



Parent Advice Sheet

29th March 2020

Dear Lough View Parents and Carers,

Well done to all of us for getting to the end of the first week of our new way of being and doing! What an extraordinary week.

In response to inquiries from parents we have put together some ideas, based on our experiences, on how to get the best out of your child/children in what are unprecedented circumstances. Apologies in advance if some of it is a bit obvious.

The first thing to remember is that you are not school so **do not put yourself under undue pressure to “meet” the educational standards of school**. No one is expecting you to *be the teacher*, especially as many of you may be trying to juggle working from home with supporting your child's education. When the teacher puts a suggested activity or link on Dojo you can choose whether or not it suits your child. It may be something to do another time. You can choose. Similarly, with the study packs; these are suggested activities based on what we have been teaching. Regular class work is differentiated to suit the child's level in Literacy and Numeracy but because of time constraints and for practical reasons, when we designed these packs it was a “best fit”. As Goldilocks might say, some may be too easy, some too hard, but hopefully most are just right. You will know quite quickly and perhaps be able to make adjustments.

It is important, where possible, for children to maintain a routine and link to their school during this time. Please get your /children up at a reasonable time, get dressed and have breakfast the same as you would if they were going to school. This will help them to take the new routine seriously. They don't need to put on their uniforms (although we've heard that some of the younger children wanted to this week!), but it may be harder for them to concentrate in pyjamas, in front of the TV, despite what they tell you..... Having a distinct place to “work” is helpful for concentration and establishing a “school work ethic”.

Please involve your children in the decision-making process about their learning. They are likely to find the changes confusing and at times a little overwhelming, but this will pass and allowing them to help decide *how much* study time, *what form* it will take and *what they will be learning about* can give them a sense of control over some part of their life and so help keep them calm and on task. Please cover Literacy (reading and writing) and Numeracy but beyond this, you can be creative in what they learn about. Remember, as a rough rule of

thumb, you have 1 minute of quality concentration/ learning for each year of their lives ie you could get 6 minutes with your 6-year-old but beyond that is a struggle (for both of you!). Children will naturally be less focused and engaged than in school so don't be hard on yourself! The average adult can concentrate for 9 minutes! If you don't believe me time each half of Emmerdale or Coronation Street!

The children will work better if you chunk the learning into appropriate amounts of time, take short movement breaks, work early in the day and put the books (if you've used them) away. *Please do not replicate the school day of 8.30 – 1.30 or 2.30pm*

www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/pupils-and-parents

It gives some lovely, simple ways to read and count with your child both inside and outside of the house. Or you might decide you have enough for now and don't need any more things to check out – and that's ok!

Remember that we can learn in all sorts of ways – not just worksheets. We do lots of interactive, interconnected, “hands on” learning at Lough View; showing our learning in many different ways. The internet can provide a wide range of useful resources that cover practically any subject our children can think of. You could draw up, with your child, a list of the things they would like to do or learn and then decide which may be possible and which you will do. Or you could gently work your way through the study pack – and that's ok too!

Keep in mind that this is an opportunity to spend time with your child/ children doing things you might otherwise not have been able to. Of course it is stressful and difficult time for families but it would be lovely to take advantage of any positives we can. When you are able to, learn together, talk about anything new you've learned, go on walks together if possible and talk about the environment, the weather, what you see/smell/hear.

And of course there's always SILENCE! Totally undervalued in our noisy world! You don't always have to *do*. It's good to sometimes just *be*. Research suggest the positive impact of being mindful in the moment on an individual's ability to concentrate to progressively longer periods of time. You could check out children's mindful/body scan/visualisation exercises on Kids Youtube (or you might not want to – and that's ok too!). Many of our children already use the 5min relaxation app. Anything which allows our children to increase their attention span and do something independently is invaluable. It is vitally important that our children learn to do things on their own. Please do not feel that you need to be constantly entertaining your child. As well as being exhausting for you (and unsustainable), it isn't good for your child's confidence, self-management and self-belief! By letting them try, get it wrong, fix it/recover you are gently and safely **building their resilience**.

The most important advice we can give to ourselves as teachers and to you, our parents, is to not be too hard on yourself. Easier said than done, I know, but recognise your limits and don't judge yourself. If your child has a random “duvet day” watching TV or a few more hours than usual during the week on a device, do not panic. Look after yourself. Stay healthy, limit your own social contact and exposure to news coverage. Children are like little sponges. They pick up on *everything*. They will take their lead from you so if you are anxious

they will absorb this and you will see it in their behaviours. Remember that all behaviour is communication so if your child is “making poor choices”, or as my mother would say “being bold” ask yourself “What is he/she trying to tell me?” It might be that they’ve had enough for now and when they are like this, take your foot off the pedal and avoid that collision!

When something goes wrong in school we practise Restorative Justice; initially used very effectively with adults by the Department for Justice in America. A deceptively simple but effective way to unravel “stuff”. We like it in at Lough View because it gives us a framework to quickly figure out what has gone on, avoids long rambling, often incoherent (sometimes angry) responses from an emotional child who is feeling, we would suggest, wronged, embarrassed, ashamed, worried, overwhelmed or frightened about what they have done or what they perceive has been done to them. Additionally, it allows the child to recover their dignity and learn from the experience as it is solution focused and restorative. We simply ask the questions (one at a time) to the child so it is more of a conversation. The important thing is to leave a cooling off time before asking. Give longer than normal for the child to process and answer each question. Regardless of their age, the child might instead draw a picture to help them process what went on and to find the words to tell you. It also gives you time to figure things out and bring your blood pressure down!

When something goes wrong. If the child is younger/vulnerable you might just stick to the 3 highlighted questions.

- 1. What happened?**
2. What were you thinking at the time?
3. What are you thinking now?
- 4. Who has been affected?** How have they been affected?
- 5. What do you need to do now to make things right?**

You will see there is no WHY. In an emotionally heightened state we can’t answer *why* initially; if ever!

The other strategies we use in school are Helping Hands and the Worry Bag. There is a lovely book all the children are familiar with, “The Huge Bag of Worries” and on the Parenting Ni website you can see how they do the same thing with a Worry Bucket.

While there will be lots of similarities, each of our families will be experiencing things in a different way. We all bring something different to the table and each child and adult in the Lough View community is unique. Some of you will find you have very reluctant learners (!), some will have learners who are self-critical perfectionists and then there will be everything else in between. When things get tricky, breathe, walk away and when everyone has calmed down and engaged their frontal cortex sit along-side your child and possibly say,

Help me understand what this is like for you..... how you’re feeling.....what you’re thinking.....” and work to find a best fit solution or compromise.

Most importantly, be present with your child. Actively listen to their concerns and answer their question honestly and in an age-appropriate way. Please be mindful of their age and don’t give too much information all at once. Don’t worry if you don’t know all the answers;

none of us do. It's ok to say you don't know. The most important part is that your child is communicating with you and able to express that they have a worry. The pre-paves for those interesting teenage years! We know you will respond in a supportive way and not dismiss their worries as being adult worries. This is a time when our children need more love and reassurance. At Lough View we replace the phrase "attention seeking" with "safety seeking" and this completely changes our understanding of what's going on for our children.

If you are looking for some help with talking to your child about coronavirus you could check out the following. But remember it's still ok if you don't want to!!

1. [www.parentingni.org/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-covid-19/Dave the Dog is worried about coronavirus](http://www.parentingni.org/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-covid-19/Dave%20the%20Dog%20is%20worried%20about%20coronavirus) – Nurse Dotty Books
2. www.nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2
3. www.cnn.com/2020/03/19/entertainment/nickelodeon-coronavirus-content/index.html For hand washing
4. www.parentingni.org/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-covid-19/
5. For older children. <https://ineqe.com/2020/03/20/animation-story-book-explains-the-coronavirus-to-children/>
6. www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/guidance-advice/talking-to-children-about-coronavirus/
7. www.mywellread.com This is a link to Action for Children with great stories for children (aged 8-11 years) with the aim of **building resilience** particularly during these challenging times.
8. Click [here](#) for a useful toolkit to answering questions or concerns your child may have about Covid-19.

If you are struggling, please contact us through the school info account or the teacher's email. We will do our best to get back to you as soon as possible. Please remember that in these exceptional circumstances, be gentle and kind with yourself. The children will take their lead from us and benefit greatly.

In the words of the famous English paediatrician and psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott– you only need to be a "good enough" parent. The perfect teacher, the perfect parent.... doesn't exist.....

Warmest regards,

Anna Johnston