

FINN VALLEY
Family Resource Centre
CLG



Parenting through COVID-19

Helpful hints to keep home life happy



Booklet 2

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency



We're delighted to bring you our second booklet, which has been put together by the staff in Finn Valley Family Resource Centre CLG and Springboard Family Support Project.

We realise that parenting can be a struggle at the best of times. As practitioners, we understand that dealing with the impact of Covid - 19 may be a stressful and difficult time for parents and children as they try to adapt to a new routine at home, social distancing and being away from their school and peers. Weeks have passed and we are all adjusting to new ways of working, educating and communicating. We are delighted to welcome an article from The Bluestack Special Needs Foundation for this month's booklet also.

In addition to the above; our staff, both as practitioners and parents have put together some articles looking at:

- Budgeting through Covid -19
- Supporting sibling relationships in the home
- Pressing the pause button
- Making the most of family time through Covid - 19
- Parenting a child with additional needs through Covid - 19
- Relaxation Games for Families
- Low cost activities to try at home

We've also added some helpful links to supports and resources which you may find useful.

We hope you all stay safe and well.

Corina Catterson Flynn
Project Manager

Home Budgeting through Covid-19

For many families, this is a very challenging time financially. Some of us may have lost our jobs while others may have had their hours reduced or their businesses closed. Some parents are now reliant on social welfare for the first time. Budgeting through this crisis is vital to keep spending on track. Whilst isolating at home you might find that you are spending more on food every week, but whilst you are spending more on food, electricity and fuel you could be saving money with less being spent on travel or childcare costs.

The budget plans that we may have been using prior to the Covid – 19 outbreak may now have to be altered. For example nights out, birthday parties and even hair cuts that you budgeted for, are now not happening so money will be saved here. However, children are at home now all the time and eating every meal with us, which will add to pressures at home.

By identifying and then prioritising your essential needs you can start your budgeting plan. Ask yourself the question, what does my family need? Consider if you need support with any of your outstanding debts? Keep a track of when your utility bills are due or when your meter needs to be topped up. MABS is a Money Advice & Budgeting Service and they are there to help you if you need some assistance. You can contact your local MABS office or call the MABS Helpline on 0761 07 2000; Monday to Friday, from 9:00am to 8:00pm. MABS also have a great online tool and Support Advisors online that can help you with any outstanding debt or to even set up a budget plan for you.

During this crisis there have been additional financial supports made available for anyone who has lost their job due to the Covid – 19 or have had their hours reduced. If you fall into this category then DEASP Income Support Helpline for Covid – 19 can be contacted on 1890800024. This helpline provides information on available income supports for people impacted by Covid-19. The information team can advise on the most suitable income supports for your circumstances and help you make an application.

If you and your family require support in terms of food or clothing there are county wide supports in place:

- The national SVDP website (<https://www.svp.ie/get-help/contact-your-local-office.aspx>) will give you the contact number for your local area.
- The We Care Food Bank in Letterkenny can be contacted on 087 1471325.
- There is also a Covid – 19 Community Response Helpline for County Donegal, they can be contacted on 1800 928992 or emailed on covidsupport@donegalcoco.ie.

Home Budgeting through Covid-19

Below is an example of a household budget plan. You can also make your own depending on what your income and outgoings are. A good way to start is with these headings.

Example 1: 5 Headings

Rent/Mortgage	Food	Electricity	Bins	Heating

Example 2: Household Budget

MONTHLY BUDGET

Month: _____

Starting Checking Balance: _____

Income: _____

Bills:

Rent/Mortgage: _____

Grocery: _____

Health Insurance: _____

Car Insurance: _____

Car Payments: _____

Electric: _____

Gas For House: _____

Gas For Cars: _____

Phone: _____

TV: _____

Internet: _____

Water: _____

Credit Card: _____

Extra Spending:

Expense: _____

Expense: _____

Expense: _____

Savings:

Starting Balance: _____

Deposit: _____

Deposit: _____

Extra Income: _____

Total Checking Balance: _____

Goals For Next Month: _____

Clare O Kane. Family Support Team Leader, Springboard

Supporting Sibling Relationships at Home

Sibling relationships are unique, authentic and invaluable, yet they can be one of the most difficult relationships to navigate as a parent. Often these relationships are filled with rivalry, jealousy and competitiveness from an early age and can be extremely frustrating, exhausting and upsetting for parent's to handle. However, it's good to point out that for most of us, although this conflict may be high, more often than not the good, fun days more than balance out.

As parents, it's important we consider our part to play in encouraging positive sibling relationships. Our children are after all, mainly in conflict with each other in order to gain more love and affection from you than their sibling/s. This rivalry can be intense but it can also have a lasting effect on children, so it's important to remind them how much they are loved, equally, every day. Don't be afraid to show your love, no matter what age they are. The first step to encouraging healthy sibling relationships is setting the ground rules for play for example, what behaviours are acceptable and what behaviours are not; no hitting, no name calling etc. You could get your children involved in this too. Find out what behaviours they are most annoyed by with each other, listen to them and make them ground rules so there is no confusion. This way, you're anticipating the problems, you're one step ahead!

It's also important to avoid making comparisons between your children. All children have their own qualities and attributes; they are all unique. Showing an understanding of this will not only strengthen your relationship with them but it will give them a greater respect for each other and build on their own self-esteem. Children like to be seen as individuals; they are individuals. What they share with their sibling is often the same parent/s, their environment, similar experiences and similar memories but they are all individual.

There will be differences; there could be age gaps, different sexes of children, different interests and needs but what they have in common is you, their parent. Teach them to understand their differences and to appreciate them. Encourage them to have a good time together by noticing what activities they enjoy doing together, though this can be tough when there are age and interest gaps. In this instance, try cooking together or art, or some form of exercise that you can all do together at least one or two shared activities a day. A scavenger hunt can be good fun, or play cards, or any game or activity that puts the adults against the kids, get them playing and working together.

Supporting Sibling Relationships at Home

When there is conflict, try to step back and let them resolve it, try not to get too involved in petty battles. Moderate levels of conflict are a healthy sign that they each can express their needs or wants. If you need to step in, remind them of the ground rules. If all else fails and you need to end the play, talk to each child and listen. You could then allow them to vent, just a little and find out what went wrong before you set the ground rules for the next play. It can sometimes help to ask each child to describe how they feel and have the other child listen. All of this sounds like hard work and it is, nobody ever said that parenting was easy, but there are so many benefits to developing healthy sibling relationships, children may learn to:

- develop their social skills
- navigate power struggles
- try to compromise
- resolve conflicts
- to be assertive
- be empathetic to others'
- respect rules and values

I'm sure all of us would be very happy parents if our children developed the above qualities and attributes from your child's first peer group; their sibling.

Short Exercise that Children and Young people can do with their siblings:

My favourite memory with you...	
I think you're good at...	
Things I like about you...	
Things that you do that annoy/upset me...	
Things I like about having a Brother and/or Sister...	
One thing I like to do together...	

Jo Sledge Brennan. Family Support Worker, Springboard

Pressing the Pause Button

Pressing the pause button, what do we mean by this term? By pressing the pause button and taking a step back from moments of drama we get the opportunity to see what's really going on and then to consider the best way in which to deal with it. This results in a calmer parent which in turn leads to a calmer child, hence improving family life for everyone.



Parenting takes the art of multi-tasking to a whole new level and sometimes, it can become all about getting things done and getting through the endless to-do-lists. This is especially the case now during unprecedented times of the Covid-19 crisis, when we as parents are trying to be all things to our children by filling in the missing gaps left by the absence of friends and teachers. This means at times we find ourselves reacting to our children with anger, frustration, or simple exhaustion. By pressing the pause button we are taking a few moments to respond. This might mean taking a few breaths, walking into another room for a few minutes or if emotions are running particularly high, deciding to address the issue at a later time or when everyone has calmed down. By doing this we give ourselves time to acknowledge our own feelings and emotions, taking the time to think about how we are feeling and recognising that reacting in anger or frustration won't help us or our children. Taking this time allows us to calm down and react with the patience, understanding and love that we as parents and our children need.

The Pause Button Technique is a really simple way to empower all parents no matter what situation they find themselves in; it allows you to press your imaginary pause button, freeze time and consider the consequences of the actions you are about to take, before making a more informed, better choice.

Pressing the Pause Button

The Parents Plus Parenting Programme states that: “rather than letting a problem happen over and over again, take time to pause and think about the best way to respond”. www.parentsplus.ie

Pause

Press the pause button

- Take a step back from how you normally react.
- Think calmly. What is the best way to respond?

Tune In

Tune in to what is happening

- What is going on for your children? How are they feeling?
- What is going on for you as a parent? How are you feeling?

Plan

Make a plan

- What is the best way to respond?
- What has worked well in the past?

**Sally Mooney. Family Support Development Worker,
Finn Valley Family Resource Centre**

Making the most of family time through COVID-19

Social distancing has provided us with an opportunity for more family time. While these restrictions have brought great disruption to our lives, we can use this time to keep our children safe, and provide them with support to maintain their happiness. It can allow us to further strengthen relationships with our children and families.



This gift of time is not about making comparisons to friends, family and neighbours. While some will bake beautiful cakes, make a wooden play house or complete all their school work, some will simply watch a movie, draw a picture or read a book. This is your time and your family. This is not a competition about productivity or success. It's likely that you are doing more as a family now without realising; maybe eating together for meals or simply being in each other's company. It is a time to get to know each other, our likes/dislikes, our hobbies and interests and what gets on our nerves.

Ignore the detailed daily schedules and do what works best for you as a family. We have no control over the re-opening of schools, crèches or sports clubs. If you are cooking and cleaning a lot, you are not alone. A few months ago a large number of us parents could be heard moaning about the school lunches, school collections and Mum's/Dad's taxi to and from afterschool activities. We have more time to teach our children how to help or to learn how to use a Hoover or empty the bins. These are life skills that they can bring with them in to their adult life, even if they will never do it just the way we would.

We have a responsibility as parents to provide love, reassurance and security. Our children will display challenging behaviours that could very likely be a result of the worries and emotions that they cannot manage alone. Let's not be hard on them or ourselves.

Making the most of family time through COVID-19

Why not involve your children in the daily plans. Take one day at a time. Ask your children what they would like to do and make a plan together.

What SHOULD WE DO today?

Go back to basics, this time at home doesn't summons you to learn a new language or invent a new gadget. Enjoy the sunshine, nature, family, music, dancing and imagination. Be careful of the time spent on social media as a parent. Be mindful of the conversations we are having in front of the children. Model the behaviour we want. Try to remain positive, despite the doubts and fears we face about life returning to "normal". The more positive you can be; the more valuable the family time will be. Take care of yourself; children are watching how you are coping.

The simple but wonderful opportunity we have to play with our children can allow us to forget, for a moment the seriousness of the world around us.

Chloe McGinty. Family Support Worker; Springboard

Parenting a Child with Additional Needs through Covid-19

Make Self Care a Priority

On an aeroplane, the air hostess tells you; that if the pressure falls in the cabin, to put on your own oxygen mask before you attend to your child's mask. The key message here is that if you are not ok, you will not be able to help your own child.

We DO have a bigger load

As parents of children with additional needs we know how very much more attending to their needs can take from us as carers, than that of non-disabled children. So, you are not being selfish, or self-obsessed by practicing strict SELF-CARE routines. Be kind and generous with yourself remembering you are doing the best you can within the circumstances. You don't have to do everything by the book, you just have to survive. When you get the first inkling that you are not managing or not in a positive headspace, seek help. Help is out there.

You are not alone

Try to Stay connected with yours and your child's network. Check in with their therapists, doctors, teachers, social worker, and any social networks they are in. While the traditional ways of staying in contact like face to face meetings are no longer possible, most organisations are offering virtual connections through whatsapp, zoom, and other social media platforms.

Address the Elephant in the room

While many of our children with additional needs may have compromised expressive communication skills their receptive skills can be excellent. They may be overhearing and exposed to lots of new information on COVID 19, talk of people getting sick and dying and may be afraid and confused. So, while it is important to stay up-to-date with what is happening, it is important that a balance is gained between discussing the issues around COVID - 19 and not becoming over obsessed with social media and too much information.

Parenting a Child with Additional Needs through Covid-19

Expect increased Anxiety

Anxiety often comes from a place of loss: our children have lost their routines, their traditional connections and the familiar, stable faces they are used to. An increase in anxiety can often lead to an increase in behaviours that challenge; meltdowns and shutdowns. You are the one consistent feature they have now. Try to be consistent in your approaches/responses. You are their anchor for stability. Your strength is paramount.

Embrace the opportunity

In the greater scheme of things, we have a choice to see this as a huge burden, which is justifiable or see this as a unique opportunity for creating deeper and stronger bonds with our children. We have fewer external distractions, an opportunity to really focus on our families, on being present, on creating an environment that can really strengthen our familial relationships. Play the games, dance to the music, sing the songs, plant the flowers, bake the cakes, take the time to embrace and enjoy the unique interests, gifts and abilities of our children with additional needs.

This too shall pass.

Wendy McCarry. Manager, Bluestack Special Needs Foundation

Contact: info@bluestackfoundation.com



**BLUESTACK
SPECIAL NEEDS
FOUNDATION**

Fun Relaxation Games for Families

When some people think of mindfulness they conjure up images of Buddhist monks sitting alone on a mountain chanting! However as a parent I have found mindful practices a valuable resource for my self-care toolbox. It is a great gift to instil in children which they can use in lots of different situations they may have to face in the future. It really is just about paying attention to the present moment. The best way to teach a child to be mindful is to practice mindfulness yourself. It is not always easy to stay calm and mindful, believe me I know!

Here is a simple technique for parents or caregivers who find themselves upset and out of touch with the present moment.

- **Stop.** Just take a momentary pause, no matter what you're doing.
- Take a breath. Feel the sensation of your own breathing, which brings you back to the present moment.
- **Observe.** Acknowledge what is happening, the good or bad, inside you or in the environment. Just note it.
- **Proceed.** Having briefly checked in with the present moment, continue with whatever it was you were doing.

There are lots of mindfulness videos, music and helpful resources and techniques available free online, but just remember not to get too bogged down in the science of it or whether you are doing it right or not. Mindfulness for children should be fun and help us as parents/carers to explore, reflect and learn about ourselves and our children. We are all on a learning journey.

Here are a few simple exercises that will encourage relaxation in a playful and interactive way for parents and children.

Fun Relaxation Games for Families

Pretend you have a nice smelling flower in one hand and a slow burning candle in the other. Breathe in slowly through your nose as you smell the flower. Breathe out slowly through your mouth as you blow out the candle. Repeat a few times.



Reach up to the tree and pick a lemon with each hand. Pretend you have a lemon in each hand. Squeeze the lemons hard to get all the juice out – squeeze, squeeze and squeeze. Throw the lemons on the floor and relax your hands. Then repeat, until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade! After your last squeeze and throw, shake out your hands to relax.



Pretend you are a lazy cat that just woke up from a lovely, long nap. Have a big yawn and a meow. Now stretch out your arms, legs and back slowly like a cat and relax.



Pretend you are a feather floating through the air for ten seconds. Suddenly you freeze and transform into a statue. Don't move! Then slowly relax as you transform back into the floating feather again. Repeat as many times as you like making sure to finish as a floating feather in a relaxed state.



Pretend you are a turtle going for a slow, relaxed turtle walk. Oh no, it's started to rain! Curl up tight under your shell for about ten seconds. The sun's out again, so come out of your shell and return to your relaxing walk. Repeat a few times, making sure to finish with a walk so that your body is relaxed.



Josephine Meehan.
Family Support Worker, Springboard.

Low Cost Activities

Some low cost activities to try together from our Childcare Team:

Butterfly

Materials/Resources needed

- Toilet roll holder
- Paper
- Scissors
- Glue /pirt stick
- Markers /crayons/colouring pencils
- Pencil/pen

Preparation and instructions

Some children may need an adult to help.

Trace the child's hand on the paper using the pen/pencil do this twice. Help child cut out their hands that they traced using scissors. Let the child colour in his/her hands that they traced using crayons, colour in toilet roll holder, when the child is finished colouring in help them to stick their hands onto the back of the toilet roll holder, turn around and add or colour on eyes mouth and nose.



Low Cost Activities

Objects and Nature Painting

Materials/resources you will need for this activity.

- Paints
- Paint brushes
- Tubs
- Water
- Paper/card
- Potatoes/leaves/stones/apples
- Preparations and instructions

Preparation and Instructions

- Children will need to go outside and gather different shaped leaves and pebbles or anything they choose to paint with. This is a fun filled activity and should keep children amused for sometime in the home.
- Put all materials on table and fill tubs with water so you can wash the paintbrushes after use. Use different coloured paints if you choose. Cut potatoes or apples in half and paint, see the different designs left on paper.
- Leave and let them dry.
- Remember to encourage children to help tidy up when your painting activity is finished and wash all paintbrushes and then dry so you can reuse them the next time you want to paint.



Low Cost Activities

Milk Carton Birdhouse

Materials/ resources needed:

- Plastic 2 litre milk carton
- Paint or markers
- Scissors
- String
- Sticky tape
- Bird seed or breadcrumbs
- Loose bark or grass
- Stickers if you want to personalise



Preparation & Instructions

- Wash milk carton thoroughly and put upside down to dry out
- Cut out a square underneath the handle, start in the middle and work your way up to make doors (make sure to have an adult present for this step)
- Press along the door line to fold door flaps out
- Remove lid and tape string to top using sticky tape and now add the lid to secure in place
- Time to decorate your bird feeders using paints or markers and design, you can even personalise it.
- Leave to dry out.

Add loose bark or grass inside the bird feeder.

Now it s time to hang your bird feeder in your garden, add breadcrumbs and watch for birds.

Enjoy.

Low Cost Activities

DIY Salt Dough - Name or Initial Ornaments

Materials /Resources Required:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 3/4 - 1 cup of water - add water slowly as you may need less
- Paint
- Paintbrush
- Cookie cutters or plastic knife
- Ribbon or string
- Parchment paper/ cooking tray



Recipe/Instructions

- Mix flour, salt and water in a bowl (if dough is too dry add more water, if it's too wet add more flour)
- Roll out dough on a flat surface
- Cut out your name or Initials using cutters or a plastic knife
- Place on a tray using parchment paper
- Poke a small hole in the corner of letters
- Bake at 250 degrees for approximately 2-3 hours
- Leave to cool
- Paint and decorate and then leave to dry
- Add ribbon and hang your new decoration wherever you like



We really hope that you enjoy creating fun together:

Mairead Connolly. Childcare Team Leader Springboard

Carole McBrearty. Childcare worker, Springboard

Anita Dolan. Childcare Worker, Springboard

Some Useful Links

COVID 19 Information and Advice from the HSE: All you need to know about COVID - 19 in Ireland:

https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI88-r95O46AIVAuDtCh32SwW5EAAYASAAEgJcrfD_BwE

Parents Centre contains information for parents and provides links to a wide range of trusted and high quality online resources including learning, parenting and information on supports for parents.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/parents-centre/>

Let's Play Ireland is an online portal on Gov.ie, providing access to a range of play resources for children.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/lets-play-ireland/>

Parent Hub Donegal is a coordinated initiative by Túsla and Community/Voluntary services across Donegal with information on all things parenting: <https://parenthubdonegal.ie/>

Donegal Youth Service: Currently offering a call back service for young people and virtual groups online. Information available also on keeping children and young people safe online. Ph 074 - 9129630
www.donegalyouthservice.ie

Foróige: Lots of up to date information for young people and parents. It will also link you to all the available foróige projects currently operating in Donegal. Website: www.foroige.ie

Some Useful Links

Jigsaw: Daily Practitioner Updates and Online Clinics for Young People. Ph: 074 – 9729620. Website: www.jigsaw.ie

Alcohol Forum: Provides support and resources on the harmful effects of alcohol on individuals, families and communities. They have also released a Covid – 19 Family Support Line which can be contacted on Ph: 0858307066

www.alcoholforum.org

Donegal Women’s Domestic Violence Service: Ph: 1800262677
Email: www.donegaldomesticviolenceservices.ie

COVID 19 Community Response Forum: Response Line Ph: 1800928982. Email: covidsupport@donegalcoco.ie



Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

www.donegalcoco.ie
www.hse.ie
www.garda.ie
www.gov.ie
www.alone.ie



COVID-19 Community Response Forum

We're here to help

Contact us for help with:

- **Collection and delivery** of food, essential household items, medication
- **Transport** to Testing Centres, GP's and hospital appointments
- **Social isolation** support and engagement
- **Meals** and delivery.

Phone: 1800-928-982
Email: covidsupport@donegalcoco.ie

#DonegalCommunity Response

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