

Issue 8, July 15th 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.

SFSC online

Our first cohort of parents came to an end of their six week online course this week. They completed sessions in their own time and then joined a weekly facilitated group discussion with one of the SFSC team. We have lots of testimonials including this one:

Just completed the 6 week SFSC online course and cannot recommend it enough to ANY parent...you don't have to be struggling. I feel confident in making my relationship with my children the best! Taqira is an amazing facilitator, so welcoming, understanding and helpful. It helps you be the best parent you can be.

There are still a few free places available so get in touch if you have parents ready to go!



SFSC Can help



Time out in lockdown

Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities and other parent programmes are united in their opposition to physical chastisement, especially smacking, which evidence supports causes children more harm than good. However, the use of Time

Out tends to split opinion in relation to its effectiveness in managing challenging behaviour versus the potential harm it might give rise to.

Time Out is a form of isolation, a corrective consequence used to decrease negative behaviour. When we use this practice, children are removed from all positive attention and given time and space to think about their behaviour. Time Out is extremely powerful and not least controlling, but can be effective in addressing inappropriate behaviour for children between the age of 3 and 10 years old.

The SFSC curriculum has always included Time Out as a corrective discipline strategy, a position which the Race Equality Foundation continue to review and support with several provisos. We acknowledge that if used inappropriately the potential to cause harm to the parent child relationship and arguably elements of the child's development exist. Consequently, as the potential for misusing and abusing this strategy is great, **facilitators should support parents in understanding the reasons for implementing this practice correctly** including the purpose and process for Time Out.

Some parents love this strategy which has been around in one form or another for many years, more recently made popular by television's Super Nanny and others. During this period of lockdown there may be a temptation to use Time Out to get a break from our children. However, Time Out should **not** be used as a catch all for every negative or inappropriate behaviour. Children should know in advance behaviours that will result in a Time Out and be given fair opportunity to avoid it. Importantly, the reason for the Time Out should **not** be because a child is tiresome; very upset and unable to regulate their feelings; or for an accident or innocent mistake. But rather for a child being deliberately defiant in relation to a known family rule; wanton or blatant disrespectful behaviour; or when confrontation or logical consequences have not been effective.

To expel a child to Time Out because they are being annoying, out of control or made a mistake would further distress them, and convey a message that they'll be isolated if they express challenging emotions, and that only their 'pleasant' feelings are warranted or safe to display.

Critics of Time Out argue that the experience of isolation can cause children to feel abandoned during an emotional crisis leading to a power struggle instead of teaching children to regulate their emotions. Some favour 'Time In' as a more nurturing alternative whereby the parent empathises with the struggling child to validate their feelings as they calm down.

SFSC acknowledges that both approaches, Time Out and *Time In*, have value in addressing different behaviours and do not have to be at odds with each other as long as parents have a combination of strategies that allow them to be both structured and nurturing in promoting appropriate behaviour and discouraging negative inappropriate acts.

During lockdown, parents should review their use of Time Out. To avoid misusing what can be a powerful controlling strategy parents should determine in advance which major violations will be addressed with a Time Out and this should be limited to no more than two or three age appropriate manageable family rules. As mentioned, other reasons for calling Time Out may include serious disrespectful behaviour or defiance, but children should not be walking on eggshells for fear that they will end up in Time Out but rather given every opportunity to self-regulate.

Time Out is presented in Session Nine of the SFSC curriculum, by which point facilitators should have established that it is better to adopt a culture of addressing positive behaviour, as it occurs, through praise and the use of positive attention. However, if used appropriately, Time Out is one of many strategies that parents can implement in a balance of positive and corrective consequences to increase self-esteem, social competence, and the ability to respect boundaries through self-discipline. We are therefore not ready to call time out on Time Out.



Parenting during a pandemic

The Race Equality Foundation were keen to find out what kind of impact lockdown was having on parenting and what strategies parents and carers put into place to make things easier. Including, whether the strategies and skills learnt through SFSC were helpful.

We asked Uzma Peraan, an experienced evaluator to find out for us. During May she carried out a series of telephone interviews with parents who had recently completed SFSC. Below is the first of two pieces she has written for us.

Parenting in normal circumstances is hard enough. Add to that the pressure of dealing with the effects of a global pandemic, and you're on a whole different level.

Not being able to go to school, play with their friends and visit their extended family can mean children are relying on parents more than ever. I carried out telephone interviews with eight parents to find out what life has been like for them during lockdown*.

This is a two part blog post that will share the findings from these calls that just goes to show that parents are not alone.

So what did parent find difficult about lockdown?

Parents shared that they were particularly concerned about their finances and worried about providing for their family. Dealing with loneliness and the feeling of inadequacy were other challenges they were experiencing.

Some parents had to stop working since the lockdown measures were introduced. Their jobs involve cleaning houses, driving taxis and working in a school as a teaching assistant. These participants were also the main income providers for their children and family.

"My wife works three days and I am the breadwinner. This weighs a lot in my mind. I'm thinking hard about how I can generate some money"

Others parents spoke about how they struggled with the lack of space in their homes. Some felt that their home was not big enough to carry out activities such as teaching, playing or studying with their children.

"The toddler needs to run and the baby needs to crawl. When we were mostly housebound it was really hard to combine household chores and children who are physically active"

And some parents described feeling very worried that their children were 'missing out' on opportunities to help them develop and learn due to lockdown restrictions. The participants shared how they felt they were not doing enough to keep their children stimulated and learning new skills.

"I am very frustrated that I can't give my children the education or exposure that I would like" "For me mentally adjusting to we can't give simple things like trying to take them out to the park ...which used to be open and we could go in and see the animals and explain what the animals are "

Despite these challenges, the parents seemed to be coping well with the lockdown measures. Most had come up with ways to deal with these difficulties, this included going outdoors and spending time on things they enjoy.

Check out Part 2 to find out what has helped parents cope with lockdown.

**Interviews were conducted before the lockdown measures were relaxed and the government guidance was to stay at home.*

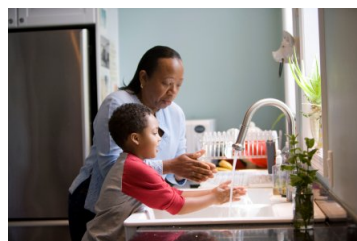
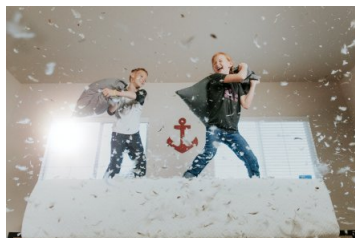
Helpful Resources

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.

Impact of lockdown on children podcast

This podcast by colleagues at UCL looks at the long-term impact of lockdown and subsequent school closures on our nation's children and young people.

Contributors discuss the effects of COVID-19 on young people, explore why and how children are not all impacted equally, and learn more about how they're coping. Listen [here](#).



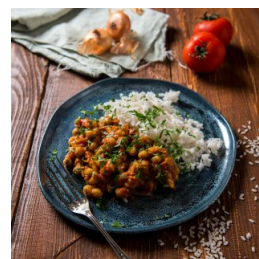
Developing new skills

About to start the school holidays on the back of months of lockdown and need some ideas about things you can do with the children? Have a look at this [blog](#) post on skills you might want to teach your children, or even get to grips with yourself! We may

as well come out of the pandemic having learnt something!

Covid Summer Food Fund

We know it can be particularly challenging for families, parents and carers to afford increased costs over the summer holidays, which is why the Government's announcement of a 'Covid Summer Food Fund' was welcome following the tireless efforts of charities and campaigners as well as Marcus Rashford's support. Schools can support eligible pupils with a £90 voucher to cover the 6-week holiday period You can check eligibility [here](#).



Covid 19 Advice



Covid 19 and families with autistic children

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown has impacted on almost every aspect of our lives. For families with autistic children, changes to normal routine may have been particularly challenging. Researchers from the University College London and the University of Bedfordshire surveyed 449 parents of autistic children to learn how the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown changed their family life and what this meant for their well-being*.

Although parents reported many additional challenges (e.g. not able to buy the usual foods or limited access to services), parents found school closures not necessarily a negative experience. Many parents felt the mood of their child improved because they did not have to attend school. They put this down to lower arousal routines at home, and not having to meet their friends' or teachers' expectations. Also, parents noted that children have become used to being at home, where they feel safe.

The Government's aim is for children with an EHC plan to go back to full-time education, regardless of whether they attend a mainstream school or a special needs setting. From September schools are very likely to be open for all children. However, many parents and their autistic children feel anxious and distressed about returning to school. The National Autistic Society (NAS) has outlined some things that parents can do to help their child with going back to school:

- **Start with the familiar.** Autistic children can feel anxious about the 'unknown'. NAS suggests asking the school for a visit before it officially reopens so that the child can become familiar with the environment again.
- **Introduce the changes in school.** Apart from familiar things, there are likely to be some changes that have happened in the schools. Parents can ask their child's teacher to take photos of places in the school where new measures have been implemented, such as one-way corridors. Also, classes may be smaller, and there may be a new teacher or new teaching assistant. The NAS has provided a useful table with all the likely changes that may have happened and how to communicate these with your child.
<https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/updates/education-and-school/back-to-school-guide.aspx>
- **Sharing information about your child.** It is important that the child's teacher is aware of the child's autism and their individual needs, especially if the child will have a new teacher.
- **What if your child doesn't want to go back to school?** Some children will 'refuse' to go back to school and no amount of reassurance or preparation for the transition will help. It may not be that the child is unwilling to go to school but rather feels unable to cope with school or the new changes. NAS has provided a guide to help parents with children who refuse to go back to school: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/in-education/exclusion/school-refusal-strategies.aspx>

For more information and guidance on supporting children with special educational needs to return to school in England see:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/updates/education-and-school/return-to-school-in-england.aspx>

<https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/learning-disabilities-autism/carers-family>

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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