

Exercise and Mood

Exercise is important for our mental and physical well-being. There are many noted benefits of regular exercise, including:

- Increasing energy levels
- Improving sleep
- Reducing stress



For children with additional needs, opportunities to move around can be a great way to let off steam and energy.

As we are spending more time indoors, it can be helpful to think about our activity levels and ways we can increase them.

Here are some ideas for thinking about ways to exercise from home with your children. There are lots of resources on YouTube, and we have listed some recommendations here:

- Cosmic Kids Yoga: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlq052EKMtk>
- Joe Wicks 30-minute morning workouts, everyday at 9am: <https://www.youtube.com/user/thebodycoach1>
- Exercise song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7jSWdnoshw>

If you do not have access to the internet, you could draw out a plan with your child and encourage them to do different exercises (e.g. jumping on the spot or star jumps). You could set up an obstacle course with items from around the house, particularly if you have any outdoor space.



Children with additional needs are also permitted to leave the house more than once a day for exercise, so you can take more trips outside for a walk or to the park. Also, for parents who have Short Breaks funding, you can use this money to purchase exercise equipment for your child (e.g. small trampoline or exercise balls).

Playing with your Child

Spending more time at home with your child presents many opportunities for play and fun. Play is an important part of a child's development for many reasons, such as:

- Engaging and interacting with parents to develop attachment relationships
- Play is a part of learning (e.g. social skills, shapes, numbers)
- A chance to use creativity and imagination

Great Ormond Street Hospital have launched a 'Power of Play' campaign to support families in thinking about ways of playing with their children as we adapt to spending more time at home.



Their website has over 20 ideas for play activities you might want to try with your child: <https://www.gosh.org/power-of-play>. If you don't have access to the internet, you could speak to your child's school about supporting you with accessing some of these resources and sending them out in the post.

Here are some other ideas for supporting play with your child:

- Think about your child's developmental level and what toys might be most appropriate for them. If you are unsure, you could speak to your child's class teacher about things that your child enjoys at school.
- Many children with additional needs enjoy sensory play. You could create a sensory box for them with objects from around the house (e.g. a soft blanket, toys with noises or lights).
- Follow your child's lead in their play where you can. Go along with their ideas with encouragement and praise. This can support positive interactions between you and your child.



Daily Routines and Wellbeing

When our normal daily routines and activities are disrupted, it can be helpful to schedule in some activities whilst we spend more time at home. Having a clearer routine and structure in our day can be a useful way to improve our wellbeing and mood.

For children with additional needs, structure and predictability can be particularly important to support their mood and anxiety levels.



Here are some ideas to support you and your family to think about this:

- Using a visual timetable can be a great way for everyone in the family to see what is going to be happening that day. Your child's school could support with sending out some materials to make the timetable.

- You could write a list of small, achievable tasks for yourself or your child each day. This can be a nice way of giving your child a sense of purpose and achievement.



- You could agree, as a family, to do one activity at the same time each day (e.g. do a YouTube exercise video at 10:30am).
- Your child might also benefit from a consistent night-time routine. For example, you could set up a 'golden hour' before bed time with some scheduled soothing and relaxing activities they can do.

As parents, it is also important to think about looking after yourself and scheduling in some time to do something that you enjoy. The charity Mind has some suggestions for self-care activities on their website:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-problems-introduction/self-care/>.