

Ideas for parents to take emotional care of themselves, babies and toddlers during the Covid-19 outbreak

At any time it can be stressful being pregnant, taking care of a baby or toddler. Having a baby can trigger lots of different and mixed feelings for a parent. Alongside this, one of the most important roles of a parent is to support a baby with their feelings. Babies and toddlers don't have the skills to manage their own feelings and are dependent on the parent to help them feel calm and safe.

The outbreak of Covid-19 means people are being faced with so many uncertainties and stresses. For a parent to support a baby with their feelings, they need to be able to manage their own feelings as best as possible. This is not easy, especially at these difficult times. It is really important that parents are able to take time for self-care in order to keep well and so be able to be available for their babies.

Below are some suggestions of things you could try:

keep connected with others

- Contact friends and family who you feel able to talk to about any concerns
- Make time to talk with friends and family about lighter subjects
- Create time for toddlers to have video chats with grandparents or other family members

listen to music

Find music that you find soothing and calming.
Notice how you feel in your body.
Notice any changes in your body as you listen to the music.

How your baby reacts to the music? What may it feel like for your unborn baby? Does your toddler like to dance to the music with you? Enjoy these moments.

Are there songs you like to sing? Are there songs your baby likes you to sing? How does this make you feel?
How does it help your baby feel?

take time to try and focus on your baby

Find a comfortable spot on the floor where you can sit with your baby.

Notice if you have worrying thoughts come into your mind and acknowledge them and then try and focus back on your baby again.

What do you notice about your baby?
If they make eye contact with you, look back at them.
If they babble, babble back. Take time to talk to your baby.
Give them space to talk back with their own sounds.

In the first few months babies like to look at faces most. They also need time to look away and have a breather, so it's good to give them space to do that too.

think about how your baby/toddler may be feeling

What may your baby or toddler be communicating through their behaviour?

Babies and toddlers don't have words for how they are feeling so they can only communicate these through their behaviour.

How do they react when they become unsettled?

What do you notice?

What may they be feeling?

What do you find you can do to help support them?

What do you notice you do that helps calm and soothe them? What helps calm and soothe you?

play!

See if you can make space to sit on the floor with your baby/toddler. Put a rug down and a few toys.

Watch your baby/toddler and see what they choose to do. See if you can follow their lead and join in with them when they invite you.

focus on your unborn baby

See if you can make space to think about your unborn baby and how they are.

You may want to try and talk to them. They start to recognise their mummy's and daddy's voices. You could sing to them or read/tell them stories.

Notice when they are moving and when they are having a rest.

have a break

If you co-parent with another adult, try and have special signals to let each other know when you need a break.

Which activities reduce your stress or help you feel brighter?

Have you got space in a garden or balcony where you can stop and connect with nature? See if you can take or find pictures of nature, sunsets that you notice you find soothing.

Perhaps you could try a relaxation, or exercise routine or workout that you could do from home.

Can you have a warm bath or try to catch up on some sleep?

Could you make a play list of your favourite music?

If you are a single parent can you set up an activity for your baby/toddler alongside you.

If you have any of your own suggestions that you've found have worked, please share them with us on social media @oxpip. We would love to hear from you!

If you feel that you would like to speak to someone or come for some OXPIP sessions then please either fill in the self-referral form on our website: oxpip.org.uk or call Lizi, Operations Manager on 0778 419 7088.

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notice how you are feeling

When you are feeling stressed, take a moment to:

1. Feel your feet in contact with the floor
2. Let your shoulders drop
3. Place one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest
4. Breathe in for a count of 4 and feel your stomach rise
5. Hold
6. Breathe out for a count of 4
7. Repeat two to four times

be kind to yourself!

Remember these are stressful times for everyone.

Be kind to yourself.

If you live with others think about how you can be kind to each other.

If you fall out or feel you got it wrong, see how you can repair.

Tell both your unborn baby and baby/toddler, that they are not responsible for your feelings, 'Mummy/ Daddy are anxious/

sad, but it is not you causing this'.

We need to tell children this because up to the age of 4 anything that happens in their world, they may think they have caused.

The other thing that is helpful to say when your baby is crying and you don't know why is 'mummy or daddy are here, I don't know why you are crying but I am going to try and work it out with you'.

Please don't leave your baby crying for more than a couple of minutes, babies need to be supported in their crying. Give them a cuddle.



OXPIP tackles some of society's most challenging issues by helping parents and their babies to form strong and loving relationships. We support families by working with parents and infant together, to build on the positive, to boost parental confidence, and help the parents be led by the needs of the baby. OXPIP offers intensive therapeutic help to parents and their babies in the first two years, in Oxfordshire and surrounding areas. Oxford Parent Infant Project is a local independent charity.