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SHIELDING DURING COVID-19

Advice for children
and young people

IT'S BEEN IMPORTANT
TO THINK ABOUT
SHIELDING SINCE WE
FIRST DISCOVERED
A NEW ILLNESS,
COVID-19



WHAT DOES SHIELDING MEAN?

'Shielding' is a new word that describes what you might have been doing if you (or someone in your family) has a health condition that means they could become ill more easily. It has been important to think about this since we first discovered a new illness, Covid-19.

Shielding means that you might have been staying at home more than other people and you spend most of your

time with your family (or whoever lives with you) at home. Perhaps even at home, you (or someone else in your family) might have to be careful about being close to other people.

What do you think about the word 'shielding'? It makes us think about a protective shield to keep you safe (a bit like this!).



WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN SHIELDING?



There are different types of health condition that might mean a person has to shield. Some of them are:

If your immune system is weak (immunodeficiency or immunosuppression).

If you have a breathing condition (respiratory).

If you have a condition related to your brain (neurological).

You might have another health condition that means shielding will help to keep you safe.

Someone who lives at home with you might have one of these health conditions.

WHAT HAS CHANGED NOW?

As we know more about Covid-19 and how many people have it, the rules around shielding are changing. This might mean you get to do more things, like see more people or go outside more. The adults who look after you can help explain what the rules are and why they have changed.

The adults who look after you (like your parents and doctors) will need to decide the best way to help you keep your shield. This might be a complicated or difficult decision to make because there might be lots of different things to consider (such as health, school and spending time with

other people). Adults will also try to include your views in the decisions they make and you can ask them to do this too.

This might mean you keep your shield in a different way – and we might have lots of different types of shield. For example, you may start to go back to school but still have to be careful about being near to other people. Or you might continue with home learning but adults who help with your care might come to your house more. We all need to continue washing our hands carefully, using tissues to catch coughs and sneezes.

WHAT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS DO YOU HAVE?

Children have told us they have lots of different feelings about shielding and about the rules changing.

Feelings mentioned by young people who are shielding either for their own health or to help a member of their family include:

You might have felt more different to other young people.

You may have enjoyed spending more time at home with your family.

You might have missed spending time with important people in your life (like friends, family members or adults from school).

You might have been happy that you had fewer medical appointments.

You might feel worried about falling behind with schoolwork.

You might have felt bored or like you were missing out.

You might have felt more sad or frustrated than usual.

You might be excited to go outside more or see someone important in your life.

You might be looking forward to getting back into familiar routines.

You might feel nervous to go outside if you have spent a lot of time at home.

You might feel frightened about the risk of you or a family member becoming ill.

All of these thoughts and feelings are ok.



We are learning more about Covid-19 all the time and this means there are some things we can't be certain about. Viruses are invisible and not being able to see Covid-19 might also add to nervous feelings. It is hard to manage uncertainty and it is normal if this makes you feel unsure or worried.

A helpful thing to do is tell a grown up you trust about your thoughts and feelings – they will want to listen to you and find ways to help.

Other ways to cope with uncertainty are:

Make a weekly plan or daily schedule – this helps us to focus on what we do know about.

Keep to routines or create new ones – it might seem boring, but routines make things feel more familiar and safe.

Talk with other people – old friends or maybe even new ones you have got to know during your time shielding.

Boost your wellbeing – by making sure you have time for rest, relaxation, fun and physical activity.

DOES SOMEONE ELSE IN YOUR FAMILY HAVE A CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITION?

If someone in your family (like a brother, sister, parent or grandparent) has a chronic health condition but you are healthy we know that can be really tough. You might have different thoughts at different times – sometimes you might be scared about your family member becoming ill and sometimes you might feel frustrated that you are not able to do the things in life that you see others doing. Some children in this situation feel a lot of responsibility towards their family member. You may not want to talk about your feelings with the adults who look after you because you worry that they already have a lot to do. It is normal to feel like this – and we hope that you can find a way to tell a trusted adult about how you feel. You are really important too!

The advice in this guide is for you too. We know that young people in your situation sometimes may not feel good about themselves, so we hope that lots of the ideas we suggest are helpful for you. There are also brilliant organisations like [Young Carers](#) that are there to help (we have included their details at the end of this guide).



YOUR OWN PERSONAL SHIELD

Your way of shielding might change straight away, or it might take longer. It might change in a big way or a small

way. Change can be difficult to manage and it is useful to focus on the things that will help you as you move forward:

Which people are important in your life? How can they help to keep you safe?

What things can you do to help yourself keep safe?

What helps with your wellbeing and feeling good?

What works best to support you with learning and your education?

What is important to you at the moment? Are there ways to include more of this in your life?

STRATEGIES FOR YOUR WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

You might be experiencing strong, unpleasant or alarming emotions at the moment. This could include anxiety (worrying a lot) or fear about the rules changing, frustration if your own personal situation does not change or does not change as much as you would like it to, or perhaps a sense of unfairness if someone else in your family has health needs that mean you need to shield too.

Worries about our physical health, or that of our family members, can be very powerful and thinking about the ‘fight or flight’ response can help

us to understand how emotions like anxiety, fear or anger can impact us. You might want to hide away (flight), you might feel cross or like you want to reject advice (fight), or you might feel overwhelmed by your feelings (we call this ‘freeze’).

There are several things that we know are helpful when people are in challenging situations or experience overpowering emotions. We’ll look at what we can do to help ourselves in terms of thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

YOUR THOUGHTS



Limit the time you worry

If you find you are worrying a lot, or going over the same thought over and over (also known as ruminating), it is useful to allocate specific 'worry time'. Decide on a time in the day when you will allow yourself these thoughts and worries, and if they come up at other times of the day then remind yourself when your next 'worry time' is and put them aside until then. Make sure you put a time limit on your worry time (such as 10 minutes) and plan something to do afterwards to help you stop at the right time.

Write your thoughts down

Another helpful approach is to get your thoughts and worries on paper – you can write or draw them. Once you've done this, you could put them away in a 'worry box' or literally throw them away in the bin. If you like, you could open the worry box once a week and see what is inside – you could also ask an adult to help you with this and talk with you about these worries. You might be able to think together about some ways to reduce the worries. Some people like to use worry dolls or worry monsters instead of a worry box. This approach could be helpful to put a worry aside until your 'worry time' too.

Imagine you're helping a friend

Another way to create a bit of space around your thoughts is to imagine a friend is telling you what you are telling yourself. You might have to try hard to imagine this, but give it a go. What would you say to that friend? How would you try to help them? This is how you can help yourself too, but it is often easier for us to think about how we can help others rather than how we can help ourselves.



YOUR FEELINGS

Talk to the people you are close to

Connecting with people we feel close to really helps to boost our mood. Spending time with family and friends doing a relaxing activity together like cooking, gardening or playing games on a regular basis really helps with feelings of connection. Video calls, texts and messaging are great but sometimes a simple phone call can help us to feel close to someone if we can't see them in person. Or think about personalising your video call by doing a favourite activity together during the call (like singing or dancing to songs you both like).

Think about what makes you feel safe

When we are in 'fight or flight' mode, it is important to increase our feelings of safety and security. Think about what feels soothing or comforting for you. It could be something simple like having a bubble bath, a hot water bottle or getting cosy with lots of pillows and fleecy blankets.

Try some meditation or mindfulness

Mindfulness or meditation can also be great ways to increase our feelings of calm. There are lots of apps, videos and websites that are freely available at the moment and you can try out different techniques to see which ones work for you. You can also do everyday activities in a mindful way, such as eating or colouring (there are lots of mindfulness colouring in books available too).



YOUR BEHAVIOUR

Exercise helps your mind, as well as your body

We talk about physical activity and exercise a lot, and it is helpful for our minds as well as our bodies. This is just about getting moving rather than running a marathon! Try to do what you can – it is actually a good idea to start with a small step as it will be easier for you to do and afterwards you will feel pleased at what you've achieved. Don't worry if you don't always stick to your plan – let it go and try again next time.

Change what you're doing to feel better

If we're feeling bad, another useful thing to do is make a change straight away. This means changing what you're doing or where you are – just moving into a different room, going outside or picking up some loom bands, playdough or Lego can help (whatever age you are!). If the activity you change to helps to distract you, or you get really absorbed in it, then this is likely to have a positive impact on your mood (doing something with your hands is usually the kind of activity that works in this way).

Make time for your hobbies

'Positive activity scheduling' is another helpful technique – it means making time for activities that make you feel good and not forgetting about hobbies or interests that are normally part of your life. Think about your values or what is important to you – how can you include more of this in your life? For example, if caring for the environment is important to you there might be online campaigns that you could become involved with or issues that you could research to learn more about. Once you have decided on an activity, plan this into your week (so that you have something to look forward to and your time is structured a bit more). Make it clear when you are going to do this activity by making a weekly timetable to put on the fridge or perhaps adding it as an event on your phone calendar. If there are things you can't do in person at the moment (such as attend clubs), talk to an adult about whether you could do the activity in an alternative way. For example, if you usually attend a club outside of school, you could arrange a video call with some of your friends from the club and perhaps do a version of the activity in a remote way.





TOP TIPS: WHAT YOU TOLD US

We asked other children and young people who have been shielding to tell us their top tips that have helped them while they have been shielding. They told us that:

Letting an adult know about their feelings helped them to feel better and work through problems.

Sticking to a routine helps them to feel more settled.

Seeing friends on video and speaking to them on the phone is great.

Finding a new activity that they can do at home has beaten the boredom.

Looking up facts about things they like on the internet has made them super-experts.

Offering support and advice to others that have been struggling has made them feel good.

HOW HAS SHIELDING BEEN FOR YOU?

Michael, aged 15: Generally, I have been feeling really anxious and sometimes flat. I struggle to know how exactly I am feeling. For a while, I was angry that I had to shield from others while my friends did not. It is unfair. Also, I am passionate about participating in Black Lives Matter protests as watching videos of George Floyd's death, as well as others, was traumatic for me, and I want a change. However, I live with my grandparents, who are shielding, and I had to choose between supporting an important cause and considering their health. Not participating in protests has been frustrating and disappointing, but I am also keen to prioritise my grandparents' health

Tanya, aged 17: I think young people should avoid spending too much time on social media as other people share their difficulties which is easy to internalise and can make you feel even more anxious.

Ali, aged 16: Losing my regular routine from school has been challenging. I was in the middle of my GCSEs and I had my routine all planned. I have now created a new routine but I am anxious that this will change again. Having autism means that I am not always able to express my thoughts and feelings, I rely on my parents to help me understand how I feel and this helps to stop the overwhelming feeling that causes me to shutdown. If other children or teenagers are on the ASD spectrum I would say, try to take each day as it comes and plan a routine that will help you cope with the day. Try to find hobbies that are enjoyable and help you to relax.

Kehinde, aged 12: Some of the positives of shielding mean that I have been able to contact my friends more through online platforms. We have arranged lots of online games that have kept us busy so that we are not bored. Having other Deaf children to talk to has meant that I am less isolated – this has helped at times. One of the challenges of shielding is that I am unable to meet friends. I know that I can see them online or through a mobile phone but that is not the same as face to face. Being Deaf means we are very tactile and not being able to interact this way is challenging and different for us. I would advise families of children with deafness to make sure that they are always included in family conversations. As we are home all day and life carries on it can sometimes be easy to forget that we cannot always follow conversations and what is going on.

Harry's mum: As my child is non-verbal and does not communicate in traditional ways, shielding was a great way to gain a better insight into his behaviour, thoughts and feelings. I feel like I know him much better and understand what makes him tick. There have been challenges too. It was almost easier in the beginning as it felt like everyone was in it together, but as time has moved forward and the restrictions have been lifted for certain groups of people, shielding has become harder – it feels like we are the only people following the rules sometimes. What has helped is getting to a point where I could sit with the uncomfortableness of never 100 per cent believing in my decisions about my child and my family – every decision comes with risk, but acknowledging that and not beating myself up if I didn't make a great decision really helped me try to stay positive. I'd advise others who are shielding to stay connected – don't shut people out (as tempting as it is!) but also don't feel you have to get back to everyone.



USEFUL CONTACTS

Remember that if you are really worried you can still talk to:

Childline

You can make a call from Facetime, phone them, or just visit their website for advice.

📄 www.childline.org.uk

☎ 0800 1111

Young Minds

Their website has lots of advice about dealing with worries about Coronavirus, or how to cope with isolation or just if you feel anxious.

📄 www.youngminds.org.uk

Advice and support for young carers

The Children's Society

Information and services for [young carers](#) in many areas.

📄 www.childrenssociety.org.uk

Carers Trust

Information about [being a young carer](#), as well as how you can access help and activities (such as young carers clubs). Their website can help you find your local carer service.

📄 <https://carers.org/>

There might be other organisations that you could talk to. Or if you are still going to school, you can also talk to one of your teachers. Ask an adult to write any useful numbers opposite.

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