



## SHARE YOUR CALM

Well, huge congratulations children and adults alike - we all have completed the first week of home school; in a variety of different ways, judging by the chats I have had with parents. None of the ways are right and none of them are wrong, simply right for us as individual families. Our current situation is completely new, even to those of us who have been around for many years. I wonder if it has taken a while to settle into this different way of life – again, children and adults alike!

As the novelty of distance learning and being at home during term time wears off, one of the challenges facing us might be how to manage the changing emotions that we may experience in the weeks ahead - again, adults and children alike. I have heard how much children are missing their classmates and how much parents are missing the connection with other adults. A virtual get-together on zoom or WhatsApp is exciting at first but there is nothing like real face-to-face human interaction, as became very clear to me last night when I was so moved by the sound of lots of people around my house during the 'Clap for the NHS'. This feeling of isolation, among many other aspects of our distancing, can result in a huge range of anxieties, fears, worries, hurt and sadness, all of which can cause high levels of stress if we do not have the strategies to let them out - once again, for adults and children alike. As the quote suggests, the adults are responsible for helping their children learn safe ways to 'let the stresses out'. We don't have these skills built in, we need to be taught. Here are some ideas to help everyone stay safe and sane!



The first to remember is that, although some feelings are uncomfortable, they are all normal and OK; they are just a way of letting us know that something is not right at the moment, so we need to act – more on that later! Also, it can help children to understand that the emotions will not last forever. Children can sometimes think that they are the only ones who feel these big, uncomfortable emotions. Some feel as if they are 'on fire', 'like a bomb', 'taken over by a machine' or 'living with a storm in [their] head – never nice weather'. Meeting fire or storm with fire or storm creates a bigger fire or storm; whereas bringing coolness or calm helps reduce the stress.

If we are to **SHARE OUR CALM** with our little people, sometimes we need to take a few moments to centre ourselves before being able to deal with the storm of emotions brewing in front of us. Explaining that you need a minute to calm is perfect because letting our children see that we feel like this too sometimes, and modelling to them how we cope, is great teaching – and boy, do we have the opportunity for it right now! Just yesterday a mum told me how one of her children had helped his younger brother to calm down – such a wonderful opportunity for him to practice his own learning as he **LENT HIS CALM**.



During their Emotional Well-Being lessons last year, the children learned how our brains are in charge of our bodies – it is the Big Boss Brain. However, the Big Boss has not kept up with the changes in human life so can sometimes trick us into thinking we are in physical danger when the threat is emotional or psychological. This clip shows the fight/flight/freeze response: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/clips/zkq8q6f>

At these times, our higher (thinking) brain goes offline so it is trickier for us to problem-solve, use our words to communicate and consider the consequences of our words and actions. We begin to react from our lower (emotional) brain, which results in us simply setting free whatever has built up inside our heads... without a second thought.



This video explains what happens and why: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bKuoH8CkFc>

When your child has flipped their lid, trying to reason with them is not going to work; so how can we lend our calm at this point instead of adding our chaos to their's? Imagine losing the car keys when you are late, what would help you to think logically, discuss and problem-solve? Someone matching your anxiety or anger? Being told to 'Calm down'? I try to remember the saying in the speech bubble:



When we are overwhelmed with big, uncomfortable emotions we revert to 'baby state'; it is helpful to remember how we calm agitated babies – gently but firmly holding (if possible), rocking to and fro, saying a gentle 'sh' and slow, deep breathing. Breathing exercises help to trick the Big Boss Brain back into realising that the body is not in real, physical threat. There are lots of ways to steady breathing on this website: <https://copingskillsforkids.com/deep-breathing-exercises-for-kids>

Noticing someone's big, uncomfortable emotions is very powerful; I know adults who use it in their working day to great effect! Using words such as, 'I can see something really big is going on for you right now by the way you're [NAME THE BEHAVIOURS YOU SEE/HEAR]. I'm wondering if you're feeling [NAME AN EMOTION THAT YOU THINK MIGHT BE RIGHT - YOU MIGHT EVEN KNOW WHAT HAS MADE THEM FEEL THIS WAY eg 'angry because you want to watch something else on the TV']. I know you want to [NAME IT e.g. watch TV, have some sweets] but I can't change my mind.' Knowing that someone gets what is going on for you can take away the need to 'act out'; encouraging your children to 'be clever and use their words' is a valuable lesson.

To get our logical thinking brain back online, we do logical and/or creative activities, e.g. sorting coloured beads or coloured match sticks, sorting or ordering a pack of playing cards, word searches, colouring, drawing, popping bubble wrap, build Lego models, Sudoku or word search puzzles. It is important that your child tidies away any equipment they have used to provide closure to the activity. If one lot of sorting does not calm them enough, get them to tidy and sort again. Some people find it useful to prepare a box of logical activities with their child in readiness; the children are very good at knowing what will work for them.

Once calm, a conversation can help children see what they can learn from their fire or storm. Using words such as 'notice' and 'wonder' ensures that children do not feel judged or under pressure to explain themselves until they are ready; they may need time to process what has happened. For example, 'I noticed you were [NAME THE BEHAVIOURS] I wonder if you were feeling [NAME ONE OR MORE EMOTIONS]' Don't push for an answer, that might pile on the pressure and start it all off again, but it will have planted the seed of thought.

Earlier I said that it is important for children to know that **ALL EMOTIONS ARE OK**; it is equally important for them to understand that **NOT ALL ACTIONS ARE OK**. In their Emotional Well-Being lessons, we looked at **SAFE** and **UNSAFE** anger. Basically, **UNSAFE ANGER** hurts ourselves, other people or things. I wonder how many examples your child can think of. One of the activities you can do with your children is to research safe ways to 'set the stresses free'. Here are some links to help:

<https://gozen.com/50-calm-down-ideas-to-try-with-kids-of-all-ages>

<https://www.thechaosandtheclutter.com/archives/13-effective-calm-down-activities-for-kids>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/joinin/seven-techniques-for-helping-kids-keep-calm>

<https://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/family/things-to-do/glitter-jars-how-to-calm-down-jar-105300>

Do not forget that the staff are all still here to support you in any way we can. If you would like to discuss any of this further or would like to discuss a particular situation, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Seal [kseal@stmarysrc.e-sussex.sch.uk](mailto:kseal@stmarysrc.e-sussex.sch.uk)

Wishing you all calm in the days and weeks to come. Karen Seal (Inclusion Manager)