

Supporting Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing through COVID-19

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is going to affect everyone's daily lives, as the government and the NHS take necessary steps to manage the outbreak, reduce transmission and treat those who need medical attention. Regardless of their age, this may be a difficult time for children and young people. Some may react right away, while others may show signs of difficulty later on.

How a child or young person reacts can vary according to their age, how they understand information and communicate, their previous experiences, and how they typically cope with stress. Negative reactions may include worrying thoughts about their health or that of family and friends, fear, avoidance, problems sleeping, or physical symptoms such as stomach ache.

During this time, it's important that you take care of your family's mental health - there are lots of things you can do, and support is available if you need it. In this letter we hope to give you some positive ways to manage your child's behaviour at home and ensure that they feel supported, safe and happy.

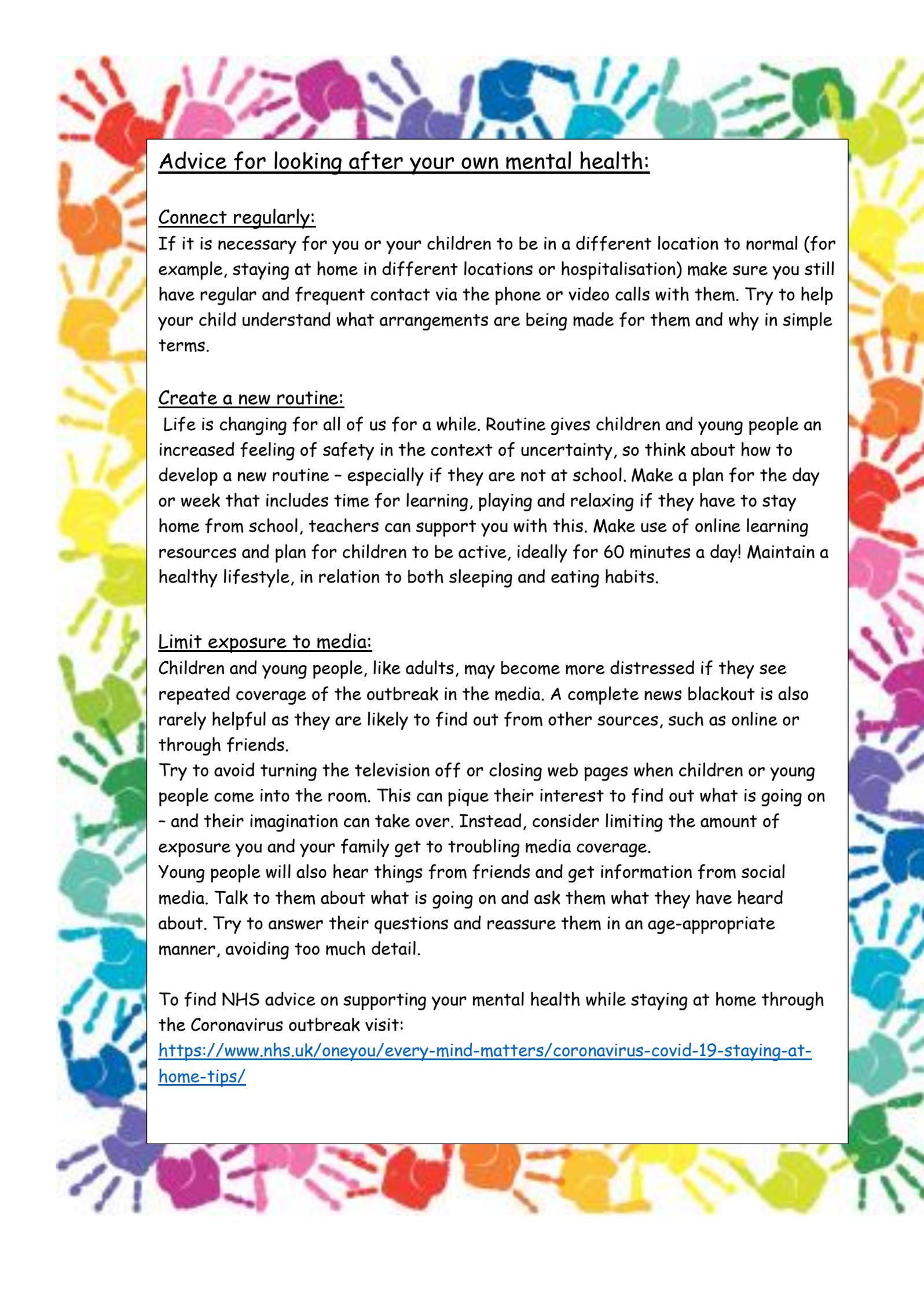
Looking after your own mental health

As well as thinking about the children or young people in your care, it is important to take care of your own mental health and wellbeing. Children and young people react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with a situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children and young people. Parents and caregivers can be more supportive to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Please see advice on how to look after your mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak or visit [Every Mind Matters](#) for clear advice and actions to take care of your mental health and wellbeing.

Be aware of your own reactions:

Remember that children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how you respond to the situation is very important. It is important to manage your own emotions and remain calm, listen to and acknowledge children and young people's concerns, speak kindly to them, and answer any questions they have honestly.



Advice for looking after your own mental health:

Connect regularly:

If it is necessary for you or your children to be in a different location to normal (for example, staying at home in different locations or hospitalisation) make sure you still have regular and frequent contact via the phone or video calls with them. Try to help your child understand what arrangements are being made for them and why in simple terms.

Create a new routine:

Life is changing for all of us for a while. Routine gives children and young people an increased feeling of safety in the context of uncertainty, so think about how to develop a new routine - especially if they are not at school. Make a plan for the day or week that includes time for learning, playing and relaxing if they have to stay home from school, teachers can support you with this. Make use of online learning resources and plan for children to be active, ideally for 60 minutes a day! Maintain a healthy lifestyle, in relation to both sleeping and eating habits.

Limit exposure to media:

Children and young people, like adults, may become more distressed if they see repeated coverage of the outbreak in the media. A complete news blackout is also rarely helpful as they are likely to find out from other sources, such as online or through friends.

Try to avoid turning the television off or closing web pages when children or young people come into the room. This can pique their interest to find out what is going on - and their imagination can take over. Instead, consider limiting the amount of exposure you and your family get to troubling media coverage.

Young people will also hear things from friends and get information from social media. Talk to them about what is going on and ask them what they have heard about. Try to answer their questions and reassure them in an age-appropriate manner, avoiding too much detail.

To find NHS advice on supporting your mental health while staying at home through the Coronavirus outbreak visit:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/>

How children and young people of different ages may react:

All children and young people are different, but there are some common ways in which different age groups may react to a situation like the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Understanding these may help you to know how to support your family. Signs may be emotional (for example, they may be upset, distressed, anxious, angry or agitated), behavioural (for example, they may become more clingy or more withdrawn, they may wet the bed), or physical (for example, they may experience stomach aches). Look out for any changes in their behaviour.

For infants to 2-year olds:

Infants may become more easily distressed. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

For 3 to 6-year olds:

Preschool and kindergarten children may return to behaviours they have outgrown. For example, toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents or caregivers. They may also have tantrums or difficulty sleeping.

The common reactions to distress will fade over time for most children and young people, though could return if they see or hear reminders of what happened.

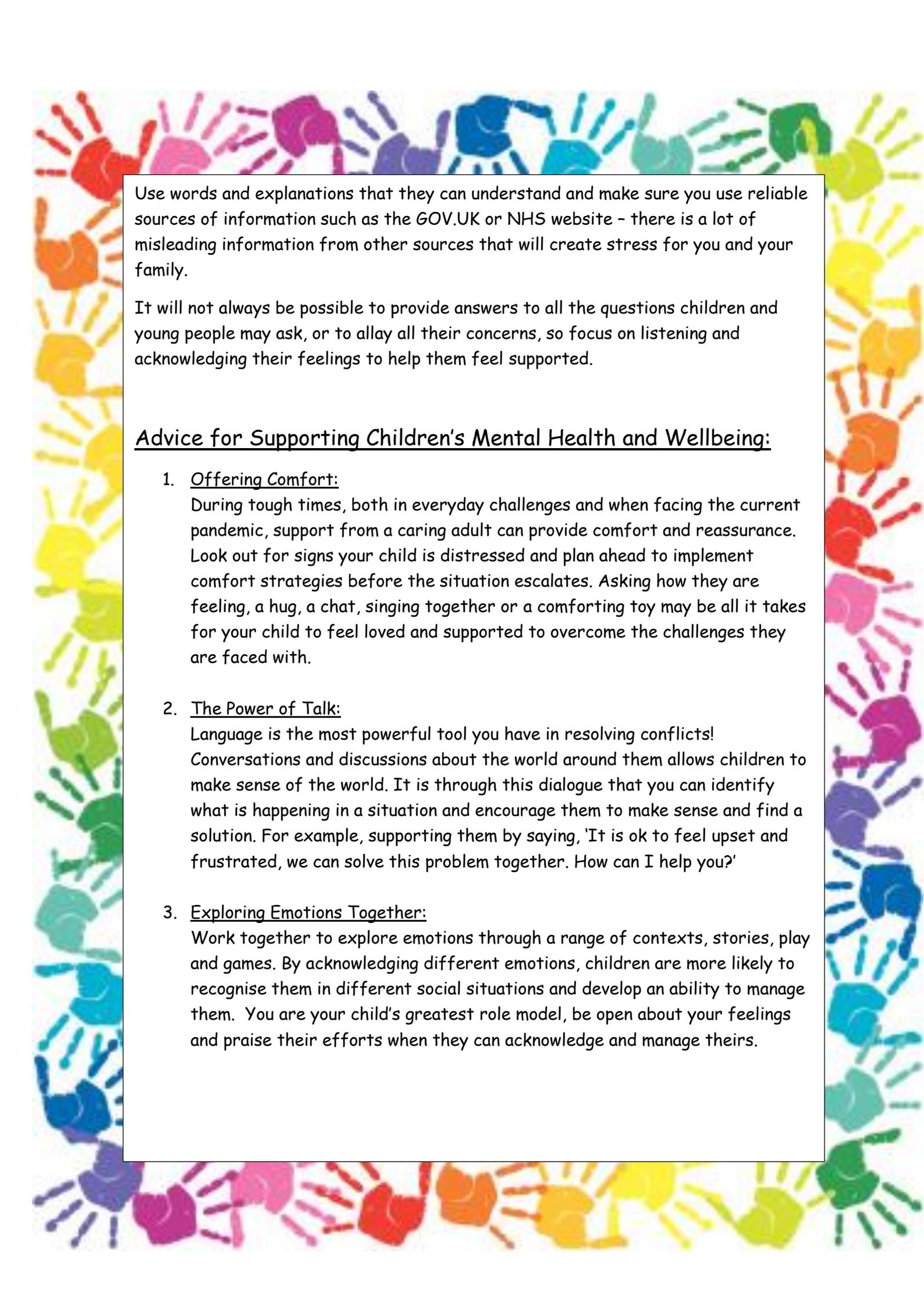
Helping children and young people cope with stress:

Listen and acknowledge:

Children and young people may feel less anxious if they are able to express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Children and young people who communicate differently to their peers may rely on you to interpret their feelings. Listen to them, acknowledge their concerns, and give them extra love and attention if they need it.

Provide clear information about the situation:

All children and young people want to feel that their parents and caregivers can keep them safe. The best way to achieve this is by talking openly about what is happening and providing honest answers to any questions they have. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe, including any actions they can take to help, such as washing their hands regularly.



Use words and explanations that they can understand and make sure you use reliable sources of information such as the GOV.UK or NHS website - there is a lot of misleading information from other sources that will create stress for you and your family.

It will not always be possible to provide answers to all the questions children and young people may ask, or to allay all their concerns, so focus on listening and acknowledging their feelings to help them feel supported.

Advice for Supporting Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing:

1. Offering Comfort:

During tough times, both in everyday challenges and when facing the current pandemic, support from a caring adult can provide comfort and reassurance. Look out for signs your child is distressed and plan ahead to implement comfort strategies before the situation escalates. Asking how they are feeling, a hug, a chat, singing together or a comforting toy may be all it takes for your child to feel loved and supported to overcome the challenges they are faced with.

2. The Power of Talk:

Language is the most powerful tool you have in resolving conflicts! Conversations and discussions about the world around them allows children to make sense of the world. It is through this dialogue that you can identify what is happening in a situation and encourage them to make sense and find a solution. For example, supporting them by saying, 'It is ok to feel upset and frustrated, we can solve this problem together. How can I help you?'

3. Exploring Emotions Together:

Work together to explore emotions through a range of contexts, stories, play and games. By acknowledging different emotions, children are more likely to recognise them in different social situations and develop an ability to manage them. You are your child's greatest role model, be open about your feelings and praise their efforts when they can acknowledge and manage theirs.

4. A Moment of Calm:

Providing a moment of calm in a busy day allows both adults and children to escape the pressures of home life and school work. Finding time for being still and quiet can be extremely valuable in preventing conflicts at home. Your child may wish to spend this time alone, that is ok, or they may wish to share it and be supported by a parent or a sibling. Giving 5- 10 minutes of non-engagement can also allow strong emotions to settle and then allow time to follow the strategies suggested.

We love these ideas for finding a moment of calm:

- Building a quiet space: an area in your home where you child can go to feel safe and calm. Fill it with books, cosy blankets and cushions and make it an inviting place to be!
- Sharing a story together
- Colouring
- Listening to calming music or a guided meditation story
- Getting outdoors

Useful websites:

You can find out more information about the government guidance issued to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people can be found by following the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

For further information on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Ideas for recipes and ways to stay active visit:

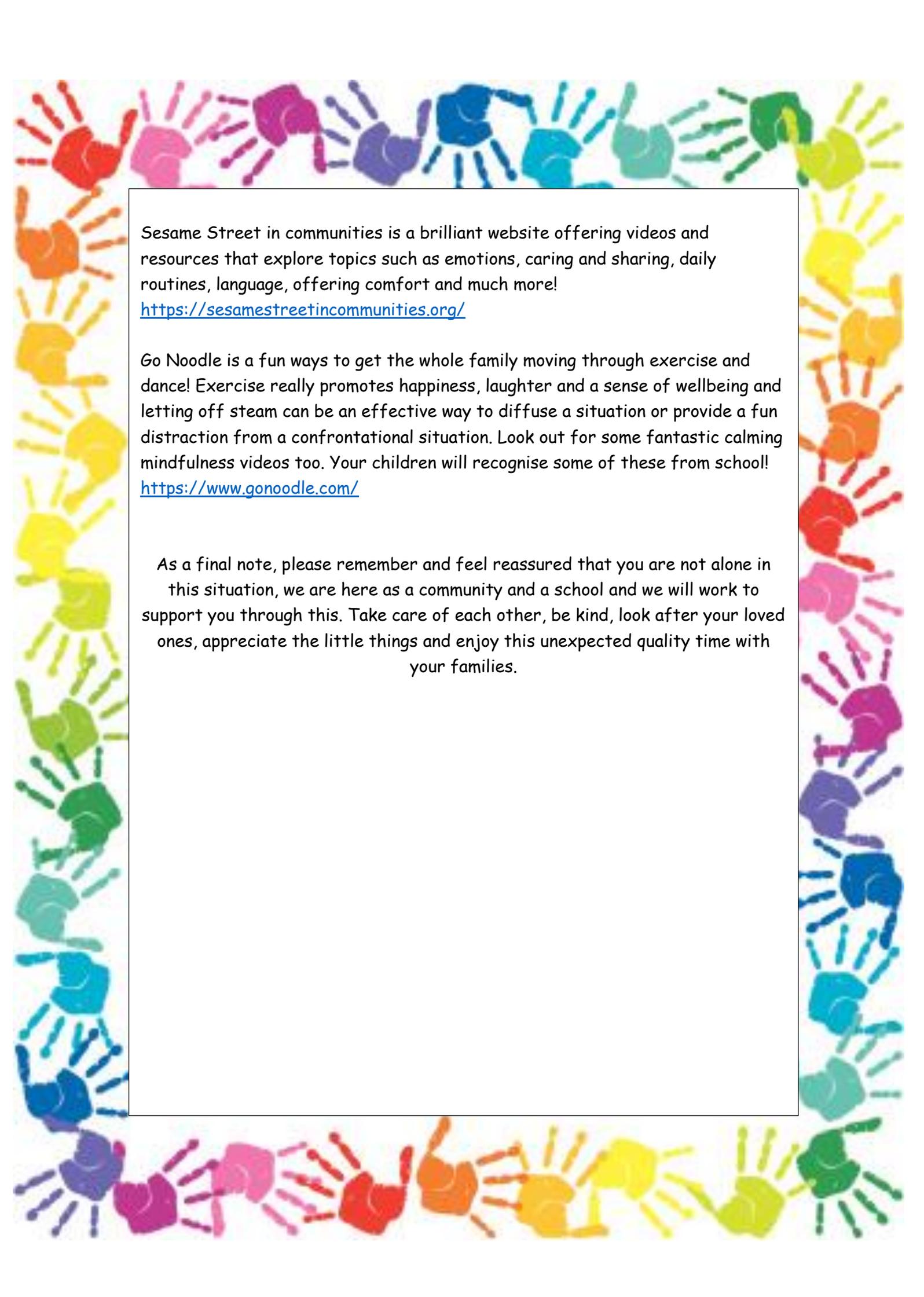
<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

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BBC Bitesize, videos, resources and activities for Key Stage 1:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/levels/z3g4d2p>



Sesame Street in communities is a brilliant website offering videos and resources that explore topics such as emotions, caring and sharing, daily routines, language, offering comfort and much more!

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/>

Go Noodle is a fun ways to get the whole family moving through exercise and dance! Exercise really promotes happiness, laughter and a sense of wellbeing and letting off steam can be an effective way to diffuse a situation or provide a fun distraction from a confrontational situation. Look out for some fantastic calming mindfulness videos too. Your children will recognise some of these from school!

<https://www.gonoodle.com/>

As a final note, please remember and feel reassured that you are not alone in this situation, we are here as a community and a school and we will work to support you through this. Take care of each other, be kind, look after your loved ones, appreciate the little things and enjoy this unexpected quality time with your families.