



Working with University College London Keeping in touch during the Covid 19 pandemic

Issue 11, September 3rd 2020

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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. We hope you find this helpful and you can let us know what you think and what you want more of by getting in touch (see the bottom of this newsletter for contact details). Take care and stay safe!



Together and SFSC Event

If you are an SFSC delivery agency or area and are interested in exploring how you manage a return to safe face-to-face groupwork delivery, join us for

this **free webinar**. It will offer advice and guidance around the safe return to face-to-face working in research and practice with a focus on what group delivery of SFSC will look like in the post lockdown environment.

This event will be useful for all those who deliver SFSC as well as SFSC research sites who will be considering data collection as well as delivery.

The webinar is taking place on 10th September at 11am. To book a place click [here](#).

SFSC online

SFSC six week online course has been delivered to more than 150 parents over the summer and had received a great deal of positive feedback from parents and professionals. If you are not able to return to full in person SFSC delivery this term, consider whether you might want to provide parents with access to our online course which has the benefit of online groupwork delivered by our experienced team. We have now produced a manual which also accompanies the course. Contact [Taquira Wilson](#) for more info or any questions.

We are also still training SFSC facilitators in our 4 week introduction model that can be delivered via an online meeting platform. Dates for training and further information from [Bernadette Rhoden](#).

SFSC Can help

Back to school after lockdown

Children are back to school after what must seem like the longest summer holiday ever.



The Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Programme components can support parents and their children as they return to a new term with new conditions. Nervous or concerned parents can think about their *cultural values and beliefs* and examine how this influences their behaviour

and parenting choices. Adopting a process for *connecting to positive aspects of the past* to strengthen motivation towards achieving a violence free healthy lifestyle may help overcome the tricky hurdle of returning to school after so long: consider if there was anything you enjoyed about school, or useful advice given by your parents/carers.

Pivotal to success will be parents' relationship with their children, their children's teachers, and other important adults in their children's lives. *Special Time* is a must for children going through huge transitional change including those away from home at Uni or on apprenticeships. Parents should try to understand developmentally where each child is at and meter their expectations accordingly, especially for those children transitioning between stages. The stresses of lockdown may have caused some children to regress and behave inappropriately in their new setting, some may simply need additional patience and understanding due to their *temperament*.

Important to all encounters are the SFSC violence prevention strategies for enhancing our relationships with others which we have covered in earlier editions of this newsletter; *Solution Building, Developing Empathy, Managing Conflict, Managing Anger, and Relaxation*. These strategies provide tools for managing difficult people and situations. The start of term creates much to do but there is no need for parents to feel overwhelmed. Take a deep breath, step back, consider what might be in everyone's best interest in the short and long term and act interdependently. If you're feeling stuck, haven't got answers to important questions, or simply can't think what to do, do you know someone who does? By utilising a *Circle of Support* parents and their children's needs can be better met.

What about the thorny subject of discipline, how easily will families be able to switch their morning lockdown routines to be up, dressed, and ready for school on time. Are families ready to adhere to new timetables that might be subject to sudden change, will children sit in classrooms and observe social distancing rules throughout the school day? It's starting to sound stressful, but if parents commit to increasing the behaviours that they want to see by giving affirmative attention for cooperation, effort and any positive shift in behaviour however minor as opposed to constantly trying to decrease inappropriate behaviour, parents and their children have a better chance of thriving and surviving the term.

The use of *Clear Instructions, Praise*, and other positive discipline strategies to support an increase in behaviours parents want to see is certainly a more nurturing way to develop children holistically. However, parents should not be afraid or lack confidence in the limited and occasional use of corrective strategies such as *Confrontation or Time Out* to address certain defiant and

disrespectful behaviours as part of a process of discipline always remembering to reconnect positively by **praising their child's next respectful behaviour**.

The *ten Rites of Passage* provide so many activities to develop social competencies as children transition from nursery to primary, primary to junior, junior to high school, and high school to college/university. What new skills did children and young people learn during lockdown? A new term provides an opportunity to do an audit and think about the skills they will need, or areas to focus on with the end of term as a target.

Returning to school is an important part of re-engaging with the community. Parents should be encouraged to see how far this could be extended. Schools may need help like never before, perhaps the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) could use a hand, other voluntary groups may have suffered during lockdown and need support getting back on track. Covid19 and Lockdown may have identified gaps in care that require the birth of new initiatives. Small children attending nursery for the first time, older children spending more time with their peers or off to Uni etc may create some 'spare' time/opportunities for parents to become involved in *community prevention efforts*, or, at the very least to create a vision for a violence free healthy year ahead.



A social conscience

Covid-19 hit more than our health at the beginning of 2020. It changed how we live and highlighted that we are social animals who crave human contact; contact that can affect us in positive and negative ways.

Many of us have been living and working from home, keeping socially distant from everyone but members of our own households, for 18 of the first 32 weeks of 2020- that is more than 50% of the time we have lived through this year so far. As lockdown measures are lifted, both old and young are responding to the need to be with others- to resume our social lives. But as the media frenzy surrounding the actions of Dominic Cummings (during lockdown) have shown, the fear of spreading a deadly virus has brought out a sense of 'social

conscience: an understanding that what we do as individuals can and does have an effect on our family, our friends and the wider community.

The idea that we work together and for each other is not a new one. About 400 years ago, the English poet, John Donne, wrote:

No man is an island,

Entire of itself,

Every man is a piece of the continent,.....

Any man's death diminishes me,

Because I am involved in mankind

Compare this to the African proverb of 'It takes a village to raise a child' and the universal way humans have always lived together in families, in tribes, in villages and in modern cities. We are animals who need each other, who can achieve more together than alone, who need relationships, who may look different and have different cultures, but are all of one human kind.

The *SFSC parenting programme* helps parents support their children in finding their way as social beings in the *social rite of passage*. As our children grow, their community widens around them. From their primary carers, they begin to recognise other family members and friends from playgroups, nursery and primary school. Children start to learn to recognise more faces and work out their place in these settings. They are part of a bigger world than just their family. From learning to take turns and share their toys, children are learning how to form wider friendships based on kindness and equality, and manage feelings of frustration (I want to play now!!) and anger (that's my toy!!) through patience. By donating unwanted clothes and toys to those in need, they begin to learn the role they can play in helping those who are less fortunate and, by sharing household chores, they learn that in any community, responsibilities need to be shared to give everyone a level of spare time and freedom. Through 'School Council' or sporting and social club roles, children can develop leadership, organisation and public speaking skills. Older children can be encouraged to develop debating skills and campaign for a cause they really believe in: many of us have heard of the 17 year old Swedish environmental activist, Greta Thunberg, but fewer have heard of Saihan Islam, a 15 year old autistic boy from the East End of London, who recently won an award from the disability charity, *Sense*, for raising awareness of mental health issues in the community, so improving the lives of many others, as well as his own.

And this is exactly the point of having a social conscience: if our children can understand from an early age that their actions affect others - positively and negatively- then this may help them do the 'right thing', be it small like helping an elderly neighbour with her shopping, or larger, by understanding how best to challenge and bring to account those in power, end prejudice and injustice and, ultimately become good leaders.

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 in 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.



Back to school anxiety

Download this Central and Northwest London NHS Trust [pamphlet](#) for parents on how to help their children manage any fears they have about returning to school after the coronavirus

'lockdown'. It is short and easy to read and has lots of good tips.

Financial advice and Covid 19

Many households have been thrown into financial chaos due to the Coronavirus. People are unsure of what they're entitled to, what options of support are available and how to plan, budget and cope financially during this period of uncertainty. [COVID Cash Course \(CCC\)](#) is a free course which trains churches, community leaders, and organisations to help their communities cope with the variety of money issues which have arisen due to COVID-19.



Coronavirus and learning disabilities

[Mencap](#) have lots of information and resources to support families around learning disabilities. You can access their helpline and chat service from [here](#) as well as find help and information.

Covid 19 Advice

How will COVID-19 have changed education?

Following the latest government guidance the reopening of schools has been described as a national priority. The message is loud and clear that schools are expected to open fully in September 2020, for all year groups across nurseries, primaries, secondary schools and colleges. There is widespread recognition of the essential role schools play not only in children's educational achievement but also their health and wellbeing and the widening gap in inequalities that home schooling in lockdown has exacerbated. With this in mind it is vitally important to get pupils back to school in as safe a way as possible but what will this will look like?

Public divide: Should children be going back to school?



The campaign #backtoschool has highlighted a divide in public opinion on whether children should be returning full time to school with many parents voicing concerns about the safety of their children, members of extended family and wider community. A recent [Lancet study](#) has highlighted

that the [National Track and Trace programme](#) will play an essential role in managing the risk of a potential second wave of the virus and will need to accompany any relaxation of physical distancing and reopening of schools. The head teachers union have also highlighted that more needs to be done to reassure parents that it is safe for children to return to school. The Chief Medical Officer, Professor Whitty has said that 'the balance of risk is very strongly in favour of children returning to school because many more are likely to be harmed by not going, than harmed by going, even during a pandemic' and the early identification and timely management of outbreaks within schools will be key to containing the virus. Although most parents and teachers support school reopening it is clear this must be done in a way that children can learn and thrive without raising the risk of spreading COVID-19 and schools have an important role to play in slowing the spread of the virus.

What schools can do?

The government has [released guidelines](#) on the new measures to be introduced to enable the return to school to be managed safely including:



- Classes to be arranged into bubbles (either in classes or year groups) to minimise the need for social distancing.
- Strict behaviour regimes in anticipation of the challenges many children will face adjusting from almost 6 months at home.
- Banning choirs, assemblies and communal activities and staggered lunch breaks and start times to reduce social contact.
- Stricter cleaning routines and changes to classroom layouts with children facing the front of the class rather than each other.

The Government states we will even see an overhauling of the curriculum in recognition of the huge amount of learning that many children will have lost over the last 5 months, as schools are being directed to teach 'an ambitious and broad curriculum in all subject areas' with an additional focus on social and emotional learning as relationships and health education (RHE) for primary aged pupils and relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) for secondary pupils becomes [compulsory from September 2020](#).



How else will school be different?

Local lockdowns and school closures may still be required if there is an outbreak in a school and teachers are being required to incorporate remote learning into their lesson plans as this may need to

be an essential component for learning in cases of local lockdowns.

There has been a lot of debate over the use of face coverings in school with the [Children's commissioner](#) and teachers union supporting their use in schools as an additional measure to give parents and pupils confidence. Government guidance has now followed the lead of Scotland and it will be mandatory for secondary school pupils to wear face coverings in communal areas such as when moving through corridors and other communal areas.

What you can do as a parent?

From September returning to school will be compulsory. Unlike at the beginning of the pandemic, when fixed penalties for not sending your child were suspended, the usual rules will now apply, so parents must send children back regularly or risk fixed penalty notices. So what can you do to support your family and children in making the right personal decisions for you on managing the return to school.

- Read up on what to expect. Make sure you have access to all the information you need to feel comfortable with your decisions. In the US the CDC have produced a [useful back to school decision making toolkit](#) that can help you address your views on how your school is preparing to reopen. If you answer unsure to any of the questions, ask your school for more information.
- Stay in contact and communicate regularly with your children's schools. Schools are being given a large degree of independence in how they implement safety measures so this means that different schools may be doing different things.
- Talk to your children about what to expect. Here is an example of a [back to school guide to parents](#) which can be useful to help you address some of your children's concerns.
- The [e-bug coronavirus website](#) contains free resources for schools and parents on hand and respiratory hygiene to keep children safe.
- Find out who your [school nurse](#) They can be an excellent source of support and information on what your local schools are doing and preparing to support your child's physical and emotional wellbeing for the months ahead.
- Above all keep up to date, with the latest advice in these dynamic times, both from government, local authorities and schools.

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](#) [@TogetherStudy1](#) [#TogetherSFSC](#).

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