



Parents videoconference: 19th May 2020

On 19th May 2020, Our Voice welcomed parents to a videoconference supported by a panel from Educational Psychology, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Social Emotional and Mental Health, Positive Behaviour Support coaches and the Joint Service for Disabled Children / Cheviots Children's Centre.

During the videoconference we explored a number of questions submitted by parents before and during the conference. Below is a summary of these discussions – responses are shown in green.

Supporting my child's learning at home

- 1) What is the best approach to get my child to engage with the course material, when he is disinclined to do so, without getting him more distressed?
 - 2) My child is not engaging with her school work and is very reluctant to get anything done. I am worried that she will fall further behind – how should I support her and how hard should I be pushing?
- Many children and young people (CYPs) are finding doing school work at home very difficult as it is so out of their normal routine, and they see school and home as very separate. Getting children to do school work when everything has changed so much is very challenging – we need to acknowledge that we are in a unique situation and there aren't any quick answers.
 - Don't put yourself and your child under too much pressure to get school work done.
 - Starting from where your child is:
 - Think about what your child usually enjoys doing at home in more normal circumstances, and what they are enjoying now.
 - Look at what they are able to do and enjoy doing at home on their own and with the family.
 - Find ways of doing more of that – this will support their focus and attention skills but from their own starting point.
 - Avoid too many prescriptive activities if your child is unsettled.
 - Break the work up into small chunks suited to your own child and allow them to do an activity they enjoy in before and after.
 - Remember that children can learn from many activities and not just the work provided by the school – you might want to focus on building some independence skills.

As a family:

- What do you enjoy doing together instead?

About the task:

- What are the school expectations? Schools won't be expecting children to have completed work in the same way as they would have done during a school day, and will understand if it is difficult for children to engage in their schoolwork.
- Has there been a conversation with the school – do they have any guidance? Talk to your school to get their support.

For more support

- You can talk to an Educational Psychologist about these issues – contact the EPS telephone line for parents/carers [here](#).
- The Our Voice website gathers together links to a variety of different support materials [here](#).



Emotion and behaviour

- 3) How do you get your child to focus when they are all over the place mentally?
- 4) My son's behaviour was already challenging before we went into lockdown, but the changes in routine and the fact that we are all cooped up together has made things so much more difficult, and my whole family is suffering. What can I do to help improve things?

- Many children may be feeling unsettled at this time – it is perfectly understandable that this is the case, as their routines will be so different to normal.
- Families are experiencing life outside of their routine, limited socialising with friends and extended family, lots of time as a family, limited activities outside of the home, uncertain times.
- Parents and carers are also likely to be feeling unsettled and children may well pick up on this.
- There will be common experiences but also individual circumstances.
- Being kind to ourselves as parents and to our children is important – knowing we are all doing the best we can in very unprecedented times. What we might expect from ourselves and our children before the pandemic may be a bit different now, and that's okay and understandable.

Starting from where your child is:

- What will they enjoy doing with you or on their own that will settle them?
- What things usually help your child to calm and relax?
- Think about creating new routines that work in these different circumstances but give some kind of structure. You could use tools like a visual timetable to help your child to understand the new routine.
- Think about what activities are meaningful for your child and try to engage them in those as much as possible to try to limit the more challenging behaviours.
- Think about why you are seeing those behaviours – is your child trying to communicate something with you.
- Give your child as much choice and control as is reasonable. For example, you could offer them a choice of two different activities to pick from.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation has a useful [information sheet](#) and a [guide to supporting children and adults with learning disabilities at home during the pandemic](#).

- The NHS website has some useful general information on [looking after children and young people during the Coronavirus outbreak](#).

- 5) Many children with SEND learn best within their peer group and in familiar surroundings. Many children already struggled with understanding the world as it was before, but they now need to get used to a whole new way of going about our daily business – social distancing, face coverings etc. How are they meant to learn all this when there is nobody outside their own household for them to engage with? I am worried it may be a potential trigger for unmanageable behaviour or anxiety.

It is understandable to be worried, there are lots of things that we are not in control of at present. At these times it can be useful to think about what is within our control and influence

They will take the lead from you, how you approach the situation calmly, engage with them, have a routine and explain situations at their level of understanding and continue to do this as lockdown gradually lifts.



- 6) I am worried that my daughter won't cope well with the return to school because her routine has been so disrupted and the way things work will be so different when she gets back. What can be done to support her during and after her return?

It will be important to talk with the school about how to plan for this carefully before, during and after her return. They will let you know what the plans are for children's return to school. For example, schools may organise virtual tours of the new school environment, or send you written information or visual stories about how things will be different, and other support materials, so that you as a parent can think about how to communicate the changes to your child in a gradual way, suited to their own way of understanding things.

What you can do

- Remind your children about what happens at school
 - Walk your child past the school premises.
 - Talk positively with children about what will happen based on what you know.
 - Whilst it is understandable that you will have concerns, it is best to avoid sharing these with your child. They will be more sure of going back to school if you explain what will happen at their level of understanding in an encouraging, supportive and hopeful way.
- 7) How are our SEN children going to be kept socially distanced once they go back to school?
- Schools are going to be thinking about this and planning very carefully using government guidance.
 - Each individual school will be making appropriate judgements in line with their own school
 - Your school will be providing information. If this is not available yet, have a conversation with your child's school about what is planned.
 - Generally, schools will put in place routines and structures to enable children to practice social distancing, even if they don't really understand the concept. For example, 'traffic flow' systems controlling how and when children use corridors within the school.

Support for mental health issues (parent and child)

- 8) What local resources and/or online resources can parents access now to support the mental health of their children with SEND, (bearing in mind that not all general resources will be suitable for children with SEND)?

Our Voice and the Local Authority will be discussing this topic and looking at what can be developed. Our Voice has gathered together some existing resources on our website [here](#).

- 9) What extra support and resources are being put in place ready for the fall out of this as it is envisaged to be immense. Are we planning ahead to be ready for the huge increase in demand for CAMHS services?

There are ongoing conversations at national, regional and local level with the partnership – we recognise that this will be a long-term issue. There will be a network of support in place that will not just be limited to Specialist CAMHS.

- 10) If a child (with an EHCP) has been referred to CAMHS with anxiety relating to the transition to secondary school this September, why do they have to be on the waiting list for a year before they can receive support? Could first steps and strategies not be put in place now? Surely such a wait is likely to have a negative impact on their mental health and well-being, particularly given what all children are going through now.



We are aware that many children are likely to be worried about transition under these circumstances – especially if they were already anxious. All Enfield services will be thinking about ways to support during this time.

Our Voice has also recognised this as a topic of key importance. We have given input on this topic from a parent's perspective to the Local Authority and it has been included in the guidance which they have now issued to schools.

The online counselling service for young people from [Kooth](#) is also available. Work is being done to adapt this service to cater for young people with learning difficulties.

Talk to the secondary school your child is going to and discuss what they are planning and what support they can provide.

Our voice will be exploring this further with CAMHS and other Enfield services to keep parents' concerns on the agenda.

11) My own stress levels are going through the roof trying to look after my children and support their school work, as well as managing my own full-time job. Are there any strategies you can suggest to help, and is there any support I can get?

Many parents will be experiencing problems like this and it is important for us to be easy on ourselves and try to find ways of looking after our own well-being such as getting enough sleep if we can, going out for walks, eating well and activities like mindfulness exercises. Do talk to your employer to see what adjustments can be made if you are struggling, and to your child's school to see what support they can give – be honest about your challenges.

If you need more practical support, do call the Duty Social Worker at Cheviots (telephone 0208 363 4047) to see what options might be available to you. To qualify for support, your child will need to meet the criteria for the Joint Services for Disabled Children. At the moment there are no play schemes available (other than Cheviots for eligible families) but we will be contacting play scheme providers regarding their recovery plans as we hope that they will be able to open up again for the summer.

Some resources you might find helpful for looking after yourself and your child include:

- [EPS helpline](#)
- [Good thinking guide](#)
- [Wellbeing support for parents and carers](#)
- Our Voice website page on [Anxiety and Wellbeing](#) including [Supporting parents](#)
- Mindfulness exercises – see some examples of quick exercises you might like to try on the Enfield Local Offer [here](#).
- [NHS Every Mind Matters](#) website with some useful resources on looking after yourself and your child whilst staying at home
- The [Mind website](#)
- Samaritans have added information on [looking after yourself and your mental health](#) during the Coronavirus outbreak to their [website](#), and continue to offer their usual support services over the phone - call 116 123 for free.
- [Young Minds](#) is a mental health charity offering information, advice and support for young people.