

1. Top Ten Tips for supporting your child's mental health & wellbeing.

Being a parent is wonderful. There's no doubt, parenthood brings joy and fulfilment into our lives, but it also brings its own set of challenges and stressors that we have to manage. Unlike any other job there is no rule book, no job description, we just have to grow and develop our own set of strategies to cope with what parenthood throws at us, the good and the not so good. One thing is certain though, if we take positive action to promote our children's mental health and wellbeing, this in turn will reduce our stressors and help maintain our wellbeing.

2. Recognise when you feel overwhelmed

We are all really good at recognising when our physical health is poor but not so effective at recognising when things are emotionally overwhelming us. Being overwhelmed can lead to:

- feeling tired all the time;
- poor sleep patterns;
- headaches;
- being irritable and impatient,
- worry, stress and anxiety;
- lack of motivation;
- trouble concentrating;
- poor eating habits;
- general negative thinking and responses e.g., thinking "I'll never be able to do this" rather than "how can I do this";

and/or

- feeling tearful.

The stress caused by these indicators may then impact on our physical health, often triggering or increasing illnesses, particularly those associated with the stomach.

So, our next tips focus on a few simple suggestions to help combat that overwhelmed feeling.

3. Focus on the here and now

In a way this is ordering all the things causing you to feel overwhelmed, identifying the immediate stressor. Take a few minutes to write down all the things that are causing you stress and anxiety. Once you have your list, identify what things you can

tackle immediately, in the short term and those that might take a bit longer. For example, let's look at this list. Say you:

- are worrying about you or your partner's job security
- have difficulty getting off to sleep
- have money worries
- find it difficult to manage your child's behaviour
- are stressed because your child is bedwetting

Thinking about all of these will no doubt cause a sense of anxiety and a feeling of being overwhelmed but if we separate them out, we can clearly see what's easy to tackle and what might take longer to resolve. So, looking at the list again in a more ordered way, we can prioritise and start to make a positive difference.

Difficulty getting off to sleep

This is something you can tackle immediately, and we have some simple tips coming up to help do this.

Managing your child's difficult behaviour

again this is something you can tackle immediately by putting new strategies in place. Have a look at our last resource for ideas. Also, don't be afraid to talk to staff at your child's nursery / school- they manage difficult behaviour on a daily basis and have a wealth of advice and solutions. Positive outcomes may take a little while to show results but the impact of taking action will have an immediate positive effect on your mental health and wellbeing

Your child is bedwetting

bedwetting is common, especially in children under the age of five, and most children will grow out of it. Following [advice from organisations such as the NHS](#) offers support on what to do and what not to do to help manage your child's bedwetting. There is also other support available too. Ask school for an appointment with the school nursing service who again can provide practical advice and support or discuss your concerns with your G.P.

Money worries

worrying about money can make us feel low and when our mood is low, we find it more difficult to manage our finances, it's a cyclical thing and can quite quickly become overwhelming. So, we need to break that cycle. The good news is you don't have to try and do this alone. There are great free support networks online and available locally that will help with auditing your spend, setting a budget, managing

debt and getting your budget back on track. Most schools will know what provision is available in your area, but if you feel uncomfortable asking them then check out other resources e.g. what's available from local voluntary sector organisations and / or your Local Authority, or online services such as [the Money Advice Service](#)

Worrying about you or your partner's job security

there are lots of factors out of our control that affect job security, particularly in this period of global economic change. Ongoing fears about you or your partner losing their job or having contracted hours reduced negatively impacts on anxiety and depression, so it's important first to acknowledge that, being realistic, this is not something you can solve in the short term. However, there are steps you can take if worried about job security that may also support your mental wellbeing. Speak to the employer and ask what the current position is. Even if they say your job is at risk or they are unsure about what might happen in the future, talking will give you the opportunity to ask them what the next steps are and when they will be able to give you a clearer picture of what the actual position is. Get expert advice so you know what your rights and options are, e.g., the [Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service \(Acas\)](#) who offer free confidential advice. Make a plan so you are prepared and have some steps to take should the situation become real. This might involve exploring what benefits & welfare will be available, other job opportunities or further retraining opportunities.

So, you can see, we've reordered the list to prioritise what we can tackle effectively first, which will help reduce some of the stress and / or anxiety and that feeling of being overwhelmed. Recognising what is causing stress and anxiety and creating a sense of order means you can think clearly and plan action, tackling one thing at a time.

4. Think positive thoughts

try to refocus the negatives to positives. I call this gentle reframing. For example, say I have a deadline of 5 days to complete a task. Instead of thinking 'I've only got five days to do this, how will I ever get this done' think 'I have five whole days to get this done. Ok, I can do this'. Reframing in this way positively changes your way of thinking and this 'can do' message will help prevent you feeling overwhelmed.

5. Be body aware

Being overwhelmed, causes physical changes. Breathing becomes shallower, posture slumps and muscles tense, all of which drive an increased feeling of stress. Straightening your posture and taking deep cleansing breaths really helps to combat the effects of stress. So, pick something you do regularly throughout the day, say

making a cup of tea. Whilst you're waiting for the kettle to boil stand up straight, relax your shoulders and take 10 deep breaths like this.

6. Say no

Saying yes is so much easier than saying no and we often agree to things even when we know this will negatively impact on us. It took me a long time to realise that saying yes to all requests really wasn't good for my wellbeing as I just got stressed trying to fit additional tasks into an already busy schedule. Saying no is okay- it can be said in a nice respectful way and be a positive.

7. Sleep

We all know how important sleep is for our children, but a good sleep pattern is also vital for your overall physical and mental health and general wellbeing. Not only does it enable your body to repair and restore for the next day, rest may also help prevent excess weight gain, heart disease and prolonged illness.

Sleep has a huge impact on how our minds and bodies function. Impaired or lack of sleep affects our mood, alertness and negatively impacts on our ability to concentrate. Research also shows that long-term sleep deprivation may contribute to serious health problems e.g., diabetes, strokes.

We need sleep for our prefrontal cortex, that's the part of the brain that thinks rationally, to work well. This helps us to make effective judgements, choices and be able to consider other people's points of view.

Just one night's poor sleep may leave us feeling tired, irritable, tearful and unable to work or function well. So, to sleep well try:

- not to worry about getting to sleep as stress negatively impacts on your ability to sleep;
- reducing your alcohol and caffeine intake;
- before bed, writing a "things to do" list. Creating this list orders tasks and creates a sense of time management, helping your mind to relax that you have a
- plan. Research shows this prevents feeling overwhelmed;
- having a regular sleep pattern- fix a bedtime and stick to it;
- not to look at any devices e.g., mobile phones, tablets or laptops an hour before bedtime and switch them off when you go to bed;
- having a bath before bed. Bathing helps lower your core body temperature which helps you to sleep;

- regulating the room temperature, lower temperatures (approx. 16 degrees) aids sleep.

If you wake during the night and find it difficult to get back to sleep do something which will calm your mind e.g., reading a book, mindfulness exercises.

8. Eat well

Ever heard the saying you are what you eat? Well our mind, just like the rest of our body, is affected by our diet. It needs the fuel from a healthy diet to function well. For example, a balanced regular diet will help the prefrontal cortex of the brain I mentioned earlier, preventing irritability and enables us to concentrate. Research shows that if you eat a diet high in processed meat, fried foods, refined cereals, pastries and high-fat dairy products, you're more likely to be anxious and depressed. The vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables have great healing, restorative powers. So here are a few foods that can boost and maintain your mental wellness:

- Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries contain antioxidants which help improve the symptoms associated with anxiety and depression. Strawberries and blueberries also contain a compound which can help improve your attention span, concentration and memory. You can also get an antioxidant boost by snacking on
- walnuts which studies have shown also amazingly promote the growth of new brain cells;
- Probiotics found in yogurt and yogurt drinks assist in lowering levels of stress, anxiety and depression;
- DHA, an Omega-3 fatty acid found in oily fish such as salmon, trout and prawns can help improve short- and long-term memory and reduce anxiety. Don't like fish or seafood? Don't worry, you can get these benefits from taking a fish oil supplement;
- The amino acid found in wholegrains helps us produce serotonin often referred to as the feel-good hormone, which helps us to improve our mood, calm our mind and maintain a healthy sleep cycle;
- Chickpeas, lentils and kidney beans are full of fibre and antioxidants. They not only keep your blood sugar stable, they also enable you to burn more energy, essential for good mental health. Beans also contain a vitamin called thiamine which helps us to produce a neurotransmitter essential for memory.

9. Limit alcohol

Alcohol affects the chemicals in your brain and the central nervous system. The central nervous system controls most functions of our body and mind and alcohol

slows our ability to function. Alcohol can affect the part of the brain that controls inhibition, which is why we often feel less anxious after having a drink but, although in the short term we may feel more relaxed, regular or heavy drinking negatively impacts on mental health and can contribute to feelings of depression, anxiety and make stress harder to cope with. So, if you do drink alcohol, try to keep to [NHS guidelines](#), that's not drinking more than 14 units per week spread over 3 days and have at least two alcohol free days per week.

10. Talk about how you are feeling

There's an old saying 'a problem shared is a problem halved'. As adults we often see ourselves as failing if we're not coping with what life is throwing at us and we internalise our feelings. This is really unhealthy. As human beings we are designed to feel and express our feelings, so bottling them up has a negative effect on our mental health and wellbeing. There really are benefits in sharing how you're feeling whether that's with someone you trust or as we detailed earlier to support organisations. Sharing can help:

- reduce the intensity and power of a feeling e.g., reduce anxiety levels;
- get a new perspective on difficulties;
- make problem solving and decision making easier;
- reduce the sense of isolation and help restore a balanced sense of reality.

We hope you find these practical tips helpful. They are general tips designed to help but as ever, if you have any concerns about your mental health or wellbeing please don't hesitate to contact your GP. There is also lots of good information via the NHS website and through other support organisations.