

Coming Out of Lockdown – Managing Worries

A Guide for Parents/Carers of Children and Young People with Long-Term Health Conditions

COVID-19 has led to more anxiety and worry for many people and if your child has a long-term health condition, it may bring up additional concerns and worries. Now that restrictions are being lifted, you might be feeling more anxious about how safe it is for you and your child to go outside, into shops and be around other people. This may feel particularly worrying if your child or someone in your family has been shielding. You might also be feeling nervous about your child being at school.

For some families, restrictions lifting will be great news and they will be desperate to get back to 'normal'. For others, it may feel 'dangerous' to be coming out of lockdown and they may feel pressured to start taking these steps before they feel ready. These are both normal reactions to an extraordinary situation.

Here are some tips to help you manage the anxieties that may be around for you and your child at the moment.

♥ Tip 1

Discuss any concerns about changes to restrictions with your child's healthcare team.

+ Your child's healthcare team can help keep you up to date with the latest Government guidelines on COVID-19.

+ You and your child should come to a joint decision with the team about what is safe to do, using their advice to help you consider the level of risk.



Tip 2

Weigh up the risks and benefits of going out, trying not to let anxiety dominate your thoughts!

There is always going to be a risk of catching bugs or viruses when out and about. Staying inside may feel like the safest thing to do but think about what the risks of not going out/not going back to school will mean for your child. For example:

- + It could mean that they will not get to see their friends and join back in with everyone. This is important for their social development.
- + They might be missing out on fun things they used to do and outdoor activities that they enjoyed and learnt from. This may be important for their mental health.
- + They will be missing out on education and may find it harder to catch up.
- + They might feel singled out as 'different' if all their friends are getting back to things.

These are examples of the kind of risks you will have to think about if keeping your child at home and they need to be weighed up against the risk of your child getting COVID-19.

Remember:

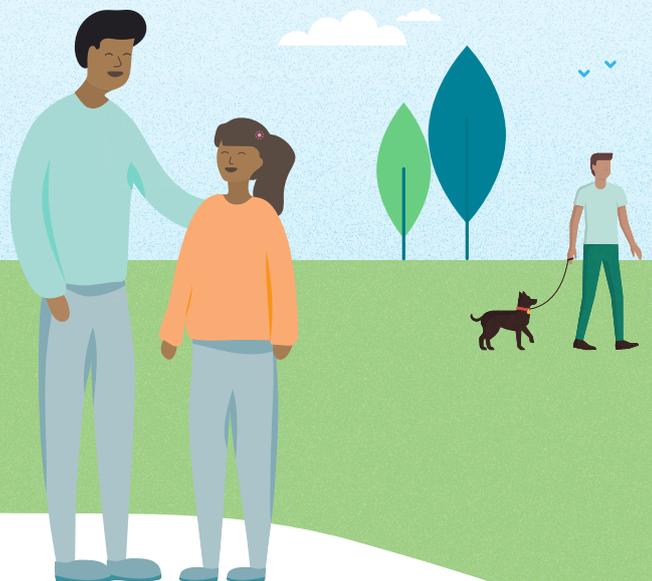
- + The risk for children is very low.
- + Your child's team will not recommend anything they think is too risky.
- + Scottish Government has introduced infection control measures to keep the level of risk as low as possible.
- + Infection control and hygiene measures are likely to be much better now everyone is having to think about it more than before.

Tip 3

Talk to your child about how they are feeling.

We are all learning about how to manage this pandemic and it is understandable that we may be feeling unsettled and unsure about the changing guidelines and advice. Help your child to understand the emotions they are feeling.

- + It can help to label emotions for your child. For example: "It seems like you are feeling scared about going outside because we were told to 'stay home and stay safe' before. Is that right?"
- + You can also help them to understand that their feelings are normal. For example: "I am feeling a bit scared too but we know it is safer to go outside now, so let's try it together".
- + You could help prepare them for what to expect. For example, you could say: "It might feel funny being around more people again", "you might notice them more than you did before" or "it will be strange being back in a shop again!"
- + You could direct them (and yourself) to some of the coping strategies below, to help manage any anxiety.
- + Listen to their questions and worries and try not to dismiss them as silly. Don't be afraid to say if you don't know the answers to their questions. The fact you have listened and taken them seriously will be appreciated. You can then try to find out the answers together or let them know that you will find out and get back to them.



The Ladder to Success



Tip 4

Make a Ladder to Success.

If the worry or anxiety is getting in the way of moving forward, try breaking things down into smaller steps. Think about the steps you and/or your child can take to begin with and work up to a bigger goal. Start with the easiest step that causes the least amount of anxiety and then work your way up. For example, you might start with just going out for a short walk around the block to practice being out and social distancing. Especially if your child has been shielding, it can be helpful just to see what being out of the safety of your home and/or garden is like. Children might be imagining all sorts of things about going out and they might need to experience how things have changed since before lockdown, to see for themselves what it is really like. Above is an example of a ladder (the steps in your ladder will depend on your child's age and the advice you have been given by their healthcare team).

Tip 5

Focus on the things you can control.

There are lots of things that we can't control about living through this pandemic. This uncertainty and ever-changing situation can cause a lot of anxiety. It can therefore be helpful for you and your child to think about the things you can control and focus on them (rather than getting caught up in all the things you can't!). For example, you can control:

- + How good you and your children are with hand hygiene.
- + How you choose to relax.
- + How you choose to spend your time together.
- + How much news you read/watch/listen to.
- + How you look after yourselves.
- + What you say to your children and how you encourage them to cope.
- + What coping strategies you can use.

Tip 6

Use strategies that can help manage anxiety.

The strategies below can help manage anxieties or upset, for you and your child. Some of these strategies need a bit of practice so it can be helpful to try them out when things are calm.

- + **Relaxation** exercises focus on controlling our breathing, relaxing the body or imagining a calm place/picture. These things can help to dial down anxiety and reduce stress.
- + **Mindfulness** exercises can be a good way to slow down busy minds and shift focus from worries.
- + **Distraction** can also take our minds off worried thoughts and can help us cope with anxiety.
- + **Model how to cope** by using the strategies yourself. Show your child it's okay to feel anxious and these things can help them to feel better.

- + **Managing worries** using a 'worry box' can be helpful. Ask your child to write or draw each worry on a piece of paper then fold the paper up and place it in a box (they may want to make or decorate a special box for this). Once all the worries have been placed in the box, let your child choose a safe place to keep it. You could then make a regular time to look through what is in the box together. You could take the worries out one-by-one to see if they are still a worry and if so, make a plan for what to do about it.
- + **Plan something to look forward to!** Try to plan a treat or reward for when you have achieved something, like the next step on your ladder to success. You may need to be a little more creative with your reward at this time and it doesn't need to be anything expensive. Examples could be a favourite home cooked dinner, a late bedtime, home movie night or a gaming session with you.

There are many helpful apps/web-based resources to support you and your child with managing worry and anxiety. Here are some ideas. Just search for the name on your device's store/internet.

Hospichill App	Lots of relaxation, distraction and mindfulness activities specifically for children attending hospital.	Free to download and available on android and Apple devices. http://hospichill.net
MoodCafé Website (NHS Fife)	Sections for children and parents with lots of resources for managing anxiety.	Available online and free to access. www.moodcafe.co.uk
MindShift App (MindShift CBT – Anxiety Canada)	Lots of strategies to help you relax, be mindful and manage anxiety.	Free to download and available on android and Apple devices. www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt
Smiling Mind App	Mindfulness exercises for adults, young people and children.	Free to download and available on any device. www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app

