



Working with University College London

Keeping in touch during the Covid 19 pandemic

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News

Welcome back to the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities newsletter: a collaboration by staff at the Race Equality Foundation and University College London (UCL) to help you and your family during the Coronavirus outbreak. This newsletter is here to offer some practical tips and support for you, parents and practitioners alike, direct from the SFSC team, and keep you informed of the latest advice to follow.

SFSC Can help

Managing anger in lockdown

The loss of freedom due to Covid 19 has resulted in many feeling fed up or angry at some point most days. Some claim that people around them or in the media make them angry; others who profess to have no idea why they're enraged; and also those who, claiming they never get angry, worryingly suppress their anger.



Whether anger has become a default position or a series of sporadic explosions, if unchecked or out of control, it can have devastating immediate and long-term consequences for families and communities. Think of something you may have said or done that you would not have considered if the proverbial red mist had not clouded your judgement. Out of control, anger can be divisive, will fuel conflict and turn crowds of well-behaved people into mobs. Anger can inhibit the ability to reason, understand, or learn, it can destroy relationships and isolate us from others. A hothead can get a young person kicked out of education, work, friendship groups and not least, in serious trouble with the law.

For this reason anger management is an integral part of the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities violence prevention curriculum, but it is important for Facilitators to help parents make the connection between controlling the emotion that is anger, enhancing relationships and achieving a violence free healthy lifestyle.

SFSC identifies anger as a perfectly valid emotion, that can be useful to motivate positive change. Managing this emotion does not mean suppressing it, which

can be dangerous but rather to find positive ways of channeling the energy.

Like other emotions, anger is experienced in our bodies as well as our minds. To manage anger you must be self-aware and notice internal and external triggers i.e. the situation and circumstances that start to change how you think and feel; worrying inner thoughts, being taken for granted, when people are unfair or violate your personal space, privacy, rights etc. the list is endless as the sensitivities are personal to each. Notice how physiological discomfort can worsen a situation, i.e. too hot or cold, tired, hungry, or in pain.

When anger starts, several hormones including testosterone, cortisol and adrenalin play havoc with our body resulting in a noticeable change in our internal feelings and external appearance i.e. heart rate, knotted stomach, temperature, breathing, clenched teeth/fists, speech pattern etc. If this continues, your ability to think clearly becomes impaired: in the heat of the moment you do/say something you later regret.

Good self-awareness coupled with self-control (the ability to think before you act) enables better reasoning before anger becomes rage. There are several measures we can learn to interrupt the automatic changes that occur and return our bodies and mind to a state of calm; if possible put some distance between you and the trigger, deep breathing, counting, or positive self-talk can be useful. A drink of water or cup of tea may help, but avoid drugs and alcohol which may worsen the experience.

The ability to manage anger is an important social competence, a skill which can be learnt and improved upon with time, effort, and practice. Childrens' ability to manage anger will depend on their developmental age. Note the tantrums of the two-four year-old, and the quick-tempered hormone induced hysteria of an adolescent. Parents should also note how temperament and personality make a difference to the triggers and intensity displayed, and consider the influence of modelling – do the adults around routinely blow a fuse when they're angry?

Facilitators should enable parental use of SFSC's managing anger strategy to support their children's behaviour but endorse the most powerful effective way of parents teaching this life saving skill is through modelling.

The final point to consider is the impact of stress which can act as a touch paper for rage. Families genuinely committed to managing anger must pay attention to their lifestyle and incorporate a variety of relaxation strategies to reduce everyday tensions and lessen the likelihood of explosive episodes. Exercise, meditation, listening to music, journaling thoughts and emotions, creative drawing or other expressive art forms, talking to trusted friends and ensuring physiological needs are met can prevent angry feelings from building up inside.

Anger is a strong emotion that can feel overwhelming at times. Learning how to deal with it, without losing control is an important emotional rite of passage to maturity. It supports the ability to empathise with others, enables solution building and capacity to deal assertively with conflict. This array of skills can keep children safe as they enhance their relationships with others, increase

their self-esteem, self-discipline, and social competence in relation to a violence free healthy lifestyle.



Progress with SFSC Online

SFSC Online programme lead Taqira Wilson shares the experience of working with parents in an online setting:

Ten weeks into delivering our SFSC Online Course and it is fair to say it has been an eye opener. Naively I believed parents would show disinterest to the idea of attending a course online and I thought it would be a struggle to keep them engaged and numbers high; 159 parents and counting and I have been proved wrong!

Delivering online most definitely differs to face to face delivery, but the energy and friendliness of all parents still shines through, so much so that the hour limit for each session often overruns by 10-15minutes. Parents are open to sharing their experiences, culture, and parenting choices; sometimes with laughs and stories of cheeky children during lockdown and sometimes with tears. There have been quite a few emotional sessions with the lack of human contact over the past four months.

With some parents being more tech savvy than others, navigating around the website and accessing the online learning platform has proved challenging at times, but generally parents are keen on the idea of online work; especially being able to do it from the comfort of their own home, and even more so when their timetables are full up.

With the course being six weeks and around two hours each week, and providing only an introduction to our full thirteen week programme, it can be difficult to spend extended time on complex or specific issues that are raised by parents; parent and child confrontation, solution building and family rules to name a few. However, the key behaviour management strategies that we look at, as well as working toward a healthy parent-child relationship, is providing a

great supportive and holding option before parents are able to attend our full programme.

I have had great feedback from parents, many of whom have expressed sadness when the six weeks are over but have enjoyed the adult interaction and having someone to be open and honest with regarding their parental difficulties. Seeing groups of up to six parents who have not met before and are not meeting in person engage highly with one another and offer each other support outside of our group discussions has been lovely. It surprised me how so many felt comfortable quickly with the online delivery, not shying away from the reasons they are attending and showing great interest in attending our full programme as soon as it can resume.

It's been great hearing parents say they've felt safe, listened to and that they are learning new skills. Many parents have expressed they are understanding more about themselves and their current parent choices, as well as really understanding their children and enhancing their relationship with them. Some parents even get their children to come and say hello to me on camera which is always lovely!

All in all, worrying attendance would be low to delivering fifteen plus groups a week, the SFSC Online Course is proving a great success and is a pleasure to deliver.

Helpful Resources

We will be sharing a few useful resources to help us get through this time of self isolation. If there are areas that would like information on, please feel free to drop us a line and we will see what is out there. Our focus is going to be on resources we can access online or via the phone as we cannot get out to get the help we might need right now. Remember that many of the telephone helplines like Samaritans and Childline are taking calls and can also be a source of someone to talk to.



Anxiety and children

The number of children receiving treatment for anxiety in the UK each year has [risen by 60%](#) and some have spoken about the [possible negative influence of social media](#) on young people's mental health. This piece on

Parentinfo offers advice to parents on how to help your child if they are suffering from this debilitating and frightening condition.

Useful resource for parents

Download this very useful pamphlet for parents to support them during the Covid Pandemic. It covers everything from how you talk to children about Covid, to useful activities for them, to parenting tips

to keeping children safe online. It is really wide ranging and is supported by a number of well thought of international bodies such as WHO and Unicef.



How to support your child as lockdown eases

In recent weeks, the government has been 'easing' lockdown, and while this may bring relief to many, it also presents new challenges, uncertainty and unpredictability.

This is certainly the case for parents and their children, as they try to work out how to navigate through the new freedoms and continued restrictions. This [article](#) on BBC bitesize provides some useful advice.

Information and Covid 19 Advice from UCL



The Children's Society Good Childhood Report

Every year the UK's Children's Society studies the wellbeing of children, and produces a detailed report on the findings in the Good Childhood Report. Naturally, this year has been overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Children's Society, therefore, decided to ask children about the impact of the coronavirus lockdown on their well-being.

Even before the pandemic, the Children's Society noted that the well-being of children was declining. Mark Russel, the chief executive, notes that too many children live in insecure housing and/or poverty and that too many children are unhappy. The coronavirus has likely made their lives even harder.

Unsurprisingly, the study found that many children have been very worried during the lockdown and that being cut off from their friends, school and wider

family members was very difficult for most. The survey found that children reported lower well-being than usual. However, the survey also highlighted some positives. Children reported they enjoyed having had time to reflect, to learn new hobbies or restart old ones and have found gratitude for things in their life pre-lockdown.

The full report can be found here:

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/life-on-hold-childrens-well-being-and-covid-19.pdf>

How to help children get ready for school



Most children in the UK have been at home since March 2020 and have had to adjust to a new way of life at home with probably a lot less formal education, and a lot more screen time. In September, the schools will start again, and some parents and children may be worried about returning to school life. When children are worried or anxious, they do not learn so well, so it is important that they feel reassured and safe to return to school. Fortunately, children are resilient, and if they know what the rules and routines are, they will adapt quickly to new scenarios according to child psychologist Dr Gummer. Based on the work of Dr Gummer and other child experts, Victoria Richards has written a few practical tips for parents to help their children prepare for going back to school:

Reintroduce a routine

Parenting experts argue that a good way to help parents and children prepare for the return to school is by reintroducing a routine. If parents reintroduce a routine before the end of the summer holiday, that will help children prepare for meal and bedtimes that are more consistent with school days. It has been suggested to start reintroducing routines a week before the start of term so that it will be less stressful by the time school starts.



Talk about school - and focus on the positives.

School is more than likely going to be different than it was back in March. Whilst it is good to talk to your child about the changes they

may experience, it is helpful to focus on the things that they are still able to do, and not focus on the things they cannot do.

Some children will start a new school and may not have had transfer days to familiarise themselves with their new school. Parents can try their best to familiarise with the new school and walk past the school with their child and talk about those things about the school that they do know about.

Role play being back at school

Children learn and communicate through play. Through play, parents can introduce school in a relaxed way through for example using Playmobil or cuddly toys and asking their child "how does the little bunny rabbit feels about going back to school?". Dr Gummer explains how play provides a safe way for children to express their feelings because they can pretend it is about the bunny and not about them. This is a great way for parents to learn about their child's worries without it feeling too strong or emotive.

Read more bedtime stories.

Children may need to a gentle reintroduction to reading at home and reading bedtime stories is good way to do this. It also offers a chance to re-introduce a bedtime routine that may be earlier than that they have been used to the past few months.



Listen to your child

Children can be worried about different things than you are. Let them know it is ok to be anxious about school and that it is ok to ask questions. Be careful not to transfer your anxieties onto your child and let your child talk about their worries if they have any. Child Psychologist Gummer says that it is important to let your child direct the conversation so that we do not interpret what the child is saying in a more complex way due to our anxieties. Playing games or reading books are good opportunities to talk with your child in a relaxed way.

What is SFSC

Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities is an inclusive evidence-based parenting programme, designed to promote protective factors which are associated with good parenting and better outcomes for children. SFSC is a group based programme for parents of children from birth to 18.

Further information is available [here](#).

What is 'Together'

We are a team of academics, practitioners, policy-makers and parents who are focused on understanding the impact of Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities. In particular, we want to know how this programme might improve the mental wellbeing of parents and their children.

Further information is available [here](#).

Get in touch

We hope this information is useful and helps in this difficult time. Do let us know if you want us to cover other topics in this newsletter by emailing us at donna@racefound.org.uk, Tweeting [@racefound](https://twitter.com/racefound) [@TogetherStudy1](https://twitter.com/TogetherStudy1) [#TogetherSFSC](https://twitter.com/TogetherSFSC).

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