

## **Tips for staying well at home:**

Mental health Ireland tell us the five steps to better mental health are **connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give**. However, to make room for this it is important to put in place structure.

### **Structure, structure, structure**

With schools and many work places closed the typical tasks that give our day a rhythm have been removed. It is really important to get your home working around a routine – maintaining wake up time, breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bedtime routines as much as possible. Avoiding excessive alcohol or unhealthy food – timetabled treats can be something to look forward to, but taken everyday they tend to lose their shine and impact. This can also allow you to timetable activities into the day to give you structure and your children predictability. Plan your day together and use visual timetables to organise your time.

### **Connect**

Maintain contact with friends and family as much as possible – use whatever medium you can e.g. WhatsApp, Facetime, Instagram. While you might not be able to see people in person – connect over the phone or online. Have a dinner, a coffee, a quick chat, do an activity together on line with those are important to you. If you're working from home, schedule contact with your colleagues and stay in touch with those in work you talk to. However, while trying to create times to connect with those outside of your home; try to not fill every moment of the day with connection inside the home. Both you and your children are **used** to having periods of both quiet time and connection – too much of either could be both overwhelming and scary.

### **Be active**

It's important to ensure you are getting enough exercise - endorphins are happy hormones that come to life and will invigorate you through movement. You would be surprised how much walking you might do on an ordinary day between going to shop, collecting the children from school/bus, or just pottering around. Without this you need to plan to move. Getting out in the fresh air for even a short time can help. Being in nature (even under a tree, in a small park, in your back garden if you have one) can support your mind and body to feel better. Not everyone can get outside, but many classes are available on line and there are a lot of free yoga and gym videos available on the internet.

One caveat, if you don't like yoga now is not the time to force it on yourself. Research suggests that more personally meaningful the activities you do, the more your mood will benefit – therefore do things you like to.

## Take notice

You will likely have much less time to yourself than you used to with the schools being closed. Running around doing lots of different tasks and keeping others entertained can often generate a lot of energy and we might not notice that we are running on empty. It is important to pause and take stock of where you are at during the day. Sometimes it can be helpful to set an alarm to ping and remind you to stop, breath, and allow your mind to focus on being right here, in this very moment, at this time. However, this can be hard to do and takes practice. Two techniques that can help are:

- 10 deep breathes – simple as it sounds but research suggests that the small act of taking 10 deep breathes (down into your belly) – drawing it in slowly and letting it out slowly – can be enough to active your parasympathetic nervous symptom – in ordinary terms, this means releasing your relaxation hormones that allow your body a break from stress/arousal hormones that become active when you are running around the place.
- “5-4-3-2-1”.
  - 5:** Acknowledge **FIVE** things you see around you. It could be a pen, a spot on the ceiling, anything in your surroundings.
  - 4:** Acknowledge **FOUR** things you can touch around you. It could be your hair, a pillow, or the ground under your feet.
  - 3:** Acknowledge **THREE** things you hear. This could be any external sound. If you can hear your belly rumbling that counts! Focus on things you can hear outside of your body.
  - 2:** Acknowledge **TWO** things you can smell. Maybe you are in your office and smell pencil, or maybe you are in your bedroom and smell a pillow. If you need to take a brief walk to find a scent you could smell soap in your bathroom, or nature outside.
  - 1:** Acknowledge **ONE** thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like—gum, coffee, or the sandwich from lunch?

## **keep learning**

Everyday at home will provide you with a learning experience at this time. However, make time to engage your mind in different ways. Learn a language, take an online museum tour, listen to a podcast, TED talks etc. The Libraries Ireland has a fast number of audio books available to download for free. Pick something you're interested in or always wanted to do – now is the time!

Free audio books: <https://www.librariesireland.ie/elibrary/eaudiobooks>

Free online learning: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue>

Free virtual gallery tours: [https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/mar/23/10-of-the-worlds-best-virtual-museum-and-art-gallery-tours?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/mar/23/10-of-the-worlds-best-virtual-museum-and-art-gallery-tours?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

**Also:** the rolling coverage of the news can be compelling with updates about everything that is happening and many things that are not. Hearing these stories repeatedly can lead to cycles of worry – give yourself a break from rolling coverage or listen to the news once in a day – you might find that hearing it once, will likely give you all the information you need to know.

## **Give**

When you are already giving so much, it might be hard to think what else can I give. But give with kindness, with a smile, with compassion. This can mean giving kindness to someone else, taking kindness from someone else, and giving kindness to yourself.

**Lastly create a self-soothing resource bundle for when you feel worried, overwhelmed, lonely, tired.**

For example, have a long bath, listen to that favourite song, cook that special meal, call that person, read that poem, cuddle a pet, make a cup of tea, listen to the birds in the park .....

**what's in your bundle ?**