These are unusual times we find ourselves in, with home working the norm, parents providing education from home and school staff developing their IT skills daily in order to support pupils and parents with the task of learning. We have realised that getting the balance between self-care and learning is important for families and what we may have prioritised within the school environment in the past, may now seem to be of less importance overall. What we know, is that children don’t ask a great deal of us and if we can attend to their wellbeing needs, spend time with them, allow them to play and be curious in a safe and supportive environment, often the learning will come naturally.

Parents need to be reassured that what they are doing will usually be good enough. In the strange times we find ourselves, remote learning and support can seem daunting and it may feel even more difficult to do with very young children or with children who have significant additional support needs. To help out, we have collated some useful resources for children with additional needs. Early learning at home is all about ways to play, learn and have fun. Following a child’s interests and having a variety of things to do and places to go safely is often all they need to maintain their curiosity. Make sure you have a mix of things and plenty of physical activities. Screens and apps etc. are fine but make sure they’re not used for too long and children’s experiences with them are as interactive as possible. There are lots of ideas and materials here to support learning for preschool children and daily tips and activities are posted on bumps to bairns.

We all need to balance the stresses of family life and work and to give ourselves permission to also take some time for ourselves, just to play and have fun. Maintaining relationships with teenagers at home may be difficult in these challenging times. At a time when their job in life is to develop their unique sense of themselves, they have to stay at home with the very people they are trying to be independent from. This can cause tension and friction, but this can be resolved easier if we are more aware of their wellbeing needs at this time and understand their development. This short presentation might help you together get to a point of mutual respect and understanding.

As a service, we have developed some helpful resources and collated some of the best practice guidance and information to help practitioners, parents and families. We have collated a range of resources relating to health and wellbeing that can be used more generally, but also include materials specifically created to support the current situation relating to COVID-19. They include new materials created by the Psychological Service and the Primary Mental Health Worker Service on how to recognise and support stress and anxiety in a child or teenager. A number of training modules and information sheets are also available on the Psychological Service website and these will be of interest to anyone working with children and young people or supporting them in any way.

It is also important to remember the wellbeing of staff. We have looked at some specific resources for them to support their own wellbeing at this time; staff wellbeing training and some other resources that might be helpful.

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- Brain fog
- Gathering the views of children and young people
- Service on the move!
- Mental Health Warriors
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Although our offices are closed, all psychologists and preschool home visiting teachers continue to deliver a service across Highland. At present there are a number of ways to get in touch with us:

If you are a parent, please contact your child’s school in the first instance and the head teacher/guidance teacher will be able to make a link with the service.

If you work in a school/early learning and childcare setting or in a service associated with a specific school/early learning and childcare setting, please get in touch with the link Educational Psychologist or preschool teacher by e-mail.

Anyone can speak with a psychologist or preschool home visiting teacher through the Just Ask Helpline on any Tuesday or Thursday afternoon between 1pm and 4pm by calling the helpline number: 07785477686

Contact can also be made at any time with the Principal Educational Psychologist by e-mail: bernadette.cairns@highland.gov.uk

Gathering the views of children and young people
Matthew Musset

This universal pack of ideas includes a range of attractive, interactive tools devised and collated by Highland Council Psychological Service – they follow a developmental sequence to allow you to select the most suitable approaches for gathering child views at all ages and stages.

For some children with complex needs, gathering their views can seem a difficult task to complete. This can be particularly challenging for very young children as well as for young people with barriers to communication.

Legislation does require this - under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child all children, including those with disabilities, have the right to have their views sought and expressed.

The pack includes a selection of ideas which may be useful, but it is by no means an exhaustive list. Ensure to match the strategy to the child/young person’s strengths, interests, communication and developmental level.

Mental Health Warriors Carrie Yavuz

Over the last year, a group of pupils at Tain Royal Academy have been working with Connie Farrell, Depute Head Teacher and Carrie Yavuz, Educational Psychologist on a co-produced project around mental health and wellbeing. Since lockdown, their focus has shifted.

“Throughout lockdown we, the Tain Royal Academy Mental Health Warriors, have been meeting online to talk about what we have been doing during lockdown to keep ourselves busy, and what we have been doing to keep a good state of mental health and well-being. Some of us have been gardening, taking the dog out, going for a walk, cycling, and doing lots of cooking (keeping a safe distance if there are people). Some of the mental health warriors have also come up with their own ways of saying thank you to the NHS from playing the pipes to making a poster. And then each day we have been tweeting on twitter the activities we have been doing to give other people ideas of what to do to keep busy.”

Tain Royal Academy, Mentor Health Warriors #MentalHealthWarriors @traofficial
So, recently I experienced a rather abrupt change in circumstances at home and at work. Unless you have been living on Mars the same thing has probably happened to you too. One symptom of this change that took me entirely by surprise was an impenetrable cloud of brain fog. A swirling, messy mist that prevented me from holding any coherent thoughts in my head for quite a few days. On 23rd March I returned to work after a week’s annual leave just in time for the nationwide imposed lockdown. Before the world took a left turn, I had planned to spend the first week of the Easter holidays doing the usual catching up jobs. Writing all the reports that just didn’t get finished, sorting out pieces of paper and filing things away, making grandiose plans about how to be organised next academic session to avoid the catch-up merry-go-round.

At this point I must come clean and admit that I am an Olympic standard procrastinator. This affliction is mainly about ‘tricky’ jobs. ‘Tricky’ is not a constant variable and depends upon many factors. Whilst writing up my doctorate for example I ran out of cupboards and drawers to tidy at home, so resorted to clearing and tidying the stationary cupboard in the office. I have sought many cures for procrastination over the years – this is one of my favourite blogs on the subject. WARNING do not click on this link unless you have two hours to lose…

Fortunately, one of the best solutions that I have found for beating procrastination also turns out to be a great help when attempting to work through brain fog. The Pomodoro Technique is a very simple way of chunking tricky tasks into smaller more manageable pieces. It is based on some great psychology and even better than any of that, it works! One essential ingredient for success is Mono-tasking (the less well known, but infinitely more helpful cousin of multi-tasking). As many good psychologists will tell you, multi-tasking is a myth. When we think we are doing multiple tasks simultaneously what we are actually doing is rapid task switching. Working like this is exhausting and burns through our mental resources quickly; not great when our mental resources are already strained such as in times of “unprecedented” crisis. Copied below is an explanation of the very basics of the Pomodoro Technique – I stumbled across this in about 2010. The guy who invented it is an Italian who shares my dreadful procrastination affliction. The only timer he had available when he invented the technique was a tomato shaped kitchen timer – tomato = pomodoro in Italian.

Pomodoro technique has now been monetised and packaged (as all good ideas must it seems). Don’t panic, you can do the technique without training or paying an exorbitant sum to become a Certified Pomodoro Master! The core process of the Pomodoro Technique consists of 6 steps:

- **Choose a task you’d like to get done** Something big, something small, something you’ve been putting off for a million years: it doesn’t matter. What matters is that it’s something that deserves your full, undivided attention.

- **Set the Pomodoro for 25 minutes** Make a small oath to yourself: I will spend 25 minutes on this task and I will not interrupt myself. You can do it! After all, it’s just 25 minutes. [pro-tip: turn off all the notifications and put your phone on silent]

- **Work on the task until the Pomodoro rings** Immerse yourself in the task for the next 25 minutes. If you suddenly realize you have something else you need to do, write the task down on a sheet of paper.

- **When the Pomodoro rings, put a checkmark on a paper** Congratulations! You’ve spent an entire, interruption-less Pomodoro on a task.

- **Take a short break** Breathe, meditate, grab a cup of coffee, go for a short walk or do something else relaxing (i.e., not work-related). Your brain will thank you later. [I have found this bit to be vital for success!]

- **Every 4 pomodoros, take a longer break** Once you’ve completed four pomodoros, you can take a longer break. 20 minutes is good. Or 30. Your brain will use this time to assimilate new information and rest before the next round of Pomodoros.
Move more, sit less

Heather Sked

This is one of the messages highlighted in the What the brain needs to learn slideshow and accompanying leaflet, now available on our blog, to support parents and carers. Exercise lifts our mood and helps us to think clearly. However, getting enough exercise might be a challenge for people right now, during this time of COVID-19 restrictions. To find out more, we asked the Psychological Service team what they were doing for exercise during the lockdown.

Team members reported that they are getting involved in a wide range of activities. Away from the house, most team members are going for walks but they are also cycling, running and walking their dogs. At home, team members are doing workouts (some online), yoga, dancing, skipping and following physio programmes. They are also getting exercise by gardening, doing DIY and chopping wood.

Mostly they are exercising with family members, although some are enjoying the opportunity to exercise on their own.

Everyone who answered is exercising at least three times a week, with the majority exercising six or seven days a week. Interestingly, half of the respondents said this was similar to the amount they had exercised before the COVID-19 restrictions and half said it was more. No one said it was less.

How do our team members feel after exercise? The most commonly used words were: energised, relaxed and happy. Several people also said they felt calm, refreshed and a sense of achievement. Some said they felt tired but they also felt relieved, more free, accomplished and motivated.

So, we can see that exercise continues to be a mood-lifter during the lockdown and that there are all sorts of activities we can continue to do right now to get exercise. The lockdown circumstances may even encourage and enable some people to exercise more than previously, as it has done for many of us in the Psychological Service.

Lockdown through a lens

One activity which can be carried out during lockdown, which fulfils the criteria for “move more, sit less” is photography, whilst on your daily walk, run or cycle. Here is a selection of photographs taken by Matthew Musset during ‘lockdown’.

freedom in isolation
life goes on for this black sheep family
a peaceful moment
the jewel in the leaf
cauliflower cheese
Dough is good for you!
Lockdown Madness à la Suggs

Alan Wilkins

Not the money sort, although that is useful, but the yeasty, bready stuff which is one of our most basic foods. It is of course nice to eat but brilliant to make yourself. I have revived my bread making, not done since the café six years ago, and wonder why I ever stopped. At the end of a day of screen and phone time the magic of the yeast frothing, the physical workout of the initial hard kneading and then the therapeutic 10 minutes of traditional kneading until the dough becomes elastic and ready for the second rising and resultant kneading, both slows you down and allows some consideration of good things, happy thoughts and talking to others. I like to listen to the wireless or some music (your choice but anything with Suggs has to be good) while I’m doing this. Then comes the tins and oven with that smell of fresh bread which is hard to beat.

Good basic recipes abound with some enticing books. Dick Strawbridge of Chateau fame wrote one with his son, “Made At Home: Breads” with an inspired pizza base from scratch. My basic is from “Whole Wheat Baking” from the Centre for Alternative Technology in Machynlleth.

Take:
3lbs wholemeal flour
2oz fresh yeast or 1oz dry yeast (check it is OK for hand baking and not just bread machines)
1 tsp sugar
1 tsp salt
3 tbsp veg or olive oil or 2oz melted marg or butter
1 ½ pints of lukewarm water (approx.)

Method:
Dissolve yeast in half pint of water add sugar and leave in warm place for a good froth.
Mix salt and flour in large bowl.
Add yeast, water and oil until all is incorporated and not too sticky.
Turn out and knead until you get a smooth elastic dough. Initially a good two minutes hard knead and then about ten minutes of rhythmical kneading turning the dough as you go. With practise you will feel when it is ready. If it is too wet add some flour to your board.
Return to bowl and cover with cling film or a tea towel, leave in the warm place to rise, about an hour when it doubles its size. Turn it out and give it another good kneading. Put into well greased bread tins. This will make two, two pound loaves or lots of rolls. Fill the tin to two thirds and cover to rise again, about half an hour, when the dough is at almost the top of the tin.
Hot oven, gas mark 7, 220C, 425F for about 45 mins. NB fan ovens need slightly lower temp and less time. Check on it at half time. You will see when it is ready. To check turn out, if it sounds hollow when tapped on bottom it is OK. Rolls take about 10 to 15 mins. Cool on wire racks.
You don’t needs tins just shape it with your hands. Rolls freeze well and microwave in 30 secs to 1 min. However, I think it is best when eaten fresh with butter and something! Good gluten free bread works with this way as do lots of other recipes. Just think how good it is for you, without it you would only be making cakes…
PS bread and yeast available on line, although you may have to buy bigger bags than normal.
My experiences as a trainee EP in Highland

Emma Rait

After completing my undergraduate Psychology degree at UHI I was very fortunate to get a place on the MSc Educational Psychology course at Dundee University. My training involves spending 2 days a week on placement with the Highland Council Psychological Service and 2 days a week at university in Dundee, completing the MSc over 2 years.

During my first year on the training course I was based in the Mid Highland office in Dingwall for my placement. I was really pleased about that as the office is near the secondary school I attended, so it was lovely to be based in a familiar town when embarking on something new. At the start of my placement I enjoyed shadowing and accompanying different Educational Psychologists (EPs) out on their visits to schools. As I gained more experience, I was able to venture out on my own to do some assessment and intervention work. My favourite bit of work in first year was working alongside an EP to deliver an intervention called ‘drawing the ideal school’. We used this as a whole-school intervention to promote pupil wellbeing and it was great fun to see the imaginative ideas the children came up with.

For second year, I have been based in the Inverness office. This year I have enjoyed working with my link school and doing direct work with young people. One of my favourite bits of work was using Video Interaction Guidance (VIG). I also enjoyed working alongside an EP delivering ‘Working on What Works (WOWW)’ with a P6/P7 class.

Now I am approaching the end of my course and am working on my thesis. My thesis involves an historical analysis of Educational Psychology training in Scotland. I am also exploring why and how Educational Psychology first started, from when the first EP was appointed in 1913. It has been interesting to read about the ways in which Educational Psychology practice has developed over the last 100 years.

The best thing about being a trainee in Highland is being part of a supportive team. Whenever I have a question about something, need some advice or peer support, there is always somebody I can speak to. I have had lots of opportunities to be involved in a variety of work whilst on placement. I have been able to do individual work, deliver training, be a part of development groups and experience multi-agency working. I have gained experience in a variety of intervention and assessment methods such as VIG and dynamic assessment. It has also been good to experience a variety of schools ranging from 1 classroom schools with a handful of pupils to large secondary schools. I feel very fortunate to have been a Highland trainee and to have had the opportunity to learn from the very best.

Going dalek!

We are all becoming more proficient with technology, even with all its glitches and challenges. Sometimes creative thinking, with humour, is needed to get your message across. One example is when your partner in Skype is losing sound quality and they ‘Go Dalek’ on you. At times like this we find using a visual support or an object of reference works well. Although it is useful to teach the skill as Matthew did wonder why Barbara was waving a toy Dalek in front of the screen!

This photo shows Emma, next to her collaborative research project poster at the Scottish Division of Educational Psychology Conference.
The Pre-school Home Visiting Teachers have developed a selection of advice sheets on a number of topics related to Additional Support Needs.

EASEYS for ASN

The purpose of the EASEYS for ASN is to provide a variety of practical ideas and support strategies for additional support needs. Based on good practice, these sheets support staff working in Early Years settings as well as parents and carers.

Play Ideas

The Play Ideas sheets focus on individual play activities, exploring differentiated play. They offer parents/carers and staff suggestions for adapting and enhancing activities, with scope to tweak for meeting a range of individual needs.

The Buddy Wheel

As part of the Psychological Service response to the new arrangements for home working, a buddy system has been established to support the wellbeing of service members. This also provides opportunities for team building through collaborative CPD activities.

Each week, service members are given a recent research article to study and then discuss with their buddy. The buddies rotate so that everyone gets an opportunity to chat with others service members over time. A stylish visual aid was created to keep track of the buddy-pairings.

Stephanie Bennet’s summaries of the articles might pique your interest and inspire personal reading to add to your own CPD.

Supporting peer relationships

Collaboration and the ability to collaborate is central to a successful group, class, school, business and society. Evidence suggests collaboration, during learning tasks, supports the development of social skills and a sense of belonging to the group. We were interested in how collaboration during learning tasks could support the maintenance of peer relationships during lockdown.

Collaboration can be structured using an approach called cooperative learning, which involves working together to accomplish a shared goal. A team of Educational Psychologists and teachers planned and trialled taking this approach online with sixteen primary 6 and 7 pupils. From the teacher’s perspective this was successful, with all young people initially joining a Google Meet and then using breakout space to work in groups of four. The young people reported that they enjoyed taking part, and they felt better for seeing their teachers and peers. A number of the parents commented how much happier the pupils were after engaging in this collaborative activity using Google Meet, particularly those who were struggling with missing school and their peers. From this feedback, the school is now introducing Google Meet sessions for all pupils twice weekly, so that pupils can see each other and their teachers and engage in short social/health & wellbeing activities.

Cooperative learning involves both a learning target and a social target. From this experience, the addition of a third could be a digital target. For more information about how to set-up breakout groups on Google Classrooms please access the training listed on the Digital Hub. Thanks to Alan McHardy, Robert Quigley, Mark Jones and Izzy Martland for their creative spirit.
While we now know that schools will open in August, we don’t know exactly when or how children will return, but we do know that this will go best if we have the experiences and wellbeing needs of children, young people, staff and families at the heart of what we plan and do.

It is really important not to make assumptions. We are all different and have all had different experiences of lockdown. Some people will be fine and raring to go, others won’t be. Some will not know what they feel. And needs may change over time – it will be a particularly long transition. Some young people may need to settle in before they later show us their needs; others will be wobbly at first but then ok. We will meet children and young people who are “ahead” of usual in some ways, but “behind” in others. Some will be more resilient and resourceful, others less.

This diagram tries to capture some of what we might see and put it into a context. It draws on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theories of education to show how the different levels interact. So, we can respond to children’s needs individually best if we also think of staff needs, school ethos – and the overall context of policy and expectations. It is no more than a map of some of the possible issues to help conversations, and you will probably think of others and see different connections – every school and ELC setting will be different, every child and family will be different, and that is the point.

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**Core training in Highland**

As part of the strategic plan for transforming and improving educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people in Highland, priority sessions of core training have been delivered this session for all staff on authority in-service days. These days were used as a starting point for wider discussion and development at a school level, with specialist services available to support the further implementation and embedding of skills as appropriate. The three training topics; Neurodevelopmental Differences, Differentiation and Promoting Positive Relationships and all the training materials are available on our [Blog](#).

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**National recognition for the Pines online films**

Heather Sked

A wide range of informative films for families and professionals are now available on the [Pines Neurodevelopmental Service website](#). This exciting project was recently shortlisted in the National Autistic Society’s UK Autism Awards 2020. Many congratulations to the team! The films include support sessions run by NAS and Chip+ and also films from the Pines team. Subjects covered include sleep support, everyday challenges from an Occupational Therapy perspective, adjusting language to support children with neurodiversity, understanding children’s food choices, structured play, managing change to reduce anxiety, sensory needs, next steps following a diagnosis, information about ADHD, as well as the [St Clement’s Practical Autism series](#) and many more. Well worth a look!