



Atlantic Academy Portland

an Aspirations Academy

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21st April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

RE: Supporting your child's wellbeing

During this difficult time we wanted to reach out to let you know that, even though our school is currently closed to all but a few children, we are still here to support your child and your family in whatever way we can.

As well as this letter we intend to make courtesy calls to each household this week, so that you have an opportunity to speak directly with a member of the Academy's staff. ***Please note that these calls will be made using a withheld number, but we would really like you to answer and we value your time and feedback.***

You might be noticing signs of increasing anxiety in your child as they are spending more time indoors and outside of their normal routines. These might include:

- Expressing sadness, anger or fear
- Sharing false information that they are hearing from their peers or seeing online
- Wanting to talk about coronavirus all the time
- Not wanting to talk about the current situation at all
- Having trouble concentrating
- Picking fights with you or with siblings
- Becoming afraid to leave the house
- Distancing themselves from their friends and family
- Exhibiting intense emotions but being unable to talk about what they're feeling

Below we have put together some resources to help you support your child. We hope you find this information helpful.

If you have any concerns about how your child is coping or you need any other support from the school, please let us through the relevant contact form via our [website](#).

We are extremely grateful for all the support you have shown us as we have adapted to these new circumstances, and we want to reassure you that we are still here to support you too.

We will get through this challenging time together.

Yours faithfully



ASPIRATIONS
The Aspirations Academies Trust
Company Registration Number: 07867577
Chief Executive: Steve Kenning

Parental advice and resources

1. Take care of yourself:

It is really important right now to take care of your own physical and mental health. Children are very perceptive, and they react to what they sense from the adults around them.

Here are some things you can do to help keep yourself healthy:

- **Connect with others** – maintain relationships with people you care about through phone and video calls.
- **Exercise** – take some time every day to exercise. You could go for a walk or run. You will find lots of fitness videos online, for everything from yoga to dance. Find something you enjoy and that makes you feel good. Each day we are sending out materials to support your child in their exercise routines, you could join them and do the exercise together
- **Eat healthy meals** – keep a well-balanced diet and drink enough water.
- **Get good and regular sleep** – being anxious or worried can have a big impact on your sleep. If you are struggling to get a good night's sleep, try to develop a calming bedtime routine. For example, do 10 minutes of yoga or listen to calming music. There are also apps you can download that provide guided meditation to help you get to sleep more quickly.
- **Turn off the news** – it is important to keep up to date, but the 24-hour news cycle can make you more anxious. Limit your exposure to the news to only a small amount of time, just enough to know what the latest government guidance is.
- **Do things you enjoy** – now that we are all spending more time at home, we can finally take up that hobby we have always meant to learn. Try baking or gardening or learning a new skill, like knitting. Activities like these will be fun things to share with your child, and will keep the household active and happy.
- **Set goals** – it is easy to lose track of the days in our current situation, so it can be helpful to set daily and weekly goals to give us a sense of control and purpose. Examples might be setting a goal of walking for half an hour at least 3 times this week or reading a new book.
- **Connect with the outdoors** – depending on where you live, it may not be possible to spend time outside. If you don't have a garden or terrace, you can still open a window to let some fresh air and sunlight in. Put a comfortable chair by the window so you can look outside and get some air as you read a book or listen to the radio.
- **Talk to someone** – during this difficult time, sharing with family and friends how you are feeling and what you are doing to cope can be helpful for both you and them. There are also helplines you can call for support, we have included a list at the end of this letter.

2. How to talk to your child about what is happening:

No matter how calmly you manage the current environment, children are likely to be anxious, so it is important to talk to them about what is happening. Children pick up bits of information from their friends, from the news and from listening to adults talking around them, but they can misunderstand what they are hearing.

- Deal with the news head-on and talk about it openly and calmly, giving them the facts. Give them age-appropriate information, take a look at:
 - BBC Newsround hub – regularly updated with information and advice
 - [Children's guide to coronavirus](#) – a download from the Children's Commissioner to help explain the situation to children

- [Mythbusters](#) from the World Health Organisation
- [Data visualisation pack](#) from Information is Beautiful (regularly updated)
- YoungMinds: [practical steps to take if you're anxious about coronavirus](#)
- Mind: [how to take care of your wellbeing when staying home](#)
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- Teach them how to know if information they find on the internet is reliable. Explain how some stories on social media may be based on rumours or inaccurate information. Encourage them to take breaks from listening to or reading the news, overexposure is not helpful.
- Encourage questions. This will give them the confidence to reach out, if they have anything to ask. Be reassuring but honest when answering questions, it is fine if you do not have all the answers. Be ready to answer the same question over and over again, children tend to repeat themselves when they are feeling uncertain or worried, so you might have to answer the same questions more than once as they seek extra reassurance.
- Be a great role model. Recognise and manage your own worries first. Be open about your own feelings and let them know it is normal to be concerned. For example, let them know you are also finding the news a bit worrying and what you are doing to stay calm.
- Explain how our body's immune system protects us. It is constantly working against germs without us knowing. We can not and do not need to control this process. Explain that we are taking precautions against this particular germ because it is a new one which our bodies have not come across before. Remind them how important it is that they eat healthy food, sleep and exercise, as this helps to fight germs. If it helps, reassure them that the effects of this virus on healthy young people are very mild.
- Keep doing your bit to help children reduce the spread of germs. Remind them to maintain good hygiene like bathing daily and wearing fresh clothes. Encourage them to sing 'happy birthday' twice when they're washing their hands.
- If your child struggles with higher levels of anxiety, and has existing phobias or obsessive-compulsive disorders, then the current situation could make those anxieties worse. Get them to do activities such as counting, ordering and sorting tasks which can help them calm down. Encourage them to use relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing. Look out for obsessive or compulsive behaviours and try to get ahead of them early by challenging unhelpful thoughts and assumptions. If you are worried about your child's anxiety, **YoungMinds is a charity dedicated to children's mental health.** They've opened a [parents' helpline](#) for confidential, expert advice. You can reach them at 0808 802 5544.

3. How to make home learning work for your family:

We are realistic about what school work our children will be able to do during this period, and we want you to be too.

By providing your child with structure at home will help them to adapt to home learning, and feel successful and happy. The following tips are designed to help you create a positive learning environment at home, use what works best for your household.

- Create and stick to a routine, this is what children are used to. For example, eat breakfast at the same time and make sure they are dressed before starting the 'school' day by 8.30am.
- Get to know your child's [timetable](#) and help them manage the tasks they have. Check in with your child during the working day, encouraging them to keep to the timetable, but be flexible. If a task/activity is going well or they want more time, let it extend where possible. If they are finding a task difficult encourage them to contact their teacher for support.
- Have a designated working space for your child, and at the end of the day have a clear cut-off signal that school time is over.
- Stick your child's timetable up on the wall so everyone knows what they should be doing when, and tick activities off throughout the day.
- Take stock at the end of each week. Consider what is working and what could be improved. Involve your child in this discussion.

- Distinguish between weekdays and weekends, to separate school life and home life.
- Give your child some chores to do so they feel more responsible about the daily routine at home. For instance they could do some cleaning or be involved in family meal preparation.
- Accept that your child will probably watch more TV/spend time on their phone. This is only natural, but you will want to set/agree to some screen time limits.

Please don't worry about your children getting behind with learning. Everyone is in the same boat, and when things get back to normal we will make sure we get everyone back on track. You can access all the learning materials that your child's teacher is sharing daily with your child via the [Virtual School](#) link on our website.

4. Helplines and websites for children and young people:

If your child would like to speak with someone confidentially, there are helplines and websites specifically for them.

ORGANISATION	CONTACT INFORMATION
<p>Shout</p> <p>Free, confidential support via text, available 24/7</p>	<p>Text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to text with a trained crisis volunteer who'll provide active listening and collaborative problem-solving</p>
<p>The Mix</p> <p>Free confidential telephone helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, whatever the problem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Call 0808 808 4994 for free (11am to 11pm daily) · Access the online community · Email The Mix
<p>ChildLine</p> <p>Confidential telephone counselling service for any child with a problem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Call 0800 1111 any time for free · Have an online chat with a counsellor (9am to midnight daily) · Check out the message boards

There is plenty of support for parents online too. We all need someone to talk to sometimes. If you feel overwhelmed, at risk of abuse or experiencing financial need, there are people you can call on for support:

- **Mental health**

ORGANISATION	CONTACT INFORMATION
<p>Mental Health Foundation</p> <p>Provides information and support for anyone with mental health problems or learning disabilities</p>	<p>Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk</p>
<p>Mind</p> <p>A mental health charity</p>	<p>Phone: 0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)</p> <p>Website: www.mind.org.uk</p>
<p>PAPYRUS</p> <p>Youth suicide prevention society</p>	<p>Phone: 0800 068 4141 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 10pm, and 2pm to 10pm on weekends and bank holidays)</p> <p>Website: www.papyrus-uk.org</p>
<p>Samaritans</p> <p>Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair</p>	<p>Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)</p> <p>Website: www.samaritans.org.uk</p>
<p>SANE</p> <p>Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers</p>	<p>Website: www.sane.org.uk/support</p>
<p>YoungMinds</p> <p>A charity dedicated to children's mental health</p>	<p>Phone: Parents' helpline 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm)</p> <p>Website: www.youngminds.org.uk</p>
<p>Cruse Bereavement Care</p> <p>Support for grief and bereavement</p>	<p>Phone: 0808 808 1677 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5pm)</p> <p>Website: www.cruse.org.uk</p>

- **Domestic violence**

ORGANISATION	CONTACT INFORMATION
<p>NSPCC</p> <p>Child protection charity</p>	<p>Phone: 0808 800 5000 for adults concerned about a child (24-hour helpline)</p> <p>0800 1111 for children (ChildLine's 24-hour helpline)</p> <p>Website: www.nspcc.org.uk</p>
<p>Refuge</p> <p>Advice on dealing with domestic violence</p>	<p>Phone: 0808 2000 247 (24-hour helpline)</p> <p>Website: www.refuge.org.uk</p>

- **Community support**

ORGANISATION	CONTACT INFORMATION
<p>Portland Resilience Committee</p> <p>Advice specifically for Portland residents, and the emergency services that are available.</p>	<p>Portland Town Council - Information and advice</p>