

# Well being, reducing stress, and getting a good night's sleep,...the St Peter's way.

Looking after your own, and your child's well being, is already on your minds. Here are a few re\**mind*\*ers...

## Screen use...

Yourself and your children may be using screens more than ever before during this current lockdown. Some of St Peter's learning requires use of a screen, from watching an educational video, to responding to their teacher online. This is an important use of a screen at this tricky time.



Unfortunately, use of a screen, up to an hour before bed dramatically affects how long a person, especially a child, spends in quality sleep.

Poor quality sleep leads to poorer concentration the next day, lowered ability to make good social interactions, reduced problem solving ability and problems managing emotions.

All of which will make a huge difference to your child's moods, behaviour and ability to cope with small issues. And of course, those factors will be affected in yourself.

Screen use in the hour before bed can stimulate your child's brain. Blue light from televisions, computer screens, phones and tablets might suppress melatonin levels and delay sleepiness. (Melatonin is a natural hormone produced at dusk to control your sleep cycle).

**So,.... do pop all screens away at least an hour or more, before bedtime. Including yours whenever you can.**

## Exercise...

We all know exercise is good for everyone's bodies, but it is actually crucial for children's developing brains as well. Even moderate exercise, like walking, can ensure children feel sharper, healthier, and happier.

**Better thinking skills.** The effects may be almost immediate. Exercise boosts memory function.

**Better moods.** Physical activity releases brain chemicals that are natural stress fighters. Just about any physical activity seems to help. Physically active children are better at managing their moods and feelings.

**Sounder sleep.** Regular exercise helps children fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer. Getting quality sleep lifts moods, improves judgment, and boosts memory.



## Reduce stress...

You are going to be in the company of your children (and other adults) day and night for many weeks. Tensions are going to stretch your patience and resilience. Your children's resilience and patience will be even thinner.

Your children will be missing extended family, friends, teachers, routines, even missing Mr Hitchcock!

**Respond** to each other with respect. Your child needs to feel your respect, even when they are not respectful. You are modeling it for them. You are their only example for how to 'be' with each other.

**Play** alongside your children. Or play a game, even for just 10 minutes. The connection will be invaluable for the rest of the day. It says 'I love spending time with you'. If there is no time for a game, ask them about their play - Be curious.

**Listen and repeat.** Turn to look at anyone in your household who is repeating a phrase, a wish etc. Eye contact tells someone you are ready to listen. It diffuses the speaker's stress that they will be ignored. Especially show your child a patient face. They will learn from your reactions.



Repeat back to any speaker, what they say to you, with honest empathy. It tells them you heard them. It truly will stop their constant repetition. You don't need to add 'But you can't'. It doesn't mean you are permitting or condoning.

Ask children what *\*they\** can do to plan to make whatever their issue is, better. Physical breaks, quick snack break, quick game break... help them resolve their problem using their solutions

Talk them through how they might plan for next time.

**Structure.** Children will miss the structure and routine of the school day much more than you know. Create a structure, with boundaries. Stick to it.



Try to only place rewards or incentives at the ends of sentences...

*'After the toys are tidied, we can play that game you wanted'.*

*'When you are ready to speak politely, we can sort out fixing your lego model'.*

*'After you've shown me how clean your hands are, I'll check that the dog hasn't eaten the pudding...'*

Many moods and behaviours are communicating a need, an emotion or a confusion. Go deeper than reacting with your feelings with children and with other adults in the house. Try wondering what might be making them behave in a particular way.

**Hugs.** Your children may need more physical soothing than usual. Take time to offer a hug, hand to hold, cosy up on sofa...

Offering the hug is the important bit. Bodily autonomy is essential.

A hug that is *wanted* triggers the release of oxytocin, a hormone associated with trust, safety, and love. Oxytocin helps to lower levels of stress hormones.

So the next time you hug your child, with their permission, remember you're doing great things for their physical and mental health.

### **Seek nature...**

We are allowed outside our homes for daily exercise and fresh air. Seek out green places. Being in nature, reduces anger and stress and increases feelings of wellbeing. Exposure to nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, it reduces blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and reduces the production of stress hormones.

Even a simple plant in a room can have a significant impact on stress and anxiety. Pop a safe plant in your child's often-used room. Encourage them to care for it too.



### **Curb adult conflict...**

Firstly, make sure you feel safe. Any conflict that makes you feel immediately unsafe, please contact either the links below, myself, or if in imminent danger contact the police.

If we are just looking at adult arguments, constant bickering, then try other ways to resolve your conflicts or frustrations.

Be alert to what your children are experiencing. Exposure to frequent, intense and poorly resolved adult conflict in the home can affect children's:

- emotional and social development
- educational attainment
- physical and mental health

And other developmental markers. Seek support or advice earlier and look after each other.

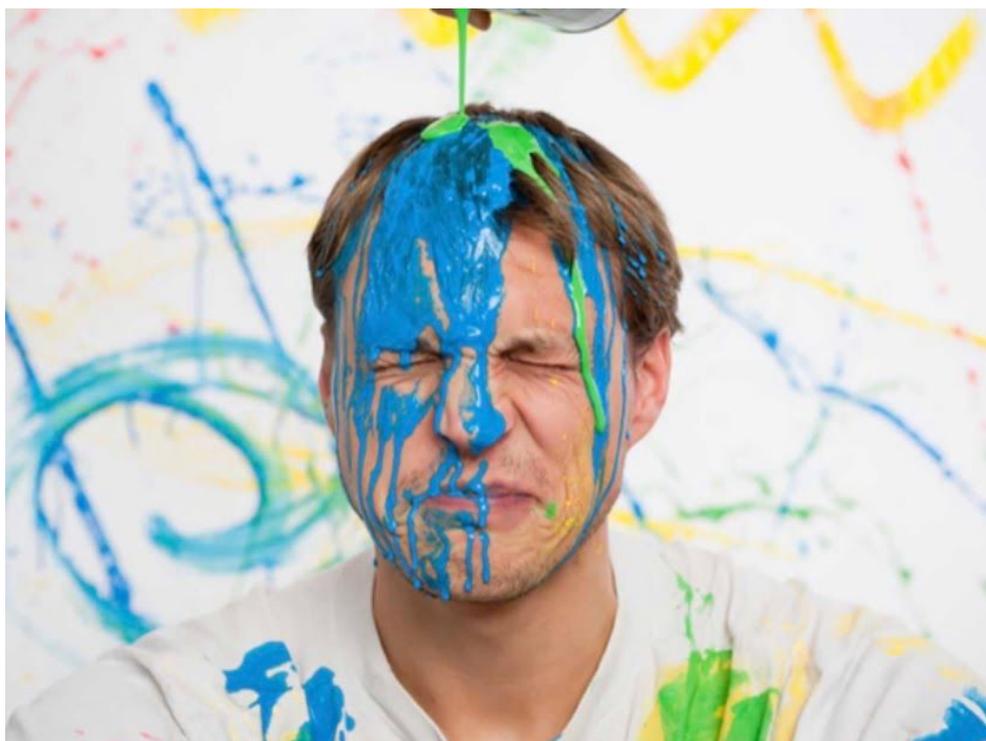
### **Make choices and changes ...**

We are needing to follow rules and this feels as though we have no control. Your children will be feeling the effects of this too. **Try to help them make choices to control the things that they can.** Give children control over small things whilst you retain control over the boundaries and structures.

Make lists of things that they'd like to alter, control or change. Organise them into things that are possible! Tick them off as you change them through the week.

### **It will mean children are less likely to demand control through their behaviour.**

Help children to decide and then change the look of their bedrooms, move furniture, alter picture locations, change bedding over. Let them choose the vegetables at meal times, the story you read to them at bedtime. Have a plan for changing where each person sits at the table, make plans to alter hair styles, clothing etc. Paint each other's faces differently each day... ready for those work zoom



meetings.

Make sure they know, it is great to be able to choose, whilst you are still making the bigger choices for them.

Record some of the choices, changes and mini achievements with a photo. Look back on it at bedtime with your children and chat about it.

## Recap: Ways to support well being, reducing stress and getting quality sleep.

- Put screens away at least an hour before bedtime. This includes mobile phones, tablets, computer screens and TV. Encourage reading or quiet play instead.
- Limit and monitor violent content at any time of day. This can affect children's moods, behaviour, and sleep regardless of the time and length of use.
- At least an hour and a half exercise per day. Break it up throughout the day in 15 minute chunks if that helps.
- Exercise before trying school activities. The effect of exercise on cognitive function is so immediate, it's almost unbelievable..
- Take physical breaks every 20 minutes or so. You can all do challenges, jumping jacks, hops, run on spot, or just up and down the stairs doing jobs a few times.
- Get some nature. Go outside, seek green places. Get some natural light on everyone's faces, outside, every day.
- Respond to each other with respect; Play with interest; Listen with curiosity; Structure and routine some of their day, and finally... Model how you would like your child to 'be' with everyone.
- Reduce adult conflict. If you are not in danger, find or seek ways to manage and resolve arguments quickly and respectfully.
- Record changes and small achievements with a photo or a tick list. Feeling in control of such changes supports mental health

Make quality sleep, physical activity, time in nature, and respectful responses an everyday part of all of your lives. Your own, and your children's, moods, minds and bodies will be healthier for it.

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Any worries about your child's, or your own wellbeing, please do email and I can arrange to make a call to you very quickly.

## Resources and contacts

**Mind** - Information and advice about how to stay mentally healthy during lockdown.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

Domestic advice and domestic abuse charities

**Refuge** - The freephone, 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline (run by charity Refuge) can be reached on 0808 2000 247, and will guide and support potential victims of domestic abuse.

**Women's Aid** - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk>

**Childline** - 08001111

**NSPCC** - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk> Includes advice on working from home alongside children

**Men's Advice Line** - <https://mensadviceline.org.uk>

**LGBT:**

Galop - <http://www.galop.org.uk>