



Positive Mental Health and
Wellbeing Guide for
Parents and Carers during the
COVID-19 Pandemic



***There is a rainbow of hope at the end
of every storm.***

This guide has been produced by Safe Space (Hertfordshire County Council) with the help of the team's therapists and colleagues to support positive mental health and wellbeing amongst parents and carers during the latest national lockdown.

It includes a range of top tips, practical ideas and resources of support that you may find useful to help maintain and improve your own mental health and emotional wellbeing during what is undoubtedly a difficult time for all.

If you have a friend, family member, colleague or neighbour that you feel would benefit from trying out some of the suggestions in this guide, be sure to pass on any of the tips or resources.

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@SafeSpaceHerts



@safespacehertfordshire

1. Looking after your own Mental Health

- Be kind to yourself: These are not normal circumstances we find ourselves in so do not put unnecessary pressure on yourself. It's okay to not be okay all the time. Having moments where you feel a bit down or sad is to be expected. Don't dismiss how you feel even if you feel other people are currently having a harder time. You're allowed to be upset about your plans being cancelled as much as somebody else can be upset about a loved one being poorly. Your feelings are valid no matter your circumstances.
- The importance of routine: Try and stick to a routine that gives you and your family a sense of 'normal'. Whilst it might not be possible to maintain your usual routine, it is important for your mental health and well-being to try and engage in some kind of routine that gives you structure and a focus. Even if your new routine only consists of going for a walk once a day and sitting and having dinner together and the rest of the day is made up as you go along, having those pointers can really help provide some consistency and make you feel more in control.
- Take time for you; Make sure you remember to stop and take time out to do something for yourself that you enjoy. It could be something as simple as having ten minutes by yourself to sit and drink a cup of tea, or you could go for a walk, read a book, workout, binge watch your favourite TV series – whatever it is that you enjoy, schedule in time to do it.

Top Tip from a Safe Space Therapist:

The Bag of Happiness: It's always good to think of yourself as having a 'Bag of Happiness' and your only job is to keep it full by looking at what's inside it every day and adding to it as needed. Look at what steals from your bag of happiness? Think about this and remember that your job is to focus on what is in the bag of happiness to make sure you keep it full.

This allows you some element of control for when things seem very much out of your control. It also helps remind us that we are in charge of our own happiness. When we focus on what we do have, negative things can seem less threatening. We learn we can change our mood by thinking of good things and that we can have some control over how we feel.

- Limit your intake of the news: Whilst social media can be a great tool to help you keep in touch with loved ones and to stay up to date with the going-s on in the World, it can also at times be overwhelming and a negative impact on your mental health and well-being, especially if you are already feeling anxious by the current situation.

Try and limit your interaction with news outlets and social media each day. Perhaps just listen to/read about the news once a day or maybe every other day. See if you can avoid going on social media right before bed as it can impact your ability to get to sleep as well as the quality of your sleep.

If you're finding it difficult to practice limiting your time online, try having a digital detox by putting your phone into a draw or box one day a week. Leave your phone in a different room overnight so you're not tempted or distracted by it going off from messages and notifications.

COPING CALENDAR: KEEP CALM. STAY WISE. BE KIND

30 actions to look after ourselves and each other as we face this global crisis together. Please use & share 🙏

1 Make a plan to help you keep calm and stay in contact	2 Enjoy washing your hands. Remember all they do for you!	3 Write down ten things you feel grateful for in life and why	4 Stay hydrated, eat healthy food and boost your immune system	5 Get active. Even if you're stuck indoors, move & stretch	6 Contact a neighbour or friend and offer to help them	7 Share what you are feeling and be willing to ask for help
8 Take five minutes to sit still and breathe. Repeat regularly	9 Call a loved one to catch up and really listen to them	10 Get good sleep. No screens before bed or when waking up	11 Notice five things that are beautiful in the world around you	12 Immerse yourself in a new book, TV show or podcast	13 Respond positively to everyone you interact with	14 Play a game that you enjoyed when you were younger
15 Make some progress on a project that matters to you	16 Rediscover your favourite music that really lifts your spirits	17 Learn something new or do something creative	18 Find a fun way to do an extra 15 minutes of physical activity	19 Do three acts of kindness to help others, however small	20 Make time for self-care. Do something kind for yourself	21 Send a letter or message to someone you can't be with
22 Find positive stories in the news and share these with others	23 Have a tech-free day. Stop scrolling and turn off the news	24 Put your worries into perspective and try to let them go	25 Look for the good in others and notice their strengths	26 Take a small step towards an important goal	27 Thank three people you're grateful to and tell them why	28 Make a plan to meet up with others again later in the year
29 Connect with nature. Breathe and notice life continuing	30 Remember that all feelings and situations pass in time	<p>“Everything can be taken from us but one thing: the freedom to choose our attitude in any given set of circumstances” ~ Viktor Frankl</p>				

ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

www.actionforhappiness.org

Find out more about the Ten Keys to Happier Living, including books, guides, posters and more here: www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys

- Look after your physical health:

Eat well; Whilst it's tempting to indulge ourselves with chocolate and takeaways as treats for making it through the days and weeks (we've all been there!), it is important to try and maintain a healthy balanced diet and to keep hydrated. Eating well is not only good for your physical health and your immune system, but it's also beneficial for your mental health and well-being. It's been shown that having a healthy, varied and balanced diet can not only give you more energy but can also improve your mood which we all need at the moment. And don't forget to drink plenty of water!

Sleep well; With the likely change to your usual routine and activities, it's easy to find your sleeping pattern is also impacted upon. Sleep is important as it helps to improve our concentration and mood. If you're going to bed much later and getting less sleep, you may find yourself feeling unmotivated which can further lower your mood. Try and go to bed at a reasonable time during the week and leave the late nights for the weekend!

Equally you may find that you feel more tired than you normally are and there's an interesting explanation behind this. Usually your brain knows what you'll be doing next in your day to day routine meaning it can 'switch off'. However with the current situation and everything being different to normal, our brains are now using more energy as we have to subconsciously make more decisions meaning our brains are working overtime because we're having to think more. So whilst it might feel like you're doing less than normal and therefore you should have more energy, remember our brains are doing more and this can be tiring.

Get moving; You don't have to be running marathons and making an at home gym in order to keep fit. Just get up and get moving in whatever way you feel comfortable and able to do so. Make it fun and do what you enjoy; whether that's going for a bike ride, smashing your personal best on a run, going for a quiet walk, gardening, or dancing round your living room like nobody's watching, because when it's something you enjoy doing you'll want to do it and it's a lot easier to stick to it!

- **Talk:** Talking to others about how you are feeling is always important for your mental health and well-being but even more so when we find ourselves in unusual and stressful circumstances. Talking to other people, whether that be face to face with people in your home or digitally, gives you an opportunity to get things off your chest and share how you're feeling. You might also find that others are feeling the same which can be reassuring to know that you're not alone with how you are feeling.

If you feel you are unable to talk to someone at home or to a friend there are lots of services, organisations and charities who are still offering support if you need it.

This next section of the guide provides details of how to access support if you are struggling or would like to talk to someone.

2. Where to access support for yourself if you are struggling

If you feel you are unable to keep yourself safe or if you require urgent medical attention as a result of self-harm or an overdose, call 999 to seek support.

If you're experiencing a mental health crisis in Hertfordshire, you can call 0800 6444 101, or the NHS 111 line and select option 2 for mental health services.

If you are struggling with your mental health, you can also speak to your GP who can refer you on for support.

You can also self-refer to the Hertfordshire Wellbeing Service which offers free and confidential talking therapy and practical support for Hertfordshire residents experiencing a wide range of mental health problems such as: worry, low mood and stress.

<https://www.northessexiapt.nhs.uk/hertfordshire>

Samaritans have a free 24-hour helpline if you feel you need to talk to someone. Just call 116 123.

www.samaritans.org.uk

SHOUT provides free confidential support via text 24/7, just text SHOUT to 85258.

<https://giveusashout.org/>

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) is a charity that offers support via phone or webchat, 5pm to midnight, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Phone: 0800 58 58 58 / www.thecalmzone.net

SANE operates SANEline which you can call on 0300 304 7000, 4:30pm – 10:30pm every day.

<http://www.sane.org.uk/>

Family Line provides free emotional support and guidance via telephone, email, web chat and text message.

They can be contacted Mon – Fri 9am – 9pm on Telephone: 0808 802 6666 / Text message: 07537 404282 / Email: familyline@family-action.org.uk

Parenting Courses There are lots of free parenting course taking place online at the moment which you may find useful to participate in. Take a look at what's on offer in Hertfordshire via the following link:

<https://directory.hertfordshire.gov.uk/Search?CategoryId=157&SM=ServiceSearch&UDG=True&ME=True>

CRUSE Bereavement offer a free National helpline for anyone affected by bereavement.

Call 0808 808 1677.

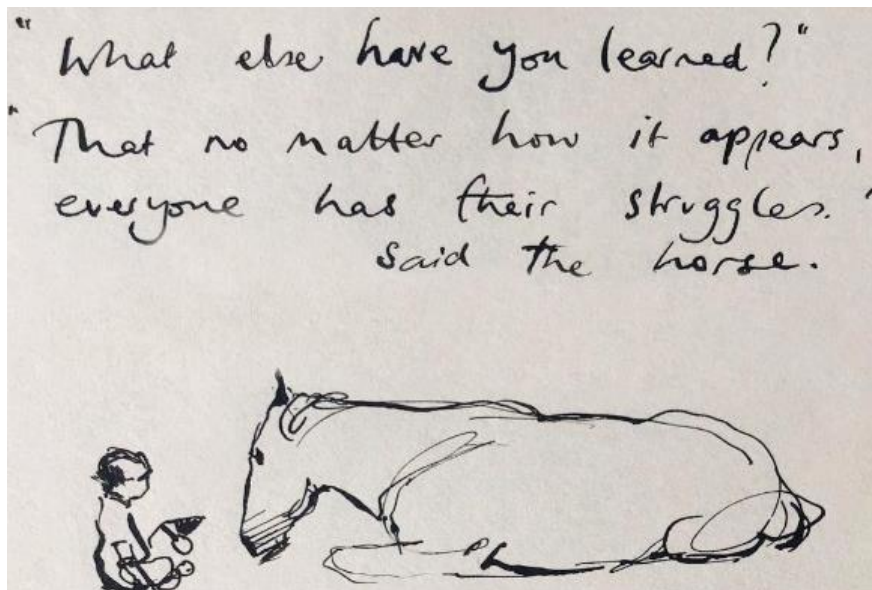
Mon & Fri: 9.30am-5pm

Tues, Wed, Thurs: 9.30am-8pm

Sat and Sun: 10am -2pm

If you have been impacted by the loss of a loved one during lockdown (COVID or non-COVID related) you may find the bereavement guides on the following link useful:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/news-and-campaigns/coronavirus-bereavement-guides.aspx>



3. How to support your Child / Young Person

- Importance of Routine: As mentioned earlier in the guide, having a routine is important to help give structure and a focus. For children and young people, a lack of routine can contribute to anxious feelings as there is uncertainty as to their day to day schedule. Routine can also help children keep focused which may be a difficult with home schooling.

Top Tips from a Safe Space Therapist:

- I would suggest sticking like glue to the school day routine. Get up at the usual time and pretend that it's all the same.
- Go out for a walk and talk with your child / young person or have time alone.
- Everyone shows anxiety and sense of pressure differently. It may not be obvious, so ask about how they are doing. Worry can sometimes manifest as moodiness or being withdrawn.
- Keep some boundaries - finding the balance is difficult but they will need them. Pick your fights carefully.
- Their friends are their World (some of the time).
- Do keep some screen time and phone limits (the impact on sleep from the March lockdown was one of the things I heard about most last term).
- They can't always keep motivated to do the work (I heard this a lot too. Live classes this time might be easier but then again, it might not).
- Exams are not everything.

- Anxiety: One of the top reasons children and young people are referred to our Safe Space service is for anxiety. Anxiety levels are likely to be high for everyone at the moment, especially for children and young people who may not fully understand why they are feeling the way they are. Providing children and young people with the opportunity to express how they are feeling in a safe and supportive environment is important.

There are also several techniques you can use with children and young people for when they are feeling anxious to try and reduce these anxieties and worries.

Here are some ideas you may find useful to practice together:

Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques can be used when you feel anxious and overwhelmed. They can also help if you are feeling an urge to self-harm. They help distract you from your current thoughts and worries to instead refocus on what's happening in the present moment. The great thing about grounding techniques is that some can be super simple and discrete so you can use them wherever you are.

Why not give some of the following grounding techniques a go?



1. Identify a Rainbow: Take a deep breath, look around you and identify something Red, Orange, yellow etc, for each colour of the rainbow.



2. Wall or chair push ups: stand arm's length away from a wall or chair. Put your hands against the wall/chair, lean forward and push back. Repeat several times.



3. Up and down exercises: bouncing up and down on a trampoline, space hopper or exercise ball. Jumping jacks, skipping, squats etc. up and down movements are grounding movements which help us to bring our energy levels back down.



4. Heavy boxes: Put some heavy objects into a box and push the box around an obstacle course.



5. Weighted backpack: put some books into a backpack to make it feel weighted (make sure the weight is appropriate to your size) and go for a walk.



6. Hanging and swinging finding something to hang or swing from is a great way of stretching out the body and can be calming and grounding.



7. Balancing: balancing on a balance board or using yoga exercises are a great way of using and developing the core muscles, they also encourage focus and attention.

8. Use math and numbers: try running through a times table in your head or counting backward from 100.

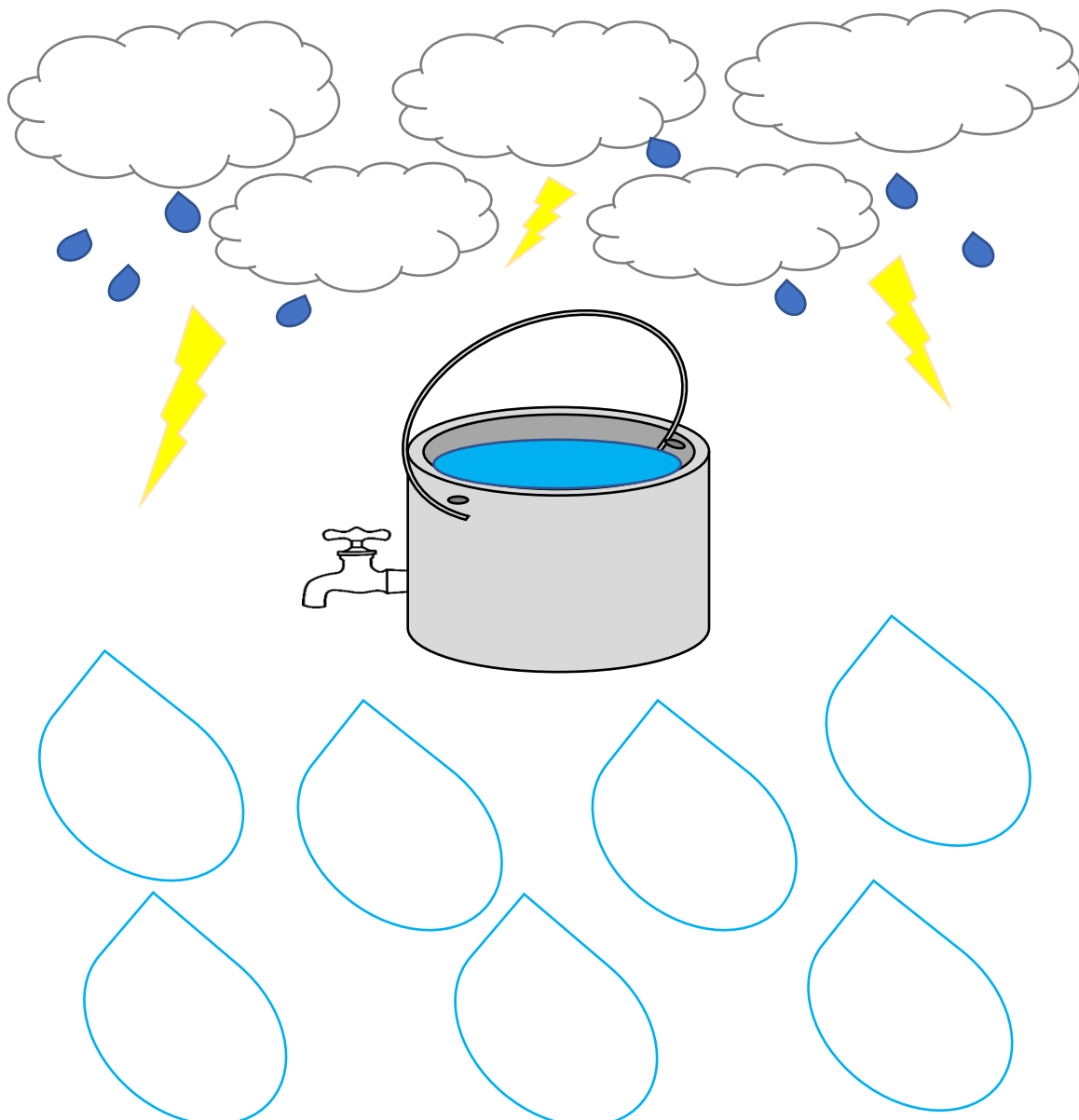
9. 5-4-3-2-1 method; Working backward from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. List 5 things you hear, 4 things you see, 3 things you can touch from where you're sitting, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

10. A-B-C: Look around the room and name something you see that starts with the letter A, then B, C and so forth. See how far you can get through the alphabet.

- Managing Stress; Children and young people may be feeling more stressed than usual at the moment due to the change and uncertainty currently being experienced. However it is important to try and manage their stress levels where possible to ensure they do not become too overwhelmed.

The stress bucket activity is a great way to reassess stress factors and the ways in which an individual can manage how they are feeling to try and ease their worries. This is an activity you can do with your child / young person, discussing as you go. You could use the image below or just draw your own stress bucket (doesn't have to be anything fancy!).

Think of the clouds and rain as containing all your stresses, this could be; school work, health problems, home life, change in routine etc. If you let these worries build up soon your bucket will be full and start to overflow (which we don't want to happen!). That's why we need to have healthy ways we can release some of these worries through the tap in our bucket. In the water droplets below the bucket, write ways you can manage your stresses so your bucket doesn't overflow. These could be; talking to someone, watching your favourite movie, listening to music, going for a walk etc.



- **Space to Talk:** It's even more important in times of uncertainty and worry, to provide children and young people with a safe space and an opportunity to talk about how they are feeling to share any worries they may have. Encouraging children and young people to talk about how they feel, not only allows them to express their emotions in a healthy way, but it can also help them feel more in control and therefore less anxious / worried.

Some children / young people may find it more difficult to talk than others. For younger children you may find it useful to try the 'worry box' technique (see below), whilst for teenagers you may find going for a walk and talking or having a chat whilst doing an activity together encourages them to open up more easily.

Top Tip from a Safe Space Therapist:

Worry Box: Create a worry box so that your child can share any anxieties or worries they are currently experiencing. A worry box can be a great tool as it gives children a way to physically get rid of their worries by placing them into the box. You can also schedule regular time into your routine (e.g. daily, whatever works for you and your child) to go through the worry box together so your child knows that they have the time and space to do this regularly.

Explain the idea of a worry box to your child; explain how we all have worries from time to time (even adults) and that it's good to share them with other people so that we don't feel too overwhelmed. The worry box is going to be somewhere they can let go of their worries by writing them down and posting them. Then together you will go through the box and look at each worry one by one so you can talk about how they make your child feel, and to have a think together about what they can do to let go of some of the anxious feelings surrounding the worry. When they have a worry, they can write it down on a piece of paper and then post it into the worry box. Once it's in the box they can let go of their anxious feelings as the box is now holding the worry.

Decorate the box together (you could use an old shoe box or cereal box), making sure there is a slot at the top of the box for the worries to be inserted into.

Your worry box is then ready to use.

Top Tip from a Safe Space Therapist:

As a family make a 'post lockdown' to-do list

Write down on small pieces of paper lots of different things and activities you would all like to do together once it is safe to do so. Fold up all your ideas and place them in a jar. Then when some level of normality resumes, once a week pick out a piece of paper and get going!

Maybe you'd like to go for a picnic, go out for dinner or visit somewhere new.

Having fun things to look forward to can help you keep a positive mindset as well as reminding you that this is temporary and one day things will be 'normal', and we'll all be able to return to doing all the things we enjoy with our loved ones.

4. Support for your Child / Young Person if you are concerned about their Mental Health / Well-Being

If you are concerned about your child or young person call 0800 6444 101 (available 24/7) or NHS 111 and select option 2 for mental health. If they require urgent medical treatment (for example from self-harm) call 999.

Speak to your GP if you have concerns regarding your child / young person's mental health or wellbeing. They can make a referral to Hertfordshire's Single Point of Access (SPA) or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to request the appropriate level of support.

As a parent / carer you can also make a self-refer to Single Point of Access (SPA) for your child / young person. Similarly your child's school can refer. Call SPA on 0300 777 0707.

Kooth.com (<https://www.kooth.com/>) provides free, online support Mon – Fri 12pm – 10pm and Sat & Sunday 6pm – 10pm, 365 days a year, for 10 – 25 year olds.

Schools and Families Advice Line: The 'Schools and Families Advice Line' (SFAL) has been established to provide emotional wellbeing advice and early help to children and young people, families and schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contact 0300 777 0707 who will take your details and pass them onto a mental health practitioner in the SFAL team who will then call you back between 8am-5pm, Monday - Friday. Support is offered in a one-off, up to 1-hour phone call.

5. Practical Needs (finance, housing, food)

Things are tough for lots of people at the moment and you might be worried about the practical needs for yourself and your family such as finances, housing and food. Such worries can negatively impact upon your mental health and wellbeing, so it's important to seek support if you are struggling.

There are lots of charities and organisations ready to help as well as resources available from the Government:

- If you are struggling financially you may be able to access financial support. Check the Government's website for further information: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/worker-support>
- Citizens Advice has lots of information and advice if you are struggling with employment, money and housing. <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/if-you-cant-pay-your-bills-because-of-coronavirus/>

- Your local food bank can help you with essential items. You can find food banks local to you via Trussell Trust's website: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/>
- If you do not have fixed broadband and cannot afford additional data on your / your young person's device used for remote learning, support is now available to provide additional data allowance. Further information is available at: <https://get-help-with-tech.education.gov.uk/about-increasing-mobile-data>

Top Tip from a Safe Space Therapist:

You can access remote learning via Xbox & PlayStation devices:

Xbox

1. Plug a keyboard into the Xbox USB slot.
2. Go to 'games and apps' menu.
3. Find and select Microsoft Edge (you may need to download this).
4. Search for your chosen online learning platform (Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams etc.) and log in as normal.

PlayStation

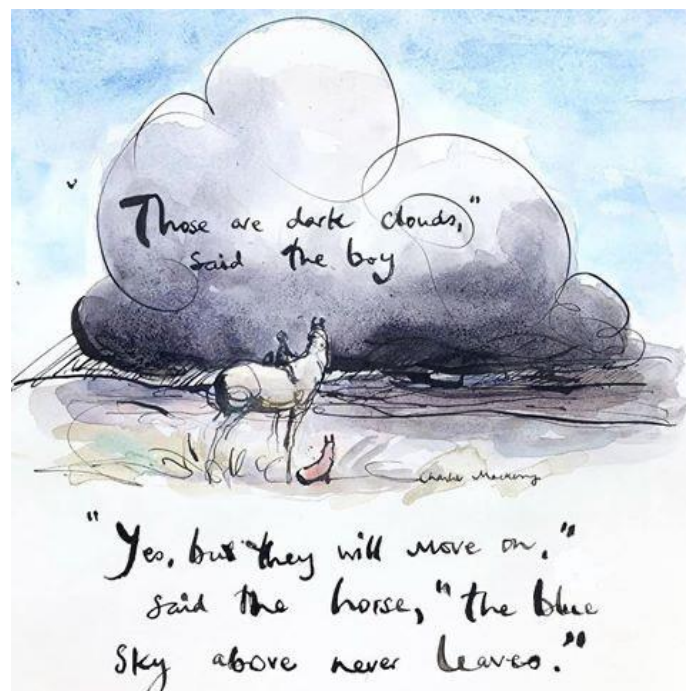
1. Locate the PlayStation internet browser icon (WWW surrounded by dots)
2. Press the PlayStation logo on the controller.
3. Go to the library and find options for games and applications.
4. Go to applications and find the internet browser.
5. Search for your chosen online learning platform (Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams etc.) and log in as normal.

6. Other Useful Websites / Organisations / Resources

- <https://youngminds.org.uk/> - fantastic website with lots of information and advice. Young Minds also have a Parents Helpline 0808 802 5544 (Mon – Fri, 9:30am – 4pm) that offers detailed advice, emotional support and signposting about a child or young person up to the age of 25.
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/> - a great website & organisation that provides information and support.
- <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/information/coronavirus/> - a charity that provides information and support to single parent families. They have specific information on the

impact of COVID-19 on single parent families including guidance on support bubbles.

- <https://www.burlingtoni.kingston.sch.uk/ckfinder/userfiles/files/How-to-Stay-Calm-in-a-Global-Pandemic-Free-ebook.pdf> - a fab resource with some wonderful illustrations.
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/parents/wellbeing-parents/self-care-for-parents-support-parents> - a range of resources and activities to use to support your wellbeing.
- ASD Resources: Children and young people with ASD may find the current situation particularly challenging. The following links to resources may be helpful if you have a child or young person with an ASD diagnosis:
 - <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/resources-for-parents-and-professionals/send-documents-and-resources.aspx?searchInput=&page=1&resultsPerPage=10&view=card>
 - <https://www.autistica.org.uk/what-is-autism/coronavirus>
 - <https://www.acamh.org/blog/coronavirus-autism-a-parents-guide/>
 - <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/anxiety>



The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse; Charlie Mackesy
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000r630>