

Self-Care for Families whilst Staying at Home

By Gemma Bradley-Fortune

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Dear Parent and Carers,

My name is Gemma and I am Learning Mentor for Nottingham Behaviour Support Team. During 7 years of working as a Learning Mentor, I have learnt that behaviour changes through praise and reward. Consequences and punishment only work in the short term. A sticker chart might get you through a holiday but rarely does the behaviour change. Why?

Because 'All Behaviour is Communication'. We do not just want to change the behaviour we want to figure out why it is happening in the first place. When we are able to explore certain behaviour, it is more than often linked to...emotions and feelings. During the last 7 years, I have worked with children, 1-to-1, to figure out why they do what they do and how I can help them feel better and ultimately learn more in school and unlock their potential. Yes – I know I have the best job!

I have lost count the number of times I have written the objective "create a safe space to talk".

This is why I am writing this now (although I cannot quite believe I am), as I am currently unable to work face to face with children in these next few months. However, I thought I would try to help by writing this 'story' so that it might help you sit down with your little ones and start a conversation. My story is all about how I am feeling about this situation and what is happening in our bodies and minds. I hope that it helps you to explain to your children that emotions and feelings are ok and that whatever they are feeling (and you are feeling) is completely natural. Whilst reading it, pause and let your child open up if they want to or talk about how you are feeling "I feel sad that we won't get to go on holiday this year". I have personally found that when someone says "I understand" it makes what you are feeling ok somehow, it does not take it away but it helps.

The end goal is that you all (as a family) create a 'Self-Care Plan' each to help you through this time. Self-Care is an interesting approach and often ignored when we are super busy. As adults, we think we are 'doing' self-care when we treat ourselves to nice food or open a bottle of wine but sometimes this is 'escapism' which takes us further away from our feelings.

So, my hope is that as you take time to do this with your child or children, you notice the things that you can do that will help you feel calm and more connected to your emotions. There is a lot in the media about how to teach your children and keep school going at home but now it is more important than ever to develop skills around managing emotions.

You cannot pour from an empty cup – so I hope you also discover what you can do to fill up your cup.

Feeling My Feelings



How my feelings keep changing in this uncertain time and
how a Self-Care Plan can help

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This is a difficult time for everyone. It is uncertain and sometimes scary. My emotions have been like this....



One minute I feel ok and I think...it's not so bad and then I listen to the news and it feels scary again and I get worried about what might happen...AND...then I go back to feeling positive and thinking about how much I could do and the fun I could have being at home... this makes me feel...sooooo confused!!



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This is happening because I feel out of control

Just like being on a roller-coaster, I don't know what is going to happen next...I am feeling Unsafe

Sometimes I don't realise I am feeling unsafe and instead I might get angry, sad or want to be alone



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It does not feel nice at all.

This might sound strange but everything I have been feeling is completely normal and is part of a stress response called 'Fight or Flight'. It was designed to keep us humans safe from things like hungry lions



It happens quickly, our bodies see the danger and make a quick decision. Can I fight this? Should I run? Good plan! RUN....In seconds, lots of different things happen in the body so that we can run really fast to escape the lion. It is over in a few minutes and our bodies go back to normal.

What we are experiencing now is so different. We cannot see the danger. We know it is out there and people are saying... 'KEEP SAFE' but we cannot run or fight it.

If you suddenly feel your heart beating fast, get hot or sweaty and your breathing gets faster you might be experiencing the 'fight or flight' response to something...perhaps the news was scary again or you suddenly thought of something that worried you.

What can you do?

1. Notice what is happening in your body
2. Take a few deep breaths; breathe in (count to 4), hold it (count to 7) and breathe out (count to 8)
3. Try to name the feeling out loud – *"I just felt worried then"*
4. You may need to move about or shake it off
5. If you need it, ask for a hug (teddies and pets also work well with this one)

Even when things feel out of control there are always things we can control

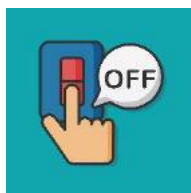
The most important thing we can control is our breathing....



FallonZephyrArt.tumblr.com

But, we are always breathing...how can breathing help? Slowing your breathing down actually calms the body – relaxes your muscles, gets oxygen into your body and brain. It's like telling your body "I'm ok, I've got this" "I can do this, I was worried but I am ok now, I'm safe, I'm ok"

Deep breathing is like the off switch to the 'Fight or Flight' response



The other thing I am feeling is 'loss' and it comes in waves and at unexpected times. At first, I felt a bit selfish feeling this because people are getting sick.

But, I realised it is ok and natural to feel like this.

I am feeling sad because I won't see children and people I work with, I won't get to go to see my friends or family and do all the things I normally do; like go to the park with my dog or go for breakfast at a café (my favourite thing to do!)

The other day I had a big cry about it; I felt sad about the things I can't do now and all the changes to my life. Once I cried for a bit it felt ok, it didn't take the things away but it helped.



I call this: 'Feeling my Feelings'. When I am too busy I forget to feel them. But it is really important to 'tune' in to our bodies and listen to what they are telling us. If you need to cry, it is ok. Your adults might need to too sometimes but it is ok, there's just a lot going on that feels unsafe and scary for everyone.

To help us we can also practise Self-Care daily, which helps us feel more relaxed, calm and able to manage our big feelings and emotions.

What is Self-Care and how do we do it?

Self-Care is something we do consciously to care for ourselves. Different activities will help keep our bodies and brain healthy and help us manage our emotional health.

Mental health



This is all about our brain and mind –when we feel worried or stressed our thoughts can become very negative

For example, I sometimes think, “oh I can’t do that, I am rubbish at that”

Doing things that helps my brain relax helps me feel me confident about trying new things.

Emotional Health



This is all about our emotions and feelings. Sometimes I can spend a whole day without thinking about how I feel and other days I feel sad, angry or worried and all I can think about is how I am feeling.

Strong emotions try very hard to get our attention, they are not just in our mind, we can feel them in the whole body.

I have been learning to ‘tune’ into my emotions because they usually have something important to tell us.

Physical Health



This is all about looking after our bodies

If I eat healthy food, get enough sleep and exercise my body ‘feels’ great. I know it because I feel it.

TYPES OF SELF-CARE



www.blessingmanifesting.com

Here are some ideas of self-care activities

Which ones might help you to feel calm and relaxed?

Some of these things might be important to your adults (parents, carers, grandparents).

You might think of some other things:

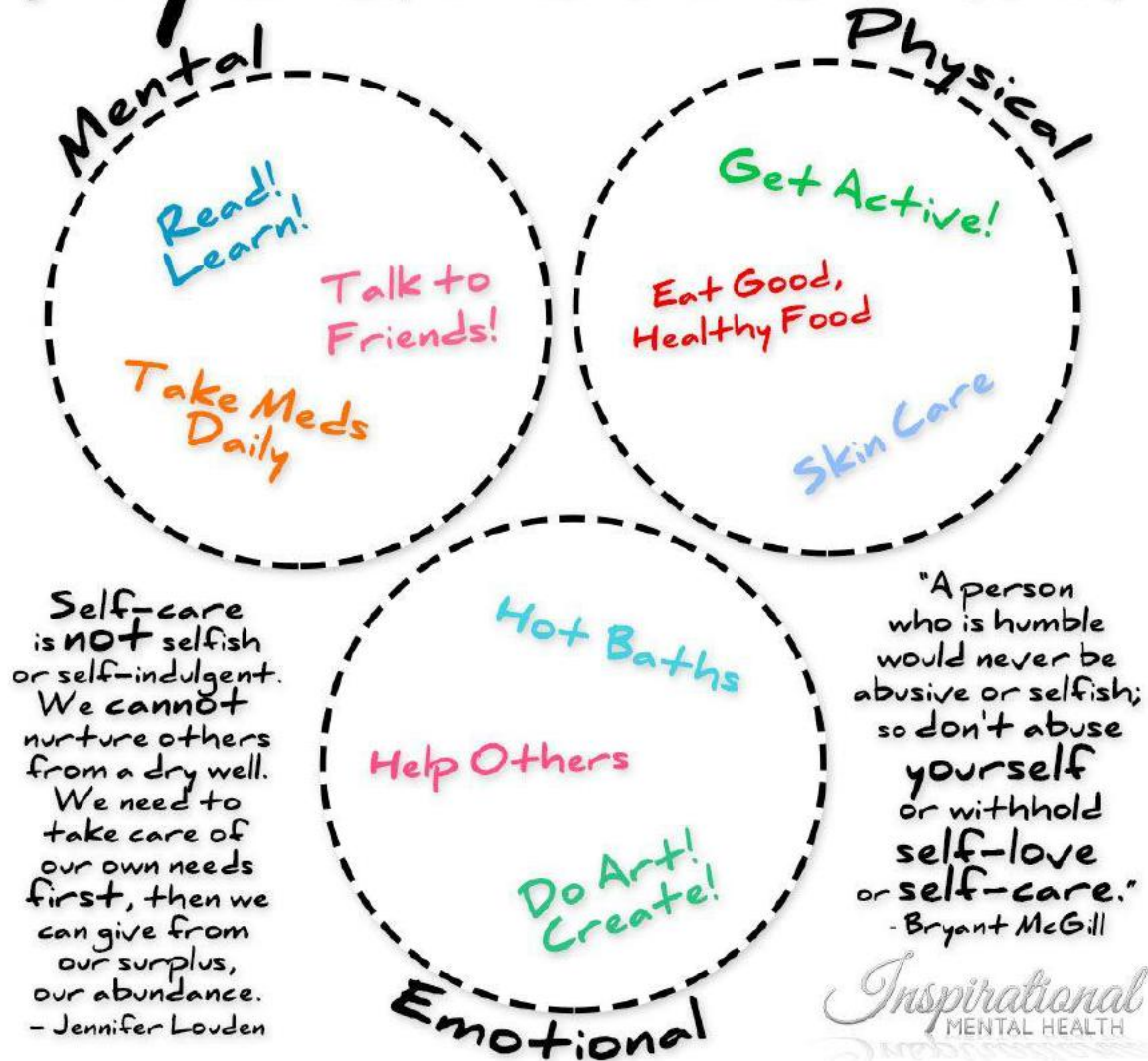
I really like to read, to learn new things, to spend time colouring in, doing puzzles, being quiet or listening to music.

Everyone's body is different so what might help me might be the opposite of what you need.

You can make your own self-care plan.

Here are some examples of Self-Care Plans and ideas:

My Self Care Plan



SELF-CARE IDEAS

<p>Listen to that one song. Repeat.</p> 	<p>Talk to a friend. Or pet. (Wait, those are synonyms.)</p> 	<p>Comfort food.</p> 	<p>Fold laundry. (Repetition + Productivity = calm.)</p> 
<p>Write. Or draw.</p> 	<p>Play like a kid. Silly putty, bubbles, Legos, cartoons, coloring...</p> 	<p>Make your bed. Fresh sheets!</p> 	<p>Drink cocoa by the fireplace.</p>  <p>Don't forget the marshmallows!</p>
<p>Look up funny memes.</p> 	<p>Compliment someone and watch their face light up.</p> <p>Nice hat!</p> 	<p>Take a shower. Better yet, soak in the tub with a magazine.</p> 	<p>Read a book. Bonus points if it has pictures.</p> 
<p>Make something without caring whether it's "good."</p> 	<p>Have a good cry, but keep it short. Use the expensive tissues.</p> 	<p>Buy yourself a smallish gift, just because.</p> 	<p>Forgive yourself for what you couldn't do today, and resolve to try again tomorrow.</p> 

@introvertdoodles

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BMWUVdoDm-/?igshid=t7k5ic503lbo>

's Self-Care Plan!

MIND

BODY

SUPPORTIVE PEOPLE IN MY LIFE

I WANT TO ACCOMPLISH

SPIRIT



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<http://limerickmentalhealth.ie/self-care-christmas/>

I think of the things in my self-care plan as a massage for my brain. They help me to relax and recharge and a lot of mine are about being creative because this also helps our brains.

Remember to take some time to do the things on your plan every day.

Talk to your adults if you get any worries or sadness about these times. It is good to share our feelings with someone.

You could also start a journal and write down some of your thoughts each day. I do this most days to think about my day and how I felt. I hope this helps,



From, Gemma