



Working with University College London

Keeping in touch during the Covid 19 pandemic

Issue 5, June 2nd 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!

Introduction to SFSC

For facilitators who are wondering how to keep parents engaged whilst waiting for their courses to restart or new ones to begin, we have put together course notes and slides for four two hour sessions that you can deliver to a small group of parents via an online meeting space like Zoom or Teams. These form an introduction to the course and are perfect as a refresher or taster. They are not however a substitute for the 13 week SFSC course would provide. In order to get up to speed on how to deliver these, you will need to complete a half day training course which Bernadette will deliver via the magic of Zoom. If you want to find out more or book training, then get in touch with: leandra@racefound.org.uk



Six week online course now live

We told you about our six week online course in the last issue, We launched it this week and are now registering learners. We are able to offer places at no charge for London parents during June, so please do get in touch if you know anyone who might find this course useful, or if you want to offer it to the parents you work with.

SFSC Can help



Rites of passage in lockdown

Week eleven in lockdown, parents may be restless, running out of new activities to develop themselves and their children. However, the ten rites of passage within the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities

curriculum contain over 101 things to do.

Rites of passage is a weird concept for many, various literal and cultural meanings have been adopted worldwide, but our use of the term simply describes developing skills or competences to transition from one stage of life to another. Importantly the transition from childhood to adulthood is the main focus and may include events such as; Completing school, learning to drive, 18th or 21st Birthday, first date, first interview or first job and so on. These may be cause for celebration but in between there will be hundreds of new skills and achievements worthy of developing with or without the celebration, all of which contribute to the main transition.

Of the many aims in SFSC, the programme seeks to provide information and activities that will help parents to support children develop knowledge and skills necessary to make the transition through childhood to adulthood. Clearly, parents cannot stop children moving through these stages, but they can influence how they do this and ultimately their success. Children and young people therefore need adults who understand and can manage the tasks, difficulties, and opportunities to mentor their transition in a meaningful way - SFSC groups support parents in so doing.

There is no one size fits all to the *coming of age* process, even the law provides different age parameter for being an adult or at least attributing adult responsibility. The ten rites of passage and associated activities give parents a chance to customize the skills and various social competencies they deem important. This allows them to meet the unique needs of each young person and their family and communities' culture, to bridge childhood and adulthood successfully.

Going through each rite of passage it can be gratifying to see the number of areas that have already been addressed. Perhaps these were instinctive, natural and easier to develop; or a child may have been supported in achieving some of the skills and competences through their circle of support. This may allow them to identify good personal hygiene (physical rite), love of reading (mental rite), the value of money (economic rite) and so on. However, it's important to review areas deliberately neglected; perhaps a parent sees less value in developing a skill, and

or, may not have the skill or confidence themselves to pass on to their child.

If there are areas parents have deliberately or otherwise overlooked, lockdown provides time galore to address this. However, if there's another more complex concern i.e. an important personal or family value in conflict with modern expectation or competence; take for example some element of the political or emotional rite of passage, lockdown might provide the time and space to decide whether or not this skill or competence should be developed, and if so, how and by whom. Some activities may have proved challenging during the height of lockdown, but thankfully as measures lift parents can explore new areas.

Left unchecked, we can imagine the various negative activities young people may adopt in transitioning themselves and determining their status as adult. Parents may not always be able to convey a particular rite of passage, but they are responsible for putting their child in the path of another who might be better suited to develop the desired skill or competence. If we recognise the value of investing our children with such competencies, we give them the opportunity to achieve adulthood well-armed and prepared for the journey ahead.



The challenges of homeschooling

We know from the parents we are in contact with, that many have struggled with creating the right atmosphere and routine for children to learn at home during the last two months. Indeed, as soon as lockdown was announced, both mainstream and social media were flooded with resources to help parents become home teachers.

But, as many soon discovered, it was difficult for them and their children to switch roles, even for part of the day, from parent/child to teacher/pupil. Children have found it hard to be motivated and as the weeks have turned into months, a feeling of 'what's the point?' has been growing, leaving children and parents feeling

stressed.

The SFSC parenting programme considers the topic of gaining knowledge from a different angle in its mental rite of passage. The idea is to help children understand why education and hard work are necessary: to answer the 'what's the point?' question, so that children themselves want to learn, understand, solve problems, experience, grow and achieve. In the words of Aristotle (384 BCE-322BCE), the ancient Greek philosopher, *"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all"*

With younger children, parents can 'teach' the importance of reading and maths with a virtual or real online shopping 'trip'. Children will need to be able to read to find the things they want to buy and they can use simple maths in adding and subtracting. They will also be learning to use a computer and work through a search engine and different websites at the same time.

With older children, time at home may be a real opportunity to consider their future. What sort of temperament do they have? Are they more logical and analytical, using the left side of their brain or, creative and emotional, using the right side of their brain? (Are we giving them enough 'free' time to explore this creative side?). What sort of future working life do they imagine? Will it be indoors or outdoors? In an office? Working for themselves or someone else? How will they achieve their ambition? This exercise will in itself require some research and solution building, which are very real life skills. They can look at further education and subject choices and research career descriptions and opportunities.

One of the positives of the pandemic might perhaps be the opportunity for all of us to take a step back and look at the wider view for our futures; education or retraining may be the answer for better, healthier and happier lives.

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.

Supporting anxious children

BBC bitesize is not just about resources for studying, they also provide some useful advice and information for parents. Take a look at this useful advice as to



how to support children who are anxious about the pandemic. Click [here](#).

Lockdown for separated parents

Its not easy managing lockdown for anyone, but there can be some very particular challenges if parents do not live together and are trying to parent.

This resource from a Scottish charity provides some useful advice and information. Click [here](#).



Covid 19 Advice

COVID-19 and education

Schools

One of the biggest changes for families during this pandemic will have been the closure of schools. Overnight parents have transitioned to teachers, establishing new routines that involve supporting your children's social/emotional and educational learning and development all from your own home. Schools closed their doors on Friday 18th March and have remained closed ever since, only opening to children of critical workers and those considered vulnerable.

How critical workers and vulnerable children are defined?



A national voucher scheme has been introduced by the Government that allows children eligible for free school meals to still access this provision whilst they stay at home. Every eligible child can now be provided with a £15 weekly shopping voucher by their school to spend at supermarkets. Where it is not possible for schools to provide meals for collection or delivery, they can now provide these vouchers either electronically or if you do not have internet access, as a gift card

Government guidance on free school meals

It is important to note that for those who need to be in school or childcare, they remain safe places to access education/food and support. The decision to close schools was made to reduce the number of children making the journey to school and reduce the number of children in school which will help to reduce the spread of the virus and help to protect the NHS. Guidance is now starting to emerge that many schools will begin opening their doors to some year groups from the 1st June 2020 however this picture is far from clear. Understandably this will be leaving many parents feeling confused and nervous about the prospect of sending your children back, asking questions such as is it safe to send my child back to school? What consequences will I face if I don't?



Who decides whether a child returns to school?



As it stands the vast majority of children remain at home with all of us unsure how long this will continue and tackling the intimidating task of home education. Thankfully the teachers unions have started to issue practical, common sense guidance around home schooling. The emphasis is that under the current circumstances it is not business as usual for schools or parents and the focus has shifted so it is no longer about parents replacing teachers but it is about encouraging parents to help your children create regular routines and study habits. This is still a big task, especially for those of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) where staying at home can be even more disruptive to the lives and routines. Wherever you are and however you need help with ideas for schooling/educational activities/routines help is at hand with a wealth on online resources and support.

[Educational support and resources from Oxford University Press](#)

[Top 12 apps for teaching your kids in lockdown](#)

[Coronavirus and SEND](#)

For parents with social care support already in place, this support may be looking very different with social distancing rules, staff shortages and changes to the way social services are delivered. This may lead to increased worries about your child's safety, how do you keep your child indoors? How do you manage



being at home with your child? Will I and my child still see their Social Worker? CAFCASS has put together the following guidance to support children and families as the situation surrounding COVID-19 develops.

CAFCASS

Concern over what your children are accessing digitally and keeping them safe online may be heightened in the current circumstances. Keeping up to date with what social media sites your children are using, how these work and risks they can pose is an ongoing task but there is lots of information and resources on how to keep our children safe online #OnlineSafetyAtHome.

[Child safety online](#)

CSA online safety toolkit

For any general advice on school closures and education the DfE have launched a helpline to answer any questions about COVID-19 related to education. Staff, parents and young people can contact the helpline as below:

Phone: 0800 046 8687

Email: DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

Opening hours: 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday)

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.

Unit 17 & 23 Deane House Studios
27 Greenwood Place
London NW5 1LB
www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk

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Company limited by guarantee England
3121679
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