



Studying and Motivation

A guide for parents and care givers
during the Covid-19 lockdown

It can be hard to motivate ourselves at the best of times and in the current lockdown with many of our work and study routines being different, it can be that much harder. Many of the methods we relied on to motivate ourselves are now no longer available; physically separating work from home for example - for a lot of us not used to solely working/studying at home, it can be hard to focus in that space. Another huge aspect of motivation is the amount of stress we are under, it is harder to focus and be productive under stress, and we find it harder to remember what we are studying - this can be a big demotivator.

It can be difficult to know what to do if your child is feeling worried or stressed and how to support them during their studies, but there are lots of ways you can help.

This guide offers some information about how to spot your child may be struggling, and some practical tips on how to support them during lockdown.

Signs your child might be struggling

Some common signs that a young person is feeling overwhelmed are:

- feeling worried or anxious
- problems sleeping
- changes in their eating (for example, skipped meals, picking at the food on their plate)
- low mood (isolating themselves, teary)
- lack of confidence
- frustration or anger
- upset stomach, headaches and flaring up of skin conditions such as eczema.
- Remember, every young person is different. So if you notice a change, you can start by talking.

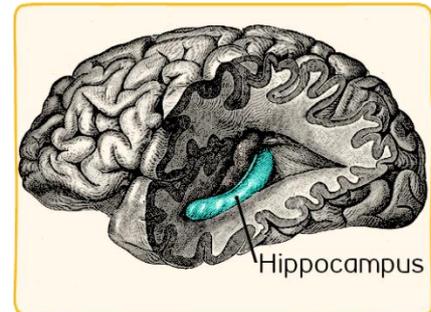
It's important to note that if you notice any of the above is consistently happening for a prolonged period (2 weeks or more) then you may need to seek support; there are contacts at the end of this guide.

Studying, Stress, and Neurochemistry

The Coronavirus pandemic will be a source of psychological stress for your children as much as anyone else, and too much stress makes mentally challenging tasks (e.g. studying) more difficult. If your child is struggling to study at home, or if you're noticing they're not as motivated academically as usual, it might be because they're under stress.

There are two main reasons for this - one psychological and one neurochemical: The psychological reason is straightforward - it's very difficult to concentrate on the task at hand if you're also worrying about something else. Half your child's attention might be taken up by writing an essay, for example, and the other half by worrying about how much they are falling behind in their subjects during the lockdown. It's distracting.

The neurochemical reason is more complicated, but worth knowing. The part of our brain that stores and organises long-term memories is the hippocampus, right at the centre. Unfortunately, it is unusually sensitive to the stress hormone **cortisol**.



Cortisol is released into our bloodstream when we are under physical or psychological stress, and when we're under stress for a long period (for example, the last couple of months), the level of cortisol in our body gradually builds up. One of the effects this has on the hippocampus is to make it less good at its job of storing long-term memories. So when you're under stress your brain is less good at making memories. This is why people often have jumbled or fragmentary memories of traumatic or stressful events, and it's also one of the reasons why many of the students we're working with are finding it so hard to study at home right now.

If you notice your child is struggling to concentrate, there are a few things you could suggest that might help:

Ask how they're doing

Don't be afraid to ask how your child is feeling. They might not want to start the conversation but sometimes it can help to show you're there to listen.

Remind your child to take breaks

If your child is really struggling, they might find themselves in a situation where the harder they push themselves, the more stressed they get, and the less information they can retain. The best way break this cycle is to take a break – get away from the desk and do something different for a bit. Getting some fresh air and taking some time out can also help our brains to process what we have learnt and help us to relax.

Eat regularly and drink water

As well as psychological stress, the other thing that can cause a spike on cortisol levels is low blood sugar - i.e. being hungry – and dehydration. You forget to eat, blood sugar goes down, cortisol goes up, and you suddenly find you can't concentrate (and probably have a headache). Encourage your child to eat and drink regularly throughout the day, and not to attempt to work on an empty stomach.

Offer help with practical things

Ask them what they think would help. This might be helping plan their work schedule or creating a relaxing work area for them.

Keep things in perspective!

As well as having to deal with all the stress and uncertainty of the pandemic, your child is having to work with the changes caused by lockdown and different support than school or college usually gives them. Trying to hold themselves to the same academic standards as they would do while in school is likely to lead to frustration and disappointment.

Take an interest

Ask them to tell you about what they've been studying. Teaching you something new can help them better understand what they are working on.

Spend time together without talking about lockdown

Try having fun together to help your child relax. [For ideas of activities click here.](#)

Give them space

Sometimes your child might just need a little time to themselves to relax. Encourage them to have a bath/shower, watch a film, or listen to some music.

Plan something to look forward to

One thing we can do during lockdown is make plans for the future. This can help take our minds off current events and can give us something to look forward to, or a goal to work towards. This could be something long term like applying for a course or job for next year. Short term plans can also be very useful to help motivate us, having something fun planned for the weekend can give us something to look forward to during the week and help provide some much-needed structure.

Look after yourself

Lockdown can be challenging for everyone in the family. It can be hard to look after others when you're feeling the strain yourself, so try to take time for yourself along the way too.

Remember, lockdown will not last forever.

What can help with my own motivation during lockdown?

Struggling with motivation during lockdown is something that everyone can experience – not just young people – so many of the tips above can also be very helpful for adults as well. For more information and resources for adults please see below:

Me and my best self in lockdown

Asha Sian reacts to negative messaging being shared on social media and how she has dealt with feeling unproductive during lockdown in HFEH Mind's latest blog post.

<https://www.hfmind.org.uk/news/me-and-my-best-self-in-lockdown/>

Working from home

We know that it's an uncertain time for lots of people and many more of us are working from home to keep safe. We may also be worried about our health, families and finances, all of which can have a negative impact on our wellbeing. Our workplace wellbeing team have put together some information to help you look after your mental health whilst working at home.

<https://www.hfmind.org.uk/news/looking-after-your-wellbeing-while-working-from-home/>

If you're a manager, check out Mind's [blog](#) about supporting yourself and your team during the coronavirus outbreak.

You can also find more resources for workplace mental health on the [Mind website](#).

Getting creative

Molly Phillips explores how for some of us, getting creative is a great way to express our emotions and can be a useful way to de stress during lockdown whether it be through journaling, cooking, writing poetry or creating music or art. When we are feeling stuck, taking a break and doing something completely different even just for 10 minutes can help when we are feeling unmotivated. She also gives suggestions and links for those interested in getting started.

<https://www.hfmind.org.uk/news/embrace-your-boredom-and-get-creative/>

Five ways to wellbeing

Our wellbeing will have a big effect on how motivated we feel. Click the link below to read about what the five ways to wellbeing are and for a list of suggestions of activities that you can do at home to practice them.

<https://www.hfmind.org.uk/news/2020/03/>



Other resources for you to use:

Local GP

IAPT Services through NHS choices:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/adults/iapt/>

To find a private therapist:

BACP: <http://www.bacp.co.uk/>

UKCP: <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist/>

Free phone lines:

Mind Info Line: 0300 123 3393

Mind Legal Advice Line: 0300 466 5463

NHS Stressline: 0300 123 200

Samaritans: 116 123

Young Minds Parent/Teacher Line: 0808 802 5544

Education Support Partnership: 08000 562 561

Citizens Advice Bureau: 0344 772 020

Equality & Human Rights Commission: 0800 444 205

ACAS (Employee Advice and Information): 0300 123 1100

Use the Clickable links to access more information:

