alt text: Picture of bucket with three taps with water flowing into the bucket, and one tap emptying it.

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What helps if you feel anxious?

- ❖ **F = Focus on what's in your control**
 - You can't control everything, but you can control what is going on in your home and with your children.
- ❖ **A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings.**
 - Allow yourself to recognise when you feel anxious.
- ❖ **C = Come back into your body**
 - Stand up or press feet to the floor; or place your hands on a chair.
 - Shrug your shoulders.
 - Take some slow and deep breaths.
- ❖ **E = Engage in what you're doing**
 - Be present.
 - What is in front of you-look at your hands?
 - What can you hear or smell around you?



Start by being kind to yourself

For most of us we are learning a new 'normal'. We are trying to work and be at home all the at the same time in very strange circumstances!

- ❖ Start by mapping out the day. Be realistic in what you can achieve and start by being kind to yourself. You may need to plan your work and your children's time. Unless you are a teacher – you are not a teacher! This may be more challenging if your child has additional learning needs and finds it harder to focus on some tasks. If you think about it how much time your child really spends with their teacher each day? Your day- to- day contact provides so many opportunities for learning that don't have to be scheduled by the minute. An average school day is 360 minutes and with about 30 children in each class that means that 12 minutes per child is the total of time given if it was one- to- one. By you being more relaxed with your children, and your children sensing this, they will also be less anxious too.
- ❖ While it is important to structure the day, try not to over-organise it minute by minute. If you don't achieve everything you will just feel you have failed. Let your children put the plan together. Build in achievable rewards. These can be a mix of small ones (more easily achievable) and bigger ones that can be gained.
- ❖ Try easing off with formal schoolwork and provide some fun things to do but build in any 'educational part' within these activities in holidays.

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Tops tips:

- ❖ **Create a broad structure to the day** such as ensuring there are regular mealtimes. An expected time to get up and get dressed for example.
- ❖ **Let your children help with chores** every day (this also provides structure) and provide them with a menu of activities, so they can decide how many rewards they get when they engage in this.
- ❖ **Avoid talking about Covid19** and watching the news and checking on your phone in front of your children all the time. Don't start catastrophising as this can easily spiral your feelings out of control. Focus on what you can control.
- ❖ **Create times and ways to discuss worries** with your children. Sometimes it can be easier talking about worries when you are not directly doing so
 - [Play a game of cards](#), do some colouring or painting, do a jigsaw together or prepare a meal. It can be easier for your children to talk at these times when they can see you are more relaxed as well. You can have a more 'normal' conversation.
 - **Have a worry box** where worries can be posted. They can be taken away each day (and you can see what is concerning your child).
 - **Build an 'anger volcano'**
 - You could build this with Lego blocks, papier-mâché or Playdoh or draw a volcano (good for planning, turn taking, creativity, and fine motor skills)
 - You could find out everything about volcanoes- how they look, where are the biggest ones around the world (geography, history)
 - Discuss with your child how a volcano rumbles and then erupts and how this can relate feelings we have when we get angry or feel out of control.
 - Talk to your child about how they feel when they want to 'erupt' and what can be done to stop that from happening.
- ❖ **Set time each day to do fun-stuff together.**
 - Write a family song or use kitchen instruments to create music together.
 - Make a family history- your child could interview your family members on the phone or on the internet.
 - Cook together and do activities in the kitchen – your children can learn about food from other countries; maths concepts (fractions, weights, calculating amounts); fine motor tasks such as cutting up and even undertaking [Science experiments](#)
 - Watch live webcam from the zoos around the world.
 - Learn a new skill together – playing cards, learning another language, painting or drawing.
 - Read a book together- a few pages every day e.g. <https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>
- ❖ **Create a regular time for exercise** – it will help with sleep and mood too e.g. Do some yoga together or do a daily activity class like [Joe Wicks](#) daily class.

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Older children and teens

- Give them lee way as this is particularly hard for teenagers when peers are becoming more important than parents in terms of identity formation.
- Ensure they have some privacy, even if they have to use your bedroom during the day to have some space away from everyone.
- Offer regular opportunities to talk but don't expect them to accept but keep the 'door open'.
- Try to reduce arguments by holding regular family meetings especially if you have teens in the house.
- Do some shared activity e.g. create a family tree and interview family members.
- Cook together – use this opportunity to learn the basics.

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/kids-cooking>



Free books to read with your children:

A nurse from Southampton has written this book for your children about Covid-19

<https://nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2/>

An author and psychologist in Bogota, Colombia named Manuela Molina has written a short brilliant book for young children, has translated it into 16 languages:

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

Carol Gray: <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

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Links to activities

Table-top activities such as:

Card games to your children :<https://www.kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/kids-games/indoor-play/snap-12-classic-card-games-to-teach-the-kids/news-story/1d153893aee53908749c1377c588928c>

Science experiments in the kitchen:

https://www.jamesdysonfoundation.co.uk/resources/challenge-cards.html?gclid=CjwKCAjw3-bzBRBhEiwAgnnLCKxiaADpmFPHjg-vGJRCpo-SgB-KHJFP-byDMKKzH8LSM8hrZKFCYBoCc3UQAvD_BwE

and

https://www.britishscienceweek.org/plan-your-activities/activity-packs/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMIoPTF2bOe6AIVmKztCh1I_QB5EAAAYASAAEgJFlvD_BwE

Cookery activities:

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/kids-cooking> or

make some muffins, hedgehogs or pizzas <https://www.sitters.co.uk/blog/15-fun-cooking-activities-for-kids.aspx>

Indoor activities from Scouts:

https://www.scouts.org.uk/activities/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMIityApc3Q6AIVktDeCh39FQUaEAAYAyAAEglwGPD_BwE

Interested in animals what about watching a live webcam:

<https://www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/webcams/>

Exercise activities:

Yoga: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X655B4ISakg> and

Shake up from the NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/10-minute-shake-up/shake-ups>

Imoves- <https://imoves.com/the-imovement>

Wellbeing activities

<https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/parents-and-carers/coronavirus-wellbeing-activity-ideas-for-families/>

Using your imagination

https://ioi.london/latest/make-your-own-tumblewing-glider/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMIsODondvQ6AIVV-DtCh0QxQBIEAAAYASAAEgLv5_D_BwE

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Resources for children with educational needs

<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/distance-education-resources-for-children-and-young-people-with-send/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education#special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send>

Ref: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Illustrated-Happiness-Trap-Struggling-Living/dp/1611801575>



About the author:

Professor Amanda Kirby has worked for more than 25 years with families with children with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia (DCD), ADHD, speech and language challenges and Autism. She has neurodiverse children and grandchildren.

She has written 8 books, translated into different languages about neurodiversity supporting parents and adults across ages and stages.

She is the CEO of Do-IT Solutions. Do-IT Solutions have developed apps and software to provide practical support for children and adults

www.doitprofiler.com and <https://profiler.app/nd-app/>