

mummy ♥ matters

LEAVING
LOCKDOWN

*Mental Wellbeing
Kit*

Dr Jenn Cooper

Chartered Counselling
Psychologist



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

Scott Gladstone

Counselling Psychologist in
Training

Introduction

Hi there, and first of all, thank you so much for downloading the "Leaving Lockdown, Your Mental Wellbeing Kit".

We are in uncertain and unprecedented times, Covid-19 swept through the world, bringing with it a wave of panic and anxiety that the world has never seen before.

We were faced with quarantine, illness, isolation, and worry for those more vulnerable around us.

Following lockdown restrictions and the introduction of vaccinations, Covid-19 is now decreasing and governments are outlining roadmaps about lifting lockdown restrictions. As we face this transition out of lockdown it is only natural that this is creating a huge amount of worry for people.

This self-help programme aims to give you some practical, and immediately implementable, strategies to help you manage your life as you transition out of lockdown and cope with whatever anxiety or distress our current environment may be causing. We hope this programme gives you back some control in a time where there is still so much uncertainty.

About the Authors:

Dr Jenn Cooper is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist with over 10 years experience, who runs her own independent psychological therapy practice. Jenn works with a variety of individuals experiencing mental health difficulties but with a special interest in maternal mental health. Jenn is committed to improving the wellbeing and mental health of people across the country, both in her independent practice and across her social media platforms.

Scott Gladstone is a final stage Counselling Psychologist in Training with experience in a range of therapeutic settings. They are passionate about increasing the accessibility of psychological information, strategies and support through communicating these ideas in an easily understandable way.

Acknowledgements

Jenn would like to thank her Instagram community for providing insight and inspiration for the material presented in this guide, along with all of their support over the last couple of years. Jenn would also like to thank Scott, without whom this guide would not exist. Scott's hard work and effort is so very much appreciated.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

A guide to this guide

If you downloaded the "Managing in Lockdown" survival kit some of the content of this guide will be familiar. Think of this guide as a remix or cover version rather than a brand new song. That said, there is new material included and the guide provides some helpful strategies to try out as we prepare for leaving lockdown.

The Covid-19 pandemic was an anxiety-provoking time that involved lots of changes as we were outside less, worked from home, spent more time with family members, took on some responsibilities for teaching our children and more. It has been over a year with these changes and just as we might be beginning to feel settled into these changes the effect of social-distancing and vaccines being provided means that things are changing again as we leave lockdown.

Feeling worried about the potential challenges of leaving lockdown is understandable. This guide has a range of exercises to help make some of those challenges a little easier. The guide is divided up into sections and each section has at least a couple of exercises. There are two types: "*Where I am at*" and "*Making changes*". "*Where I am at*" exercises are exactly that, they are to help you reflect on your current situation. Once you have a good idea of this it is easier to think about how you would like things to be different and that is where the "*Making changes*" exercises come in. These exercises help you to think about how you can best use the tips and strategies in this guide for you.

Whatever the changes you are thinking of making are, **focus on making steps rather than leaps**; making changes is difficult but by making small steps rather than big leaps those changes are more sustainable and a bit less scary.

Further support

While this guide includes a range of strategies that may help with some of the potential issues associated with leaving lockdown, these are general strategies. If you are struggling and think you might benefit from some more tailored or specialised guidance or support please contact your doctor.

Information about other sources of support can be found at

- www.nhs.uk/mental-health
- www.mind.org.uk
- www.mentalhealth.org.uk/getting-help



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

What's In Store

Section 1 – Body

Sleep

Diet

Movement

Managing Energy

Section 2 – Mind

Slowing Things Down

Validate & Self Soothe

Dealing With Unhelpful Thoughts

Section 3 – Social and Family

Communication

Assert Yourself

Relationships

Re-Establish & Reconnecting

Digital Resilience

Section 4 – Children

Impact

Body

Mind

Communication



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Body



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Sleep

Sleep sounds really simple but ensuring you're managing your sleep is crucial for helping you feel rested and restored. If you are feeling well-rested making steps (not leaps!) towards the other changes in this guide will be easier. Good sleep hygiene is essential for us all. When we are well rested, we are happier, more rational, and it is easier to act with intention. A lot of these tips might sound obvious and it can be easy not to do them or not prioritise them but getting into good sleep habits is well worth the effort.

Here are some strategies to try to improve your sleep

- ▶ Set a bedtime and stick to it. As humans we love routine. So set a regular bedtime and waking time. This can be hard, especially when our routines are out of whack, but maintaining a sleep routine is crucial for good sleep.
- ▶ Now that we are entering into what might be a faster pace of life as lockdown eases, it's worth considering whether the sleep times you've been using will provide you with sufficient rest. It might be you are needing to get up earlier, so make sure to take that into account when setting your bedtime.
- ▶ Create a good sleep environment. Avoid screens in your bedroom and try to avoid looking at screens for at least thirty minutes before bed; if you can, keep your phone in another room or at least out of easy reach. Ensure your room is cool and dark.
- ▶ Wind down – start introducing a bedtime routine. We do it for our children – bath, story, bed; yet don't do it for ourselves. Start implementing a routine that will help you wind down (not TV, social media, news etc). Create a sense of calm and relaxation. Dim the lights, have a shower, read a book...do anything that will promote a sense of soothing and calmness.
- ▶ Avoid caffeine or nicotine too close to bedtime; don't exercise too close to bedtime either.
- ▶ Write it down – write down your bedtime routine. Start with the time you want to be going to sleep at, then work backwards so that you give yourself plenty of time.



Dr Jenn Cooper

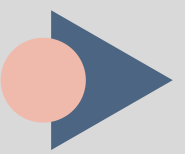
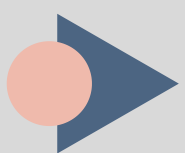
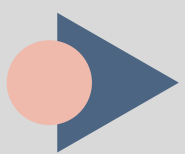
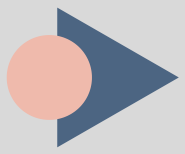
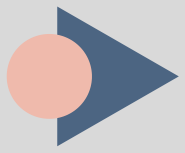
Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Sleep

Making changes: Choose some of the strategies above and begin to develop a great routine for a great night's sleep.

My Good Night's Sleep Plan



Diet

We have had a year of lockdown and the shift in routine that brought with it. With those shifts in routine we might have been more sedentary and slipped into some unhelpful eating habits, we might have found time to be doing Youtube exercise videos every day, or be somewhere in between. As we move out of lockdown and will be spending more time around people it makes sense that some of our worries and hang-ups about how we look might re-surface, particularly as we are approaching summer and messages about how we "should" look are more likely to be around.

However we may have changed over the past year, it's okay - research shows when we are stressed that this can influence our hormones and behaviour which can affect our weight, so try to stave off any critical thoughts you might have about this. Being self-critical about these changes is only likely to make us feel worse about ourselves. We discuss some tips around movement and exercise later on, but we can talk a little about diet here.

Firstly, part of feeling at our best is making sure that we have the fuel we need to keep up with what we are doing. As we move out of lockdown, it is important to prioritise our nutrition - not for weight change, but for wellbeing! It might feel easier when we start needing to contend with the school run or commuting to work to swap breakfast for half a banana as we head out the door, or decide that we'll get lunch after we help out the kids and then it is 5pm and we're "hangry".

The focus here is on nourishing and attending to your needs, not weight change. Perhaps give yourself time to ease back into life without a drastic change in diet (**steps, not leaps**). Remember to be kind to yourself, no matter what you think of the changes that might have occurred in your body now is not the time for self-criticism and leaps, now is the time for compassion and small steps!

Over the page are some general guidelines but if you feel you need a little more structure about making these changes to your diet then you can always explore your options by speaking to your GP, or a dietician, plus there are some great online resources.



Diet

Making changes: Some general guidelines on looking after your nutrition

- ▶ Eat at regular times: As much as you can do, try to eat at regular time throughout the day to avoid dips in energy levels
- ▶ Prioritise your nutrition: If you are feeding the kids and forgetting about yourself, make a point of eating with the kids. If you are making packed lunches the night before, make yourself something for tomorrow too. It is so easy to put off your own needs, so ensure you prioritise these!
- ▶ Eat meals at meal times: Avoid the trap of swapping a meal for a piece of fruit or a packet of crisps to tide you over till your next meal.
- ▶ Don't get too bogged down in food rules and "superfoods": It is important to have a balanced diet but avoid getting sucked into following fad diets.
- ▶ Food isn't just fuel, it can be fun: Getting stuck into cooking new recipes (by yourself, with a partner, or with the kids) can be fun and it is a great skill to learn. Plus we don't need to be "be good" all of the time, it's totally okay to have a biscuit with a coffee or an ice cream at the beach.
- ▶ Don't forget hydration: Keeping yourself hydrated is important, try filling a large water bottle and making sure you drink from it regularly and finish it each day.



Dr Jenn Cooper

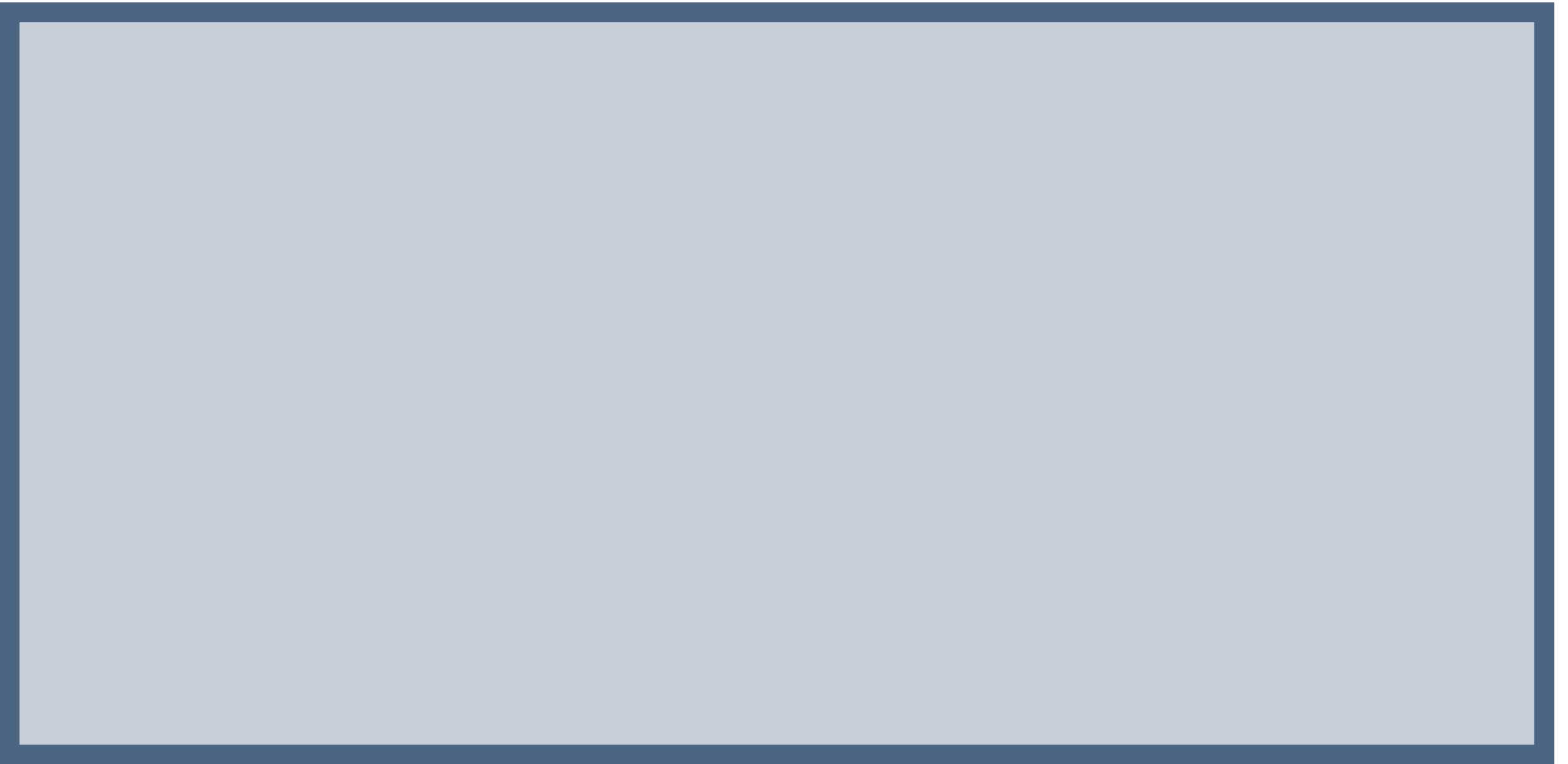
Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Movement

The importance of moving our body can often be overlooked. Getting moving is good for our physical health and it is really important for our mental health too. We've probably all had days or a weekend that we have spent on the sofa . . . how do you feel physically after that? Did you feel enthusiastic with lots of 'get up and go'? Or did you feel lethargic and that your 'get up and go' had 'got up and gone'?

Where I am at: Take a moment to think about how moving or not moving makes you feel.



Movement encourages the body to release a surge of endorphins around your body and is often referred to as a 'natural anti-depressant'. Those endorphins are responsible for uplifting our mood and increasing our energy levels ... even if we feel totally done in after a tough workout.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Movement

We might have slipped into a more sedentary lifestyle during lockdown, moving from working on computers, to video calls, to sitting on the sofa. When we are less active, we might feel more sluggish and have thoughts like "I can't be bothered" which can keep us from being more active. Now that we're heading back to 'normal life' there might also be a pressure of getting back to exercise, so while getting some more activity is important, we need to remember to balance this - again it's about those **steps, not leaps!**

Here are some ideas that can help towards making small changes to stay active and keep ourselves physically and mentally healthy.

Walk

Many of us have a new-found respect for the simple act of going out for a walk - particularly when we were only allowed out once a day for an hour of exercise! As we come out of lockdown, we might find that those daily walks become a thing of lockdown-past as we begin to engage in more of our 'normal' activities. As such, we might find that we are actually moving less as we begin the commutes to work and school again. So find little pockets of time where you can still get those steps in or just have a little time to yourself to decompress with an audiobook, podcast or album. Whether it's walking to school or work, even parking a little further away and walking the rest of the way, or scheduling in a quick walk during your lunch break, there are still ways to continue with this really healthy habit many developed in lockdown!



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Movement

Exercise

From home workouts, heading back to the gym or doing outdoor bootcamps, finding time to get in a little exercise will really boost your mood and energy levels.

There is an abundance of free resources online for you to get a workout done from the comfort of your living room. I think many of us fell in love with the Body Coach during those 'P.E. with Joe' lockdown mornings - the great news is there is a WHOLE channel worth of workouts for all abilities.

If you are heading back out to the gym, take it slow. Perhaps get a refresher gym induction so that you feel confident that you know what you're doing and you're not leaping in. Go with a friend or sign up for a class you previously really enjoyed. But ease in. We don't want to go all in and not be able to walk for a week (remember **steps, not leaps**). The same applies if you have been inspired by YouTube videos you followed during lockdown, now could be a time to explore attending a new exercise class or sports club.

There are loads of different types of exercise you can do and different things will work for different people. Some people love lifting weights and doing a full cardio workout, and others can't imagine anything worse. That's okay, going for a thirty minute walk each day is great exercise, playing with the kids in the garden, or trying out some yoga videos for something a little gentler all still gets you moving.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Movement

Making changes: Take a moment to plan out how you will incorporate movement into your life as you leave lockdown.

My Movement Commitment

My movement plan

What:

When:

What do I want to get from this:



Managing energy

Lockdown will have affected us all differently and where we might have left behind some activities like doing the school run, commuting to work, meeting friends in cafes or parks we might have had to pick up new roles like teaching our children, or looking after vulnerable family, friends or neighbours.

As we leave lockdown those roles and routines are probably going to shift again. Some of us might feel really enthusiastic about getting to spend time with family, friends and colleagues again, whereas some of us might have enjoyed the pace of life lockdown provided. Plus whether it is news reports, social media or even chats with friends we might be feeling a pressure to rush back to doing everything we did before lockdown began.

Remember, everything costs us energy - whether it is the demands of parenting; socialising; work; relationships; hobbies; or general life activities. While many of these are good things, things we have been deprived of for so long like meeting up with friends, it is important to recognise that these still take a toll on our energy.

As a result, any change in roles and routines can have an impact on our energy, and if we are not careful in managing our energy we can get burnt out. With so many of us already feeling pretty burnt out after the demands of lockdown, managing our energy has never been more important. We are in a place of needing to replenish those energy stores while also balancing the energy demands of our new found freedom! A great way to avoid pushing ourselves too far and running our batteries down is to have a good idea of how the activities we want to do, and those we need to do, affect our energy. Over the page are some strategies to help with this and we talk more about how to focus on what matters in a later section.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Managing energy

Where I am at exercise: Over the page is an activity planner. Over the next week use it to keep track of your mental and physical energy and the activities you were doing (whether watching TV, helping the kids with homework, speaking with friends or whatever else) to get a better idea of how your energy changes.

Now that you have an idea of how the activities you are already doing affect your energy it is easier to think about how to add in other activities as we leave lockdown. Some days might already be full of things that leave you feeling physically tired even if you enjoy them, or you might have days that by the end of it while you have the energy for playing games with the kids, helping them with the maths homework is out of the question.

By taking stock it is easier to think about when is the best time to add things in. And remember you don't need to do everything all at once ... **steps, not leaps!** By adding activities in slowly we 1) focus on doing what matters most to us, and 2) avoid feeling like we have no petrol left in the tank.

We will talk more about how to handle your own and other people's expectations in a later section, but for now it can be helpful to plan out your week.

Making changes: Add your planned activities to the form on the next page. Start with the need-to-dos (although please do consider whether some of these really are need-to-dos), then once you have an idea of how those will affect your energy level over the week add in the want-to-dos on the days when you will have the most energy.



Activity Schedule

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday



Dr Jenn Cooper
Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Mind



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Slowing things down

While lockdown restriction might have meant a slower pace of life for some of us, it did bring with it a number of stresses and strains as we contended with the uncertainty and worry of changing information about how best to protect ourselves and others. We also might have had to deal with the stresses of taking on new roles and responsibilities or even just learning how to use new apps and programmes to allow us to work from home or home school the kids. And alongside these we may have had to contend with grief and loss.

Now there are more changes happening. Questions about vaccinations, changes to lockdown restrictions, workplaces are thinking about when / if / how to bring employees back to the office, children are back in school. Then there is stuff like meeting with friends and family, being able to be back in shops, restaurants and cafes; groups and classes for ourselves and family members are beginning to re-open. Heck, even trying to find a free appointment to get a haircut at the moment is tough. It is a lot!

We might be feeling pressure from ourselves or others that we should be thinking, feeling and acting in a particular way about this. We might feel that we are being pulled in all sorts of directions, and that after a year in the stormy seas of lockdown that our map is looking a bit worse for wear and it's difficult to plot a course. Like I said, it is a lot.

With this 'a lot', we can feel overwhelmed and disconnected from what we want to be doing or focused on. By using techniques, like calming breathing and mindfulness techniques, which can slow things down and help us feel a little more anchored, we can reconnect with those things that are important to us.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Slowing things down

Making changes: The first thing we can do is to focus on our breathing - by doing this, it can turn down our body's physical 'fight or flight' response and calm our nervous system. We can do this in a stressful moment, or introduce this as a regular practice to help reduce our anxiety baseline. The good part about both of these techniques is that they are transportable - you take your breath with you wherever you go, so you can use these whenever you feel your thoughts are getting too tangled or messy.

In the moment - Box breathing

- Visualise a square
- Start by breathing in for four, and imagine drawing a line along one edge of the box
- Then hold your breath for four, and imagine drawing a line along the next edge
- Slowly exhale for four, and imagine drawing the next edge of the box
- Then hold your breath for four, and imagine the line connecting up to the first line
- Repeat this four or five times until you feel calmer.

Regular practice - Calming breathing

- Sit in a comfortable, open posture; close your eyes or focus on a point on the floor
- Notice your breathing
- Some distracting thoughts might come up, that's okay, acknowledge the thought and go back to focusing on your breathing.
- Try to find a comfortable, calming pace, this will be different for everyone.
- Once you find a comfortable pace you can try widening your attention, noticing how your body feels during this. Try and stick with this pace for a couple of minutes.

The first few times you try this you might find your mind is pretty chatty with thoughts (mine loves to remind me what I need to get at the shops, or if I need to send an email). What you might find though is just taking the moment to focus on your breath can begin, with practice, to gain a little space from those thoughts.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Slowing things down

Focusing on our breathing is a great way to slow things down and give us a bit of space. We can build on this ability to focus our attention in a range of ways, and this can help us feel a little more in control. Mindfulness is not just sitting on a cushion and counting breaths.

One way to do this, is to mindfully do an activity that we already do. That might be washing the dishes, or showering, or even walking. The goal here is to focus on the sensory experience of the activity. So that might be the sound of dishes splashing, the smell of your shampoo, or the sensation of your weight shifting as your foot rolls from heel to ball. Whatever activity you pick, try to focus on those sensations for ten-minutes - you might be surprised how much is going on in these everyday activities. As with focusing on your breathing, if other thoughts come up, acknowledge them and gently bring your attention back to the activity. The goal here is to train yourself to focus your attention so that you can feel a little more space from your thoughts and a little more in control.

If this is something which 'clicks' for you and you want to develop this skill further there are a range of great mindfulness resources which you can check out:

- The "Smiling Mind" app
- "Headspace" app
- www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/
- <https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/resource/audio>



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

It is all okay

It is a bit of an understatement to say that lockdown has been difficult, the worry, uncertainty and burnout it brought was real. There is still so much of the world that is not in our control and whatever you are feeling is valid.

Our emotions are an important guide to letting us know how we are responding to what is happening in our lives. It can be all too easy to drop into being self-critical or comparing ourselves to how others seem to be coping. We might tell ourselves that we are "being silly" or "making too much of things" but our emotions are helpful guides and we are not "weak" for feeling afraid or stressed or low. We are human, having normal reactions to events that have been far from normal.

Now is a great time to show yourself compassion, empathy and kindness. Meet your emotional experiencing with the love and consideration you would your child or loved ones. Allow yourself to feel while reassuring yourself that you can cope.

Being able to find ways to sit with these (sometimes difficult) emotions, validate them and acknowledge them is a great skill to develop, so the following pages cover some ways to begin developing this important skill.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Validate and self-soothe

If all that about being compassionate to yourself feels like a great but difficult idea that's okay, it is another skill that you can cultivate.

Self-soothing is a way to create a sense of safety when you are feeling overwhelmed and unsafe. It is a set of tools that don't necessarily take the feelings away, but rather helps you reduce your arousal level, turning down threat mode and exerting a little control over those overwhelming emotions.

Developing a soothing box can be helpful so that when you are feeling overwhelmed, you have some coping strategies that are easily to hand. Actively collect these items and put them in a special box - even this is an act of kindness. When you are feeling overwhelmed, engaging in soothing can help us validate our experiences while also helping us reduce our anxiety.

You can break this down by the five senses into:

- Sight: What makes you feel safe and calm? Photographs of someone you love? A favourite place? Your favourite painting?
- Sound: What music makes you feel calm and relaxed? Do the sound of waves calm you? Can you record your family or loved ones sending you a message?
- Smell: What smell takes you back to a time of peace and calmness? Is there a scent that reminds you of someone who made you feel safe? Or a particular smell that felt like 'home'? Is there a particular candle or incense that you feel calmed by?
- Taste: Is there a food that brings back fond memories? Perhaps a meal your gran made; or your favourite chocolate bar that feels truly indulgent. Or perhaps a packet of sweeties like you used to buy with your pocket money at the weekend as a child?
- Touch: Is there a particular sensation that is soothing for you? A particular material that you enjoy being on your skin? A favourite blanket that you can rub between your fingers? A rock that is smooth and jagged at the same time? An old teddy bear you loved? Or perhaps it is seeking out a cuddle, getting your hair brushed or brushing your child's hair?



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

My Soothing Box

SIGHT

SOUND

SMELL

TASTE

TOUCH



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Distraction

Even if we practice mindfulness there can still be times when our brains get chatty with unhelpful thoughts and we can feel hooked into these when we want to feel focused on something else. One way to deal with these unhelpful thoughts, as a short-term-strategy, is distraction.

Some really simple ways to do this in the moment are:

- ▶ Count back from 3000 in 6's
- ▶ Pull up a Wikipedia page on your phone and count all of the 'i's' on the page
- ▶ Look at a picture or painting nearby and count all of the colours; patterns; textures
- ▶ Focus your attention on the carpet and try to identify each tiny fibre or colour
- ▶ Recite the alphabet backwards

This might seem simple or silly but while our brains can be very clever they are not the best at multitasking. If you are tuned into worry, changing the channel by focusing all your attention onto a mundane but challenging task can shift your focus away from worry and unhelpful thoughts. It doesn't fix everything, but it does make a little bit of space that gives you some room to engage in more helpful activities.

Distraction can also help in a less immediate way. If you find particular times or days are worse than others, you can set up activities that will help take your mind away from it. You could:

- ▶ Read a REALLY interesting book
- ▶ Watch a hilarious film
- ▶ Do some puzzles or crosswords
- ▶ Cook a complicated recipe
- ▶ Exercise



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Dealing with unhelpful thoughts

Our brains are excellent at having thoughts, some of these are helpful and sometimes they can be unhelpful worries. We have spoken about a range of activities to give yourself a little space from thoughts so you can focus on what matters. This might be enough for some of those unhelpful thoughts and they might not crop back up, but some unhelpful thoughts are a little stickier or more persistent. So what about these kinds of thoughts?

Well, we can have a little more control over our thoughts by changing how we react to them, which can be very powerful. Here are a couple of techniques that can be effective:

➤ Evidence analysis:

Start by identifying the unhelpful thought and then look for evidence for and against the thought. Imagine you are on a jury in court, how would you weigh up the evidence? Can you challenge the evidence you identify as 'for' the thought?

What would you say to a friend? Sometimes we can come up with evidence that goes against the thought but we don't really believe it. If this happens it can be helpful to think about what we might say to someone else experiencing the thought.

➤ Alternative thinking:

Identify the anxious thoughts, what feelings and urges to act does it elicit? Rate the feeling out of ten (with ten being the most intense). What would be an alternative thought? Is there a flip side? If you engage in the helpful alternative, how you you feel? Rate these out of ten.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Evidence analysis

Anxious Thought: e.g. "I am going to be overwhelmed going back to work"

Evidence For

e.g. "There are some things about going back to work which are still uncertain"

Evidence Against

e.g. "I have coped with uncertainty before when I started the job", "I still know how to do my job", "Everyone else is in the same situation, we will adjust in time", "I enjoy my work / being in the office / spending time with colleagues"



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Alternative thinking

Anxious Thoughts, Behaviour & Feelings (rate 0-10)

e.g. "Avoid places / people & check news throughout the day; anxious (10/10)

Alternative Thoughts, Behaviour & Feelings (rate 0-10)

e.g. based on the evidence I'll probably be ok; check less & go out when need to; anxious (5/10) and calm (5/10)



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Shifting our Perspective

Our brains are pretty fantastic at trying to keep us safe and spotting potential issues. But what this can mean is that we can give more attention to those threatening negative thoughts than positive ones and then we can get caught up in those unhelpful thoughts. There are some common thinking traps:

- ▶ Catastrophising – "everything is going to be terrible forever"
- ▶ All or Nothing Thinking – "everything is perfect or everything is terrible"
- ▶ Biased Thinking – "there is only terrible things happening"

What can be really helpful is to take a step back from these thoughts. This means that we can see the broader picture, rather than get caught up, and means that we can shift that cycle. Some questions to shift your perspective a little are:

- ▶ Asking yourself and others what the best part of the day was?
- ▶ What one good thing happened today?
- ▶ What 3 things have you got to feel grateful for today?
- ▶ What went well today?
- ▶ What has improved today?
- ▶ What was the funniest part of the day?
- ▶ What did you enjoy today?

Asking these questions will pretty quickly slow down that vicious cycle and can help move your emotions to a more positive place. It might not stop the worries, but it can help you see that those unhelpful thoughts are just a small part of the picture and you can shift your perspective for a little while to be focused on something positive. This can be tricky to start at first but like most things becomes easier with practice. Be gentle with yourself if you find it tricky to begin with, try your best and come back to it tomorrow.



Shift Your Perspective

Something Funny 

One Good Thing 

Gratitude Attitude 

What Went Well? 

- ▶
- ▶
- ▶

 The Best Part Of The Day 



Focus on what matters

As we are leaving lockdown we might be feeling pulled in a number of different directions dealing with our own and other people's plans and expectations about what restrictions lifting will allow. Family, friends, social, work, school, and all sorts of other areas of life might be changing and we might be feeling a pressure to try and keep up with it all. But we are not superhuman and trying to do it all at once is likely to leave us tired at best and completely burnt out at worst - remember it is best to take **steps, not leaps!**

But that raises an important question, what steps do you want (or need) to take, and in what direction? Those directions will be unique to all of us but this metaphor might be helpful.

Imagine you have a large jam jar, a couple of larger rocks, some smaller pebbles and some sand. If you start filling the jar with sand you could fill it right to the top and have no room for the pebbles or rocks. But if you put the rocks in the jar first, then you put in the pebbles and they can drop into the space between the rocks, and then the sand can fit into the spaces between the pebbles.

Figuring out what your rocks and pebbles are can be difficult. It is likely that with a year in lockdown that our sense of what our priorities are shifted, plus with leaving lockdown, the expectations about what we should be doing from ourselves and others might make it difficult to figure out what our priorities are. Of course, you might have found with lockdown that it became easier to focus on what matters most to you.

There is no hard and fast guidance here that will apply to everyone, we will have different priorities but thinking about timescales can be helpful. So, the rocks are your key priorities, the things that are going to be important in the long-term, maybe relationships with family and friends; pebbles are things that are important but might change like attending a night class, thinking about changes in your job; and sand is the more fleeting things that this time next year you might have even forgotten about - like watching that Netflix show.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Social and relationships



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Communication

As lockdown restrictions lift some of us might feel raring to get back to our older way of life, back to work, cafes, gyms and going to the shops while some of us might like the slower pace that came with lockdown restrictions or feel worried about lockdown lifting, and some of us will be somewhere in the middle. There is no right place to be on this spectrum but because family, friends and colleagues might be at a different place on the spectrum than you, now is an important time to think about setting boundaries around communication

It is easy to get caught up in talking about restrictions lifting, vaccinations, returning to work and socialising, and future plans. This might feel helpful or exciting but having some worries about what the next weeks and months might look like for you also makes complete sense.

If talking about these topics increases your anxiety or makes you feel worse, an important aspect to managing that worry is adding some control to the conversations you are having.

Where I am at: Take a moment to think about how these conversations make you feel:

How does this conversation make me feel?

Have you noticed how particular conversations or communication with particular people makes you feel? A really straight forward tool is to rate those conversations. Take a moment to check in with yourself about the conversations you're having and where they place on this scale:

Conversations about _____
with _____ make me feel:

Great
Happy
Distracted

Ok
Neutral
Manageable

Worse
Highly Anxious
Uncomfortable



Communication

Where we are at: Take a moment to think about where you, and your significant others, are on that spectrum of readiness

The readiness spectrum

Take a moment to check in with yourself about how ready you feel for lockdown lifting. What about your family and friends?

Raring to go
Excited
Comfortable

Ready
Neutral
Manageable

Not ready
Anxious
Uncomfortable

The image shows a readiness spectrum scale with five horizontal lines for marking. The scale is divided into three sections: 'Raring to go' (Excited, Comfortable) on the left, 'Ready' (Neutral, Manageable) in the middle, and 'Not ready' (Anxious, Uncomfortable) on the right. The scale is currently blank, with no markings.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Assert yourself

Now that you have an idea of what topics might make you uncomfortable it is helpful to think about how you manage those when communicating with others by being assertive about our needs. Sometimes when we think about being assertive we can think that means being demanding or that that might mean upsetting or offending others. What being assertive means is being able to ask for others to respect your needs.

We will all have different levels of preparedness and comfort with leaving lockdown, some friends might be keen to go out while others are happy to meet for a takeaway or barbeque at the house. While keeping up with friends and family is important it is okay to choose to spend time with people who are more aligned with our preparedness and comfort with lockdown restrictions lifting.

As we move out of lockdown we might find ourselves being asked to participate in things we don't feel ready for yet like meeting friends for drinks in a pub, or going to a busy shopping mall. It is okay to feel uncomfortable about this, and it is just as okay to communicate your needs - they are as important as everyone else's. In these situations, it can be helpful to acknowledge what others want to do, explain why that makes you feel uncomfortable and either turn down the offer for now or suggest something where you do feel comfortable. Failing that, it is also helpful to know that 'no thanks' can be a complete sentence.

It is not just social situations where we might want to assert our needs. As we come out of lockdown, our needs will change as our energy is pulled in different directions and we adjust to this transition. Many of us aren't that great at expressing our needs in the first place, so try to take a moment to tune into those changing needs. We might need time to ourselves to work or relax, we might need an early night, we might need to be heard, we might need a hug.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Assert yourself

Now some of the needs highlighted above will be fairly easily met and you may well manage this on your own. However, some of them might rely on someone else. Whilst we cannot demand that others meet our needs, we can communicate them in a way that gives us the best opportunity for gaining understanding and ultimately what we need.

This is where asserting your needs with a full stop, rather than a question mark, comes in. By asking "if that's okay"? at the end of a need (e.g. "I'm going out for a walk if that's okay?") this can disempower us. It leaves out needs open to refusal, rather than "I'm going out for a walk, I need a break". You might need to go a step further with "and you'll need to do bedtime", remember this is you communicating your needs rather than being bossy or selfish. If the other person really cannot accommodate this request, they will tell you, but by communicating it this way you are more likely to be heard and listened to. Of course, there will be times when your needs are in competition with others, and where someone else might not be able to meet your need immediately. Here it can be helpful to think about how you might compromise, so that you are able to take into account the other person's need without completely letting go of your own. For example if you partner responds to your need for a walk with "I'm going on a zoom call" you might follow up with, "ok, once your call is done, I'll go for my walk".

Making changes: Take a moment to reframe the needs above using a full stop, rather than a question mark.

Conversation Strategies

What is the need?

How will I assertively communicate my need (statement)?

Strategies for Compromise



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Relationships

As mentioned, different people will have different hopes and expectations about moving out of lockdown and this could have an impact on our relationships. We might still be dealing with the challenges of sharing space while working from home, and facing familiar issues around who is responsible for what activities - getting the children ready for school, making dinner, doing household chores etc.

Being proactive in discussing these helps to keep relationships running smoothly and tensions low. By being open about these issues we can acknowledge that even if we are in different boats, we are in the same storm heading for the same safe harbour.

I would really encourage you to sit down with your partner (or flatmates or parents or whoever you live with) and think about how your relationships might be changing in the face of lockdown restrictions easing, what you need from each other now, what your triggers might be and how you might manage these together. It is not possible for you to do this alone; by definition a relationship is a way in which two (or more) people are connected; so you all have equal responsibility over the relationship.

Where we are at: Write down some of the potential triggers in your relationships.

Potential Triggers and Conflict



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Relationships

Having identified the potential new needs of each other and areas of conflict, now is the time to be proactive and think about how you might manage these. Remember to be assertive, being open and collaborative now can help prevent issues cropping up later.

While every relationship is unique, what every relationship has in common is that they benefit from healthy boundaries and communication.

It is really important that you can both (or all) consider what your boundaries and needs are, and how these might change as lockdown lifts. This will not be a 'set it and forget it' and being open about how those needs and boundaries change over time might be hard but it will be worth it, remember - **steps, not leaps!**

It might be that you have needs to spend more time out of the family home - I know many of us are feeling the need for some time away from parenting duties! So discussing this with your partner will be essential to ensure that they can support you in this, without feeling resentful at being left behind. Equally, you might find that you need more time before heading out, so having open discussions with your partner or friends about the plans they make for nights out or get togethers will ensure your not being dragged into situations you'd prefer not to.

Some helpful strategies to consider are:

Identify when and how you can have your own space when you need it

Consider sharing you weekly activity planner (or parts of it) with those you live with, maybe encourage them to do the same, so you can plan dividing up those shared chores to help you each manage your energy, and identify when you will spend quality time together

Remember too, as lockdown lifts and you start to re-engage in social activities it is important to still make time to look after your relationship, engage and connect with other. Schedule this time in.

When the inevitable arguments to happen, create a crisis resolution plan with each other for how you might resolves this quicker - e.g. stopping what you are doing; having space away from each other; making contact (holding hands); having a phrase that can defuse the situation.



Relationships

Our Relationship Action Plan

Needs

Needs

- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶

- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶

Our Plan to Meet Those Needs

- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶
- ▶



Relationships

Our Crisis Resolution Plan

Our Plan to Manage Conflict

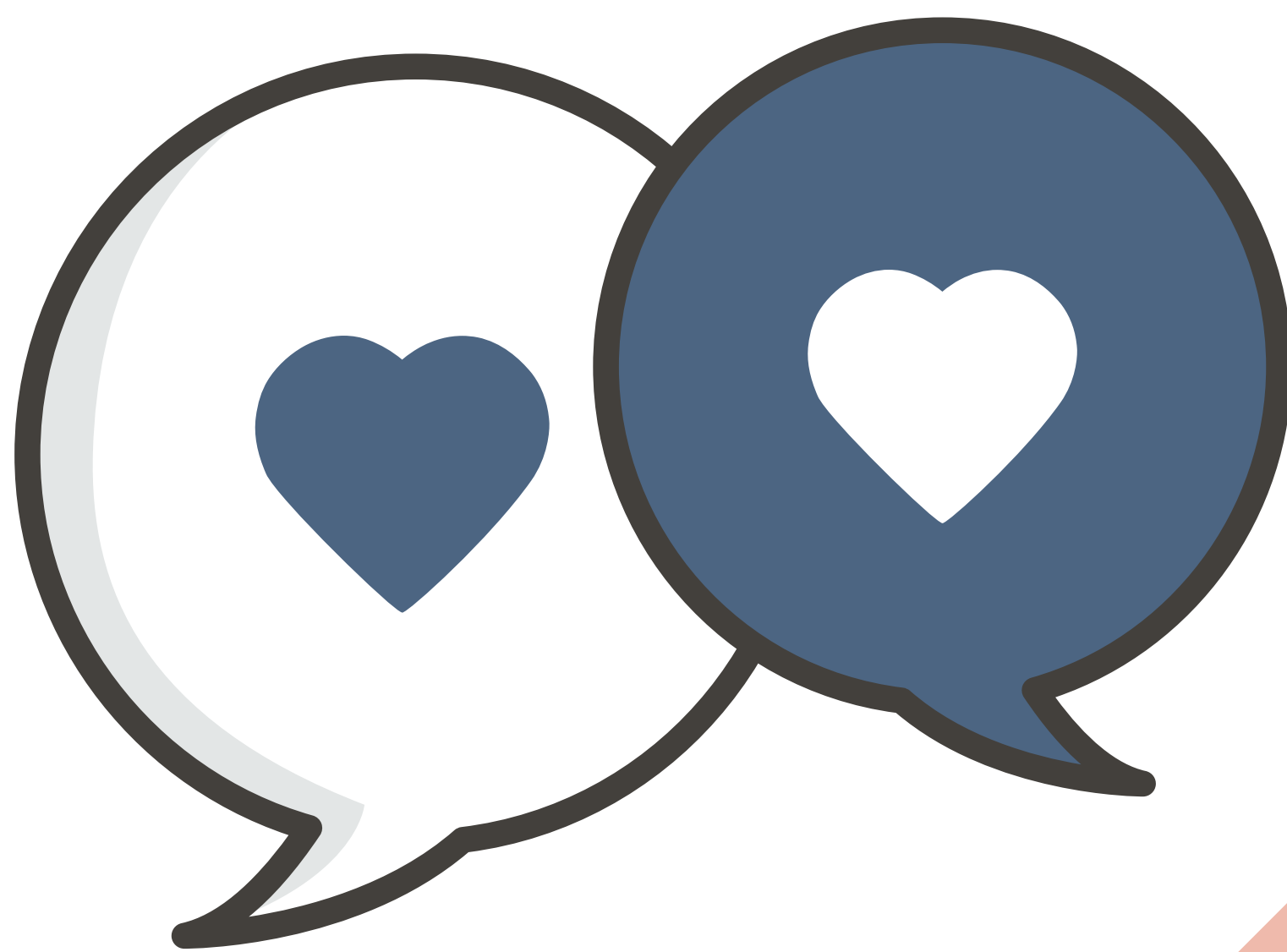


Re-establishing

After a year of lockdown we might have experienced shifts in our relationships. With all the changes to our roles and responsibilities, our relationships with those closest to us, particularly those we share our homes with, may have taken a move towards the pragmatic and practical. This makes sense, when we are stressed it is hard to focus on rest and relaxation, plus for many of us when we could get time to relax we chose to get some space to ourselves, so of course things might have shifted.

If you've found your partner has become more like a housemate, try setting some quality time to spend with them each week, have a date night, maybe go out if you both feel comfortable or stay in and cook your favourite meal. Keep it simple, sit at a table and make eye contact rather than on the sofa watching TV.

Alongside this, make time to check-in with each other beyond just keeping each other up to date. Maybe share what you appreciate about your partner whether that is their smile, sense of humour, or their determination; or what they do that you are grateful for whether that is doing the laundry, reading the kids a bedtime story, or making you a cup of tea in the morning.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Reconnecting

It is not just our relationships with the people that we share our home with that may have changed, our relationships with others might have changed too. We lost our ability to meet up in social venues, we may have been perpetually delaying making plans hoping lockdown restrictions changed, or found that in making sure we were attending to the need-tos that we sometimes didn't have the time or energy to keep up with Zoom quiz nights or busy group chats.

As mentioned earlier, leaving lockdown gives us an opportunity to re-focus on what matters, and that might mean our relationships change. If we are introverted, we might have found that we appreciated not having as many social engagements and the prospect of connecting with others leaves us feeling drained. Conversely, if we are extroverted we might be keen to be meeting up with people while also experiencing some Covid-19 related anxiety about being back in social spaces.

In all of this, we get some choice about how we leave lockdown, how and when we reconnect with others.

If you have drifted from friends, it is okay to be open about this, let them know that you would like to catch up, whether that's chatting by text, inviting them for a coffee, or meeting up for a drink

Remember it is okay to be assertive. If others invite you out and you do not feel ready, it is okay to thank them and let them know that you still need some time to feel ready for being back in social situations

If you are keen to meet up and your friends don't yet feel ready to, then it is okay to be open about wanting to reconnect and check-in on what feels most comfortable for them

Finally, there may be some friends that you have drifted from over the past year that you realise that you are no longer close with, it is okay to let these friendships go if they are not relationships that improve your wellbeing.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Digital resilience

Now more than ever we are readily contactable by calls, texts, emails, social media posts and direct messages. Alongside that, smartphones provide helpful apps, ways to view videos, listen to music and podcasts, read books, and play games. In many ways this is really convenient and we can benefit from that ease of connection. Text messaging and social media can provide a great way to keep in contact with important people easily and this can be a great source of support. The flipside of that is that that we are carrying around devices that can easily pull on our attention - social media apps and games are really good (bad) at doing this.

It is not that any of these things are intrinsically unhelpful, but we might have found ourselves using our apps and devices with a little less intention. Plus, we might have found that as restrictions lift we are dealing with more notifications about planning social activities or preparing to return to work which lead to feeling overwhelmed.

There are some things we can do to develop a bit more intention and a bit of space away to respond to this:

It is okay to put your phone on silent for a bit while you focus on something else.

Plus if you have a new-ish smartphone you can probably set it to automatically be silent at certain times, or silence calls from everyone except certain people.

Check out the notification settings within apps too, consider turning off notifications for all but your most important apps.

If you find yourself procrastinating, newer smartphones will often have options to limit the amount of time you spend on particular apps or you could move them to another screen

Take some time to look through your social media feeds and unfollow or mute people who add to the feelings of overwhelm. We are in control of what we see on social media, albeit it doesn't always feel that way.

Limit when you use your phone, try not to use it for an hour before your bed time or first thing when you wake up.



Children



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Children

Those of us with children will be well aware of the impact that the months of lockdown, restrictions and changes in our way of living have not only been difficult for us to adjust to, but have also impacted on our children. This part of the guide is aimed at giving you some ideas of how lockdown might have impacted on our children, as well as things to consider as we move out of lockdown for our children. Unfortunately, children cannot always tell us how they are feeling, and so as parents we have the mammoth task of figuring this out and knowing what to do!

This section is merely a brief overview of some of the challenges our children might be facing as we move out of lockdown, and is by no means exhaustive, nor does it mean that your own children will definitely be sharing these experiences. You know your child best, but knowing what to look out for can be helpful. If you have specific concerns about your child's wellbeing - whether lockdown related or otherwise, know that you have options for further support - you can discuss your concerns with your GP, health visitor, child's school or a counsellor / psychologist who can help guide you on the next steps to supporting your child.



Impact on Children

The impact of lockdown on our children is something that is still to be fully appreciated. However, those months of isolation, being separated from their family, friends and routine; being told 'no' or 'you can't' much more often than ever before; and having varying degrees of understanding about this scary virus will no doubt have impacted on them in some capacity. We might find out children are more anxious than usual, perhaps they are less keen than before to go outside or are more vigilant and aware of things that they really shouldn't have to be (such as social distancing). We might also find that our children are struggling socially, having had many months away from friends, or they may be struggling with school with all those long months of homeschooling. Each child is unique and so the impact lockdown has had on your child will be unique. Bear in mind too that our children have also experienced the grief and loss that this year has brought, along with shifts and changes in the dynamics at home, and parents who have been undoubtedly more stressed.

And depending on the age of our children they may or may not be able to communicate how they are feeling. They may come out and openly tell you that they feel nervous being back at school, or they may communicate their internal experience in different ways.

You may notice your children are more emotional than usual. They may appear to have regressed in years, having tantrums and meltdowns about seemingly insignificant things that typically wouldn't have bothered them. You may notice them being moodier than usual, or even acting out more than before.

You might also notice that they appear more anxious than before. Your confident, outgoing child, suddenly doesn't want to go to school, after school clubs or play dates. They may struggle with separation anxiety, getting upset whenever you have to leave them.

Below you will find some areas for you to consider when helping your child manage their experience of leaving lockdown



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Body

As we spoke about earlier, lockdown has no doubt changed out energy, activity and routine, and children will not be immune to this. Managing their energy levels, pacing their activities and adjusting to a new routine is equally important for their wellbeing as it is for our own.

Managing energy

With the easing of lockdown, our children will be catapulted into a different pace of life again. As with ourselves, they can get carried away with this, however they possess even less insight than we do about the potential costs of this. Look out for your children becoming overwhelmed or overexcited; these might be indicators that your child isn't managing their energy effectively. Children can be like Duracell bunnies and just keep going, but that isn't always helpful or healthy. Be sure to look for ways to encourage proper rest time. For younger children, this might look like quiet time after a morning of play or reducing the after school activities. Of course, with older children and teenagers, this might not always be in your control, but perhaps easing up on screen time restrictions, or allowing them those longer lies at the weekend might be ways to help them manage their energy.

If you notice that your children are struggling to adapt back to the pace of school, slow down weekends. Give them space to unwind and switch off, it might sometimes make you unpopular by saying no to things that they want to do, but remember that children haven't learned how to manage their own energy yet, so you might need to step in and do this for them.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Body

Pacing

As our children leave lockdown, they will carry with them the impact of the last year, with less resources than you or I have to manage these. I know that as a parent, my initial feelings about lockdown easing were:

1. Thank god for that - back to school and nursery you go!
2. Best get them signed up for those dance and drama classes again, oh and don't forget swimming
3. When will gran have them for a sleepover?
4. What else can we do to entertain them?

And while every one of those thoughts are absolutely valid, having taken a step back from them and looking at the list objectively - it's asking quite a lot of two little girls who have predominantly been at home for a year.

There might be an eagerness to get the kids back to some kind of normality, but we must recognise that there is a cost to this. Going from nothing to EVERYTHING all at once would be overwhelming for anyone and so as parents, reminding ourselves to pace these transitions for our children is so important. And in doing so, we will hopefully not contribute to any anxiety they might have, and also give them time to adapt and recover from a challenging year.

As parents, we must be careful not to try to make up for all the missed opportunities of the last year. Firstly, this is impossible to do; and secondly, our children have all the time in the world for new opportunities - we do not need to cram it all in.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

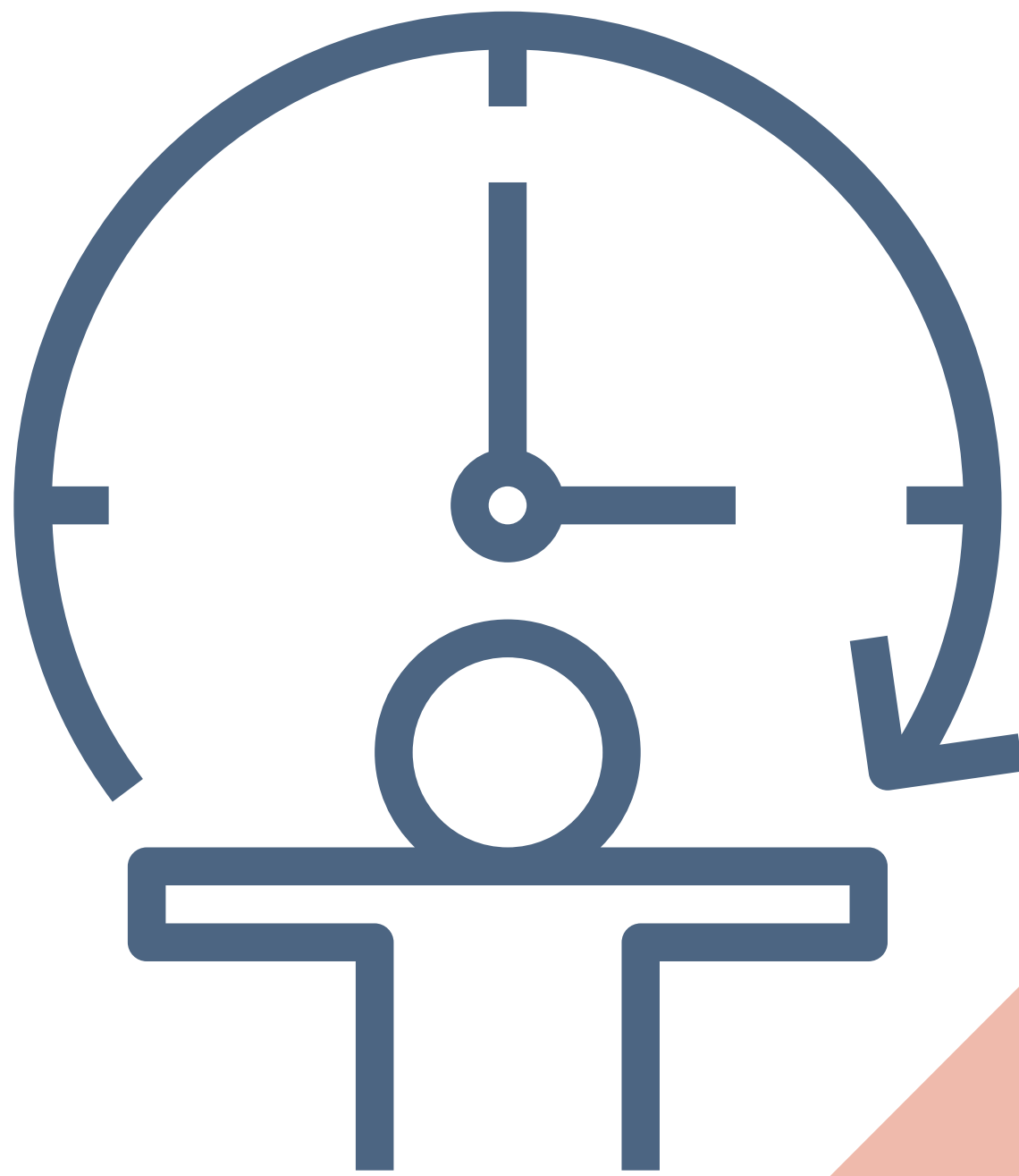
mummy ♥ matters

Body

Routine

There is also something to be said about the sudden change in routine and the faster pace of life that we're all adapting to. I know the school runs have felt relentless these last few weeks, so goodness knows how the kids feel! The routine that children had is up in the air and that can feel disorientating and overwhelming - even when we perceive that the new routine is filled with more exciting things! Easing back into a routine, and maintaining consistency will be really helpful for your children to feel safe and contained.

Talk with your child about their new routine, bearing in mind the need for pacing and managing energy. Talk about what they need to do (school, nursery, etc) and what they would like to do. Give them a sense of what their week now looks like including any childcare arrangements. Going from being with you almost 100% of the time, to moving between childcare and grandparents might be disorientating for children, especially younger ones who can't articulate this. Perhaps write up their new routine and put it in a visible place like you might have done during lockdown.



Mind

Just like us, our children might be feeling overwhelmed or anxious as they come out of lockdown, but they have less resources available to them to articulate and regulate those emotions. Below are some tips for helping your child manage those difficult emotions

Talk to them about their feelings

We know that talking about how we are feeling can be really helpful, however, for children, this can be challenging, as they don't always have the words, labels or understanding about what they are experiencing.

The most important thing you can do for children is provide them the space and time to talk about how they are feeling. It might be that you spend some time at bedtime asking them how they are feeling, if anything has upset them, or if there is anything they want to tell you. Sometimes it can be really helpful if you can model for them how you are feeling. If you have had a busy, overwhelming day, or if you are feeling anxious about heading back out there, tell them about it. Share with them how you are feeling and what you can do to help yourself. Being open and honest with them will not only help them with words to label their experience, but it also builds trust that it's okay to feel however they are feeling.

Being able to validate these emotions is really important too. They might seem irrational or silly to us, but to children, those little things feel pretty huge. Being able to validate them and tell them it is okay to be feeling how they are feeling will give them the confidence to open up more, but will also help to soothe them. A big hug, telling them you are there for them and that it is okay will be very reassuring for them.



Mind

Self-soothing

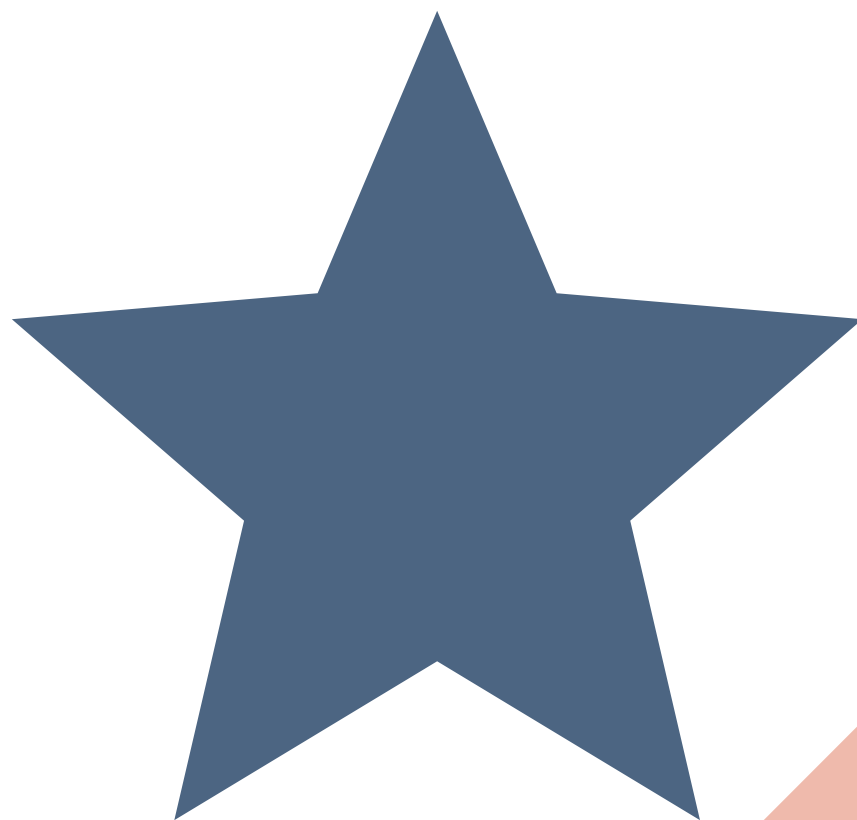
We have spoken about the importance of self-soothing for us as adults, but this is even more important for our children, because while we might struggle with this, they are still learning how to do it.

The self-soothing box described earlier is something you can do with your child. Talk to them about all the things that help them to feel safe and secure and explain how these objects can be used to help us when we are feeling anxious, sad or any other big emotions. Allow them to take ownership of this, selecting items of their choice and allowing them to decide where the box should be kept. Some ideas for items for a child's soothing box include

- Worry dolls / worry stones - that children can share their worries with
- Worry monsters / worry boxes - that children can write their worries down and 'feed' to the monster or put in the box
- Star breathing prompt (described below)
- Busy Mind Jar & Breathing Buddies (ideas from @thenofiltermum on instagram, described below)

Star breathing

Have your child trace their hand on a piece of paper. Then, get them to follow the line of their handprint with their finger, slowly breathing in as they move up the thumb, and out as they move down the thumb, in as they move up the index finger, and out as they move down the other side, and so on. They could also do this without the traced hand and physically touch their hand with their other hand to replicate the movement.



Mind

Busy mind jar

You need: A jar (with a good screwable lid); glitter, beads, and water.

- Talk to you child about what sort of things are in our minds - feelings, thoughts, memories
- Get them to tip in some beads which are the memories (talk about different memories).
- Ask them what sort of feelings or thoughts might be in our minds - the glitter is the feelings/thoughts. Using different colours for different ones (The good, the bad, and the ugly).
- Once the jar is filled with our thoughts and feelings, screw the lid on tight. Shake the jar up and show your child how all of this stuff gets all mixed up sometimes, especially when we have big feelings or big things happen to us. We call this a 'mind storm'
- It looks scary and all muddled up. But if we take three nice big deep breaths we see that after being all shaken up, the mind storm calms down.
- Encourage your child to use the 'busy mind jar' when they are having big feelings to help calm down. This helps to make breathing exercises tangible

Breathing buddy

Fill a sock with rice, tie some elastic bands around the end, at the top, and in the middle so that the sock has a 'head', 'body' and 'bottom'.

Decorate the sock with eyes, pipe cleaners - whatever your child wishes - this is their breathing buddy.

Use the breathing buddy by having your child lie down with their buddy on their tummy. Ask your child to breathe in slowly, pushing their breathing buddy up high with their tummies, and then breathe out slowly, bringing their breathing buddy back down - almost like their buddy was sitting on a balloon. Older children can use the breathing buddy to hold and squeeze as they breathe in and out - the breathing buddy can also be a good worry object.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Mind

Mindfulness

When life feels like it's moving so fast, being able to sit back, slow things down and ground in the moment can be really helpful - and an amazing skill to begin teaching our children. Mindfulness is the act of focusing your attention on the present moment - not worrying about what is to come, or about what has already happened, but simply noticing the here and now, without judgement. Mindfulness for children is becoming more and more popular as we are beginning to see the benefits this can have on us all. It gets taught in schools more often, and there is a huge amount of resources available specifically for children.

When your child is feeling overwhelmed, helping them bring their attention to the here and now means they might get a little respite from whatever is upsetting them.

Mindfulness is most effective when done daily, so finding a way to incorporate this into your daily routine can be helpful - perhaps at bedtime, or after school, or even before you all get up for the day. Incorporating it into daily life will make it easier to then use when the kids get overwhelmed and need a bit of an s.o.s. moment.

There are lots of apps available and loads of YouTube videos, here are some to check out:

- Smiling Minds App
- Headspace App
- Headspace videos on YouTube
- The Mental Health Teacher on YouTube

Shift perspective

As we spoke about earlier, the ability to shift our perspective from the overwhelm to the positives can be really helpful, however not always easy. Helping our children to look for the positives and gratitude in life, is just as important for them as it is for us.

Perhaps you could use the same prompts outlined previously with your children. Use them as an opportunity to start the conversation. Perhaps this could be a dinner time or bedtime routine?



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters

Communication

Just like with ourselves, it is so important that our children learn to, and have the opportunity to, communicate their own needs. This involves them having the opportunity to have more choice and autonomy, and us, as parents, listening and validating this.

I know I can make the mistake of pushing the kids to do things because we've 'paid' for it, or because it's what we've always done, e.g. dancing, drama, swimming classes. But actually when we push our children to do these things (especially as we come out of lockdown) it is important to really listen to them and respect their autonomy to make decisions. Similarly, I know that I experience anxiety about the idea of soft play and swimming lessons and so might be more reluctant to pursue these, even when the kids really want to go.

If they no longer want to do a particular activity, have a discussion around why, and validate their opinion. You might compromise and give it a break for a while, then come back to it again further down the line; or it might be that withdrawing from an activity is the right thing to do. Or if they are desperate to do something that you're perhaps feeling a little more cautious about, this is an opportunity to hear them out and to consider if you can compromise on your anxieties.

Similarly, there will be lots more social activities, play dates and parties as we come out of lockdown. Now most children are likely to be thrilled about this, but if your child isn't wanting to go somewhere or play with particular people, then it might be really worth listening to this. They are being thrust back into full time education which is a lot of social interaction all at once. Children are more similar to us than we sometimes think, and they might just be too worn out for lots of play dates and socialisation outside of school.

We can often brush aside our children's hesitation as nerves or even laziness, but by doing so we are undermining their opportunities to communicate their needs assertively. Now, it is not about automatically giving in to their requests, but it is an opportunity to really sit down and talk about it with them.

Perhaps you might even preempt the conversation by talking about the easing of lockdown and the fact things are opening up again. From here, it is a good opportunity to explore what they would or would not like to re-engage in and think about pacing that.



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision



mummy ♥ matters

Final Thoughts

We don't know what the future holds, however what we do know is that right now, you deserve to take time to look after yourself during these anxious and uncertain times.

We hope that this self help guide will give you strategies and tools to equip you to regain some sense of control over the situation. None of us have an instruction manual for this, and so it is ok if you are not ok.

Talk to others, use your strategies, and try to be compassionate with yourself. As mentioned, this guide provides some general strategies, but if you feel you are struggling or that you might benefit from some more tailored or specialised guidance or support please contact your doctor.

We truly hope this has been helpful and we'd love to receive any feedback you might have.

You can contact Jenn at:

 jenn@renfrewshirepsychology.co.uk

You can also follow Jenn for daily tips and advice on instagram at:

 [@mummy_matters__](https://www.instagram.com/mummy_matters__)



Dr Jenn Cooper

Psychological Therapy, Coaching, Supervision

mummy ♥ matters