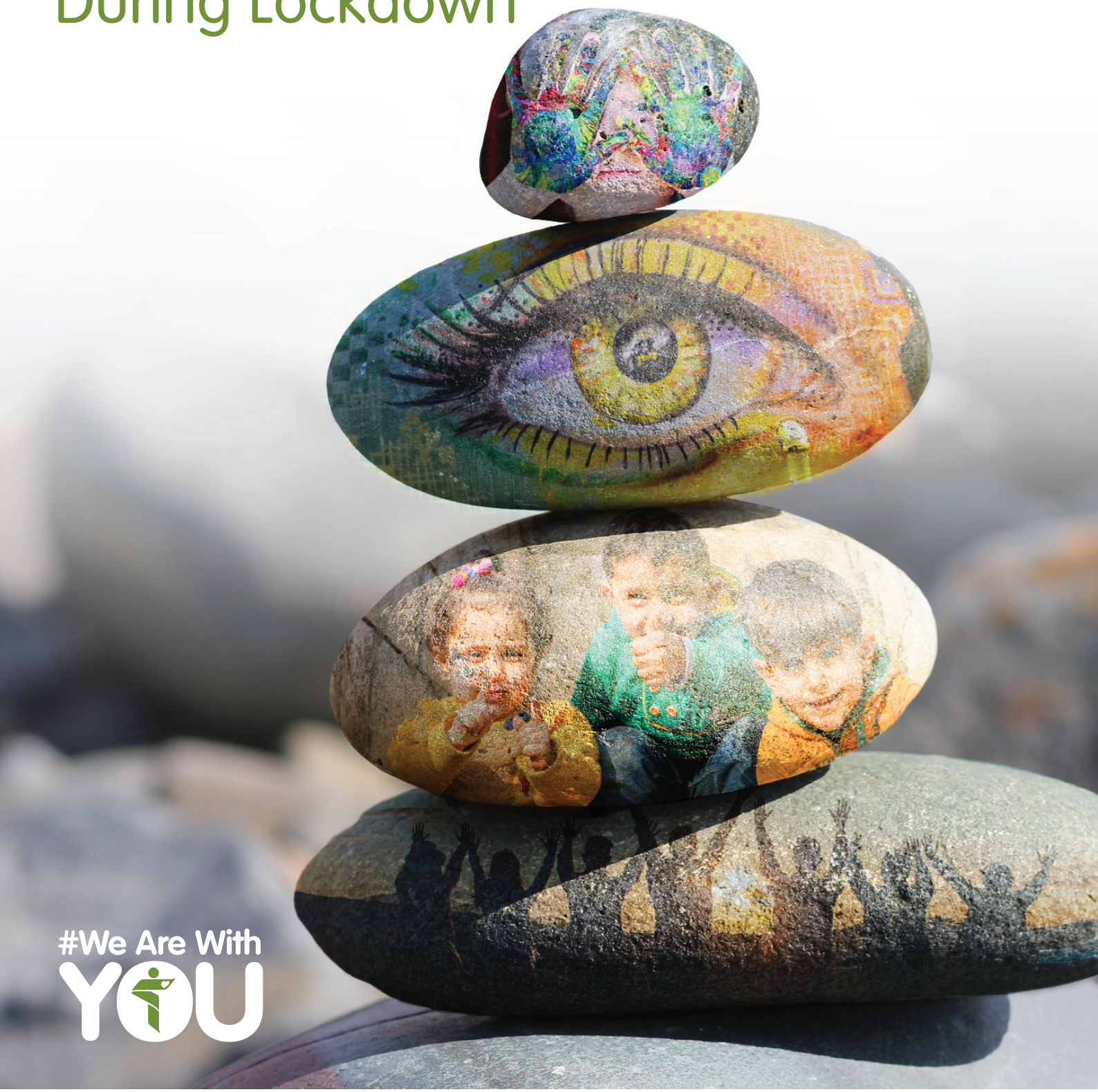
Western Health and Social Care Trust

Supporting Parents who are Worried About Their Children's Emotional Health & Well-being During Lockdown



Children and young people will have their own worries and fears about Coronavirus. Their daily routine has changed, they are being home schooled, they have reduced contact with family and friends. Life is very different.

This uncertainty can affect children and young people in different ways. Some will cope well with the challenge and others may be overcome by anxiety and fear.

Paying attention to your child's feelings and worries about the pandemic is key to helping them cope and to feel heard.

Things Parents may say

"I don't know what to say to my child about Coronavirus"

If your child has questions about what is happening, tell them in a way that they can understand.

- **Respond in an open and supportive way; children are likely to need extra love and attention during this time.**
- **Talk to them about what is happening. Encourage them to tell you about how they feel. Ask open questions to help identify and name their concerns.**
- **Give clear and simple messages, repeat as necessary if children ask again.**
- **Acknowledge and normalise their concerns.**
- **Be patient, encourage and comfort your children.**

"My child's behaviour has changed"

Anxiety in children can look like:

- **Physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches**
- **Moodiness and irritability**
- **Irrational fears, obsessive thoughts and increased worry**
- **Tantrums, meltdowns or crying more than normal**
- **Sleep problems**
- **Reassurance-seeking (Are we going to be okay? Is nana going to be okay?)**
- **Clinginess.**

As parents or carers, we sometimes respond to children's worries by saying, "Don't worry about that".

Instead, listen to and acknowledge their worries

- **Validate their worries e.g. "That must feel scary"**
- **Normalise their worries e.g. "I felt scared like that when…"**
- **Help them process their worries e.g. "Even though we might feel worried, these are all the reasons why we are actually very safe…"**

By supporting children, listening to and acknowledging their fears, parents teach them how to process their worries and help them by being understanding and supportive.

Ask Them What They Already Know

Start by listening and then acknowledge what they have said.

"That sounds very frightening. There is a virus that makes everyone sick and kills people. It must have worried you hearing that".

Then move on and correct any information that they have shared that is not factual.

"Don't worry son, that is not true, not everyone who catches the virus will die. Most people who catch coronavirus will get a mild cough and temperature and will get better quickly."

"There are things we can do to keep ourselves safe, like washing our hands, and staying indoors."

Ask them if they have any questions and remember that it is okay to not answer a question straight away. It is okay to say something like

"that is a really good question and I want to make sure I give you a good answer."

This gives you time and breathing space to process what they have just asked, and come up with a sensible, factual response.

"I'm worried about my child's behaviour"

Children express fear, worry or sadness in different ways. Some children become withdrawn; others may lash out, or become more argumentative. Feeling angry, anxious or sad is a normal response in a time of uncertainty.

- **Help your child to name their feelings and let them know that their reaction is normal.**

- **Tell your child that we can all get through hard things. You are there to support and look after them.**

- **Share stories about times from your childhood when you found something hard and how you managed to get through it.**

- **Encourage your child to express emotions in creative ways:**
    - **By drawing: "Can you draw a picture of some of things you are worried about."**
    - **By writing: "Why don't you write a story about why someone might be worried about the Coronavirus."**
    - **By creating: "Let's make a picture so we will remember how we made ourselves feel better."**

"My child doesn't understand why they have to stay home why there is no school."

Your child might ask a question that you're not able to answer at the time e.g. 'when is school going to open again'.

Be honest that you don't know, and acknowledge that this might be difficult.

"My child isn't sleeping because they are worried."

Since the start of the Coronavirus parents are finding that without the routine of school and work, the whole family's sleep is affected.

If anxiety or worries are affecting your child's sleep here are some things that may help:

- **Make a dedicated time and space to talk about worries in the daytime. This should be earlier in the day, and separate to bedtime routine.**
- **If you find that your children want to talk through their worries at bedtime, it may be helpful to note these on a piece of paper together and put them in a Worry Box. Alternatively, you can give them to a Worry Monster or Teddy Bear to look after overnight. Then find a time the next day to look at the worries together.**
- **Encourage relaxation exercises to calm the body and mind before bed.**

Bedtime Routine

Create a calming and relaxed environment for your children. Bedtime routine should begin one hour before intended bedtime.

- **Relaxing activity e.g. puzzles, colouring, building blocks (no screens).**
- **Light supper e.g. small glass of warm milk, cereal or toast.**
- **Relaxing bath, pyjamas, brush teeth then toilet.**
- **Read a bedtime story, or sing a lullaby to your child when they are in bed.**
- **Conversation with your child at bedtime can be really beneficial so they and feel listened to, understood and connected to you. It can also help with 'closure' on their day and their concerns.**
- **Goodnight kiss and cuddle.**
- **Leave the room to encourage your child to settle and fall asleep in their own bed. Let your child know that you are just downstairs or in the next room.**
- **Make sure that your child's room is quiet, cool and dark. Toys should be out of sight.**
- **Provide a night light emitting orange light if needed.**

Sleep Tips for Families During Lockdown

- **Keep normal wake and sleep times. Avoid long naps especially in the afternoon as this can make it difficult to get to sleep at night.**
- **Limit lie-ins to the weekend, and make sure that everyone wakes up no more than one hour later than you would on a normal/school day.**
- **There may understandably be an increase in screen time during the day at the moment, however it is still recommend that screens are switched off for one hour before bedtime if you can.**
- **Unwind for an hour before your intended bedtime. Do something you feel relaxes you, dim the lights and switch off from technology as blue light from devices has been proven to disrupt sleep.**
- **Keep your bedroom gadget free and ensure it is quiet, cool and dark.**
- **Getting enough natural daylight and physical activity are important for better sleep at night, though avoid exercise close to bedtime. Current government advice allows you to go outside to exercise once a day. However if this is not possible then try to use the spaces in your home or garden.**
- **If you are self-isolating and need to stay indoors, open up all the curtains first thing in the morning. Opening windows for 20 minutes in the morning will help you to get a blast of fresh air.**

"What if my child sees the news or hears something scary?"

Children will learn about coronavirus from their parents and from conversations or news reports they overhear at home. If children hear too much information from the news they might start to worry unnecessarily and they may worry about the risks to themselves and their families. It is important for parents to limit and monitor children's exposure to around coronavirus in order to reduce potential worry, fear and confusion.

- **Parents should talk honestly to children about the Coronavirus but at a level appropriate to their age and level of understanding.**

- **Most of the news reports about Coronavirus talk about people dying from the virus and, although this is true, children need to be reminded that most people will recover from it and won't need to see a doctor or go to hospital.**

- **Help children understand that they are safe. It's also important to reassure children that they will receive appropriate medical care if they become unwell.**

- **Reduce exposure to the TV and social media and devices. Be careful about what you are watching while your child is there and delete your browsing history, especially if your child uses the same device as you.**

"My child doesn't understand why they have to wash their hands."

These necessary precautions can be difficult for children to understand. Be practical, helpful and encouraging.

- **Role model – wash your hands together for 20 seconds.**

- **Make up a song about washing hands. Or sing 'Happy Birthday to Me' twice while you wash.**

- **Use visual cues for example make a mark on their hand with a pen to explain the importance of hand washing or use glitter to show them how germs spread if you touch other things.**

- **Make sure they always have access to a box of tissues and explain to them how important it is to use one and then throw it in the bin if they cough, sneeze or blow their nose.**

Ask how the parent is feeling about the Coronavirus crisis?

"I feel anxious"

Children will be very tuned into how parents and carers react and respond to coronavirus.

Children observe parents' behaviours and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during times of stress and crisis. Young children, in particular, look to their parents' behaviour to determine whether certain situations are threatening or not.

Parents need to first manage their own anxiety about it in order to help their children manage anxiety.

Ask the parent **"how are you managing with your thoughts about coronavirus? Are you ok?"**

You might be feeling worried yourself at the moment. It is important to keep doing the things that we know help us cope.

- **Having a regular sleeping pattern, getting some exercise and eating a balanced diet will all help.**
- **Try to find moments in the day to do something that helps you to feel calm. If you are calm, then you are more able to help your child with what they're worried about.**
- **Seek support from friends and family.**

Some General Tips

Routines help children and young people to feel safe so where possible maintain normal routine. Develop a daily timetable keep some family structure. Making this a visual timetable can help to reduce the anxiety that comes from a change in routine.

Limit coronavirus conversations. Talking about coronavirus all the time will only increase anxiety and fear.

- **Create a predictable and consistent daily routine. Tell them what is going to happen each day.**
- **Remind children being homebound is temporary.**
- **Give the children tasks, teach them new skills e.g. how to make an omelette.**
- **Spend time outdoors and get some exercise.**
- **Maintain your children's friendships virtually – FaceTime, WhatsApp.**
- **Plan and engage children in fun activities.**
- **Set aside one-one time with each child.**
- **Maintain a healthy diet for you and your family.**
- **Practice normal bedtime and sleep routine.**

Look for the Helpers

Encourage your child to 'look for the helpers' when talking about the current situation.

There are always kind people who help e.g. the people who work shops spending all night stocking the shelves, the nurses and doctors looking after the sick, the bin men, the postman….the list goes on.

Think together about how you and your children could become a 'helper' too. Could you send notes or pictures to neighbours or family who are in isolation asking if they need anything?

Donate to the local food bank if you can, or just be mindful when shopping about those who might have less than you. And if you are one of those families in need, then please reach out for help and support.

Relaxation Exercises

5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Grounding Exercise



5 things you can see.



4 things you can touch.



3 things you can hear.



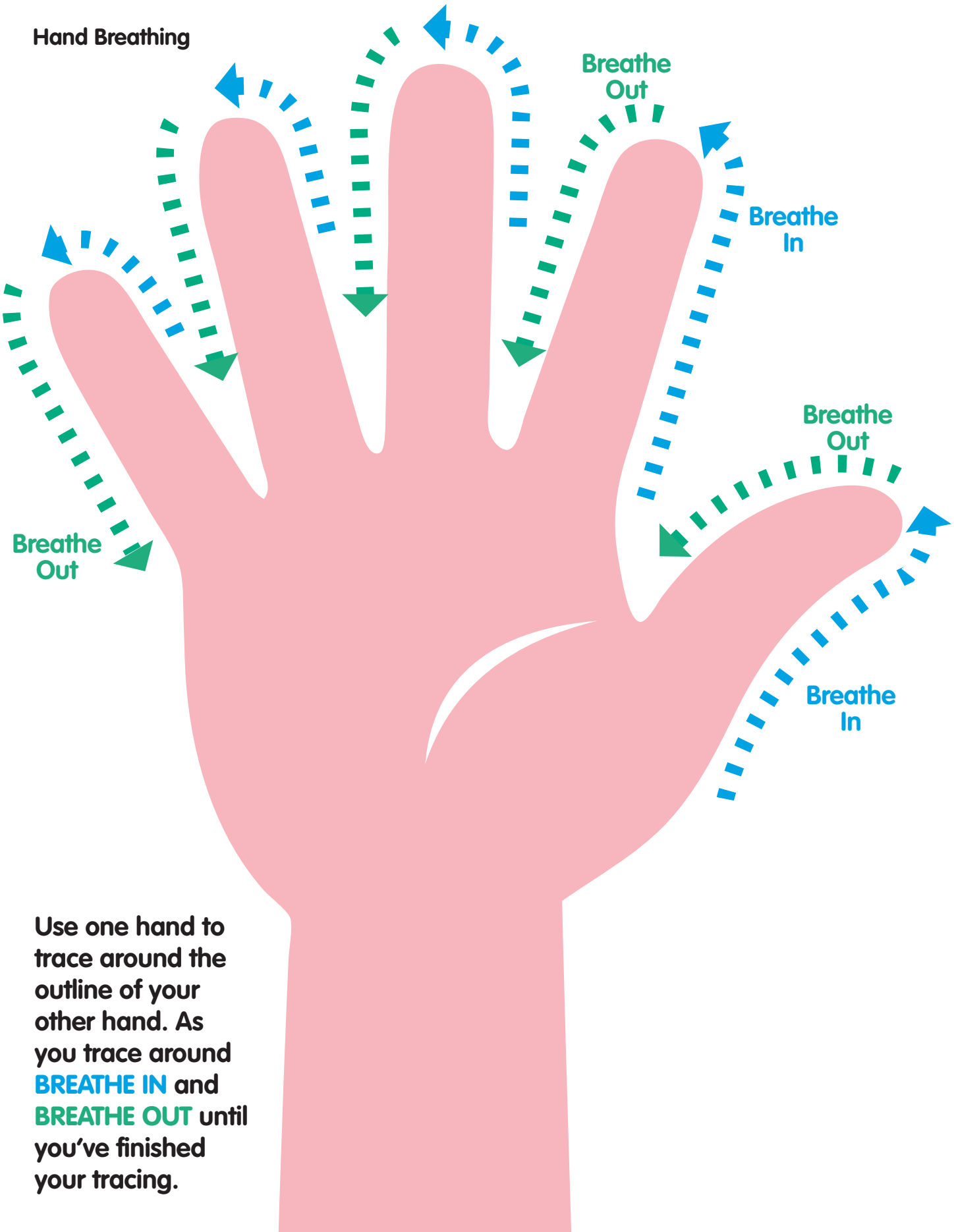
2 things you can smell.



1 thing you can taste.

Relaxation Exercises

Hand Breathing



Use one hand to trace around the outline of your other hand. As you trace around BREATHE IN and BREATHE OUT until you've finished your tracing.

Websites for Young People

BBC **https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51387017**

Kidscape **www.kidscape.org.uk**

Young Minds **www.youngminds.org.uk**

Mood Juice **www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk**

Rethink Mental Illness **www.rethink.org**

ChildLine **www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/**

Cosmic Kids Yoga **https://www.cosmickids.com/**

Helpful Apps for Young People

There are a wide range of informative apps on the market. Most are free but some you pay for.

The Worry Box
https://the-worry-box.en.aptoide.com/app

Booster Buddy
https://www.psyberguide.org/apps/booster-buddy/

Mindful Gnats
https://appgrooves.com/app/mindful-gnats-by-handaxe-limited

Headspace
https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app

Positive Penguins
https://www.educationalappstore.com/app/positive-penguins-hd

Chill Panda
https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/chill-panda/

Resources for Parents

'Coronavirus: A Book for Children'
https://nosycrowcoronavirus.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Coronavirus_ABookForChildren.pdf

Emerging Minds
https://emergingminds.org.uk/resources/

Nano Girl Live
https://www.nanogirllive.co.nz/coronavirus-soap-experiment

University of Oxford
https://www.psy.ox.ac.uk/covid-19-our-mental-health

Rethink Mental Illness
https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/blogs/2020/03/managing-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/

Mind
https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/

MindEd
www.minded.org.uk

Royal College of Psychiatrists
www.rcpsych.ac.uk

NHS
www.nhs.uk

The Sleep Council
www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

The Children's Sleep Charity
www.thechildrenssleepcharity.org.uk

Worcestershire Health and Care Trust
https://www.hacw.nhs.uk/coronavirus-and-mental-wellbeing

Think U know:
https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/?utm_source=Thinkuknow&utm_campaign=11c85df25c-TUK_GLOBAL_MAR_2020_MESSAGE&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0b54505554-11c85df25c-54980941
EA: https://www.eani.org.uk/taxonomy/term/539

If your situation becomes more difficult or unmanageable please contact your GP or Health Visitor in the first instance.

Other sources of support include:

Parenting NI
Helpline: **0808 8010 722**
https://www.parentingni.org

Childline
0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk/

Lifeline **0800 808 8000**

Samaritans
08457 090909
jo@samaritans.org