

**Supporting your child  
during difficult times:**  
a practical guide for  
parents and carers

**Our practical guide will provide explanations and practical tips about the following topics:**

- Proving empathy for your child
- Looking after your mental health and wellbeing
- Where your child can find support for their mental health and wellbeing
- Where you can find support for your mental health and wellbeing

Being empathic as a parent is all about putting yourself in the shoes of your children, and really understanding their feelings, and where they're coming from. This helps them feel truly seen and heard.

However, responding compassionately to help ease your child's distress is not always easy, especially if you're going through a difficult time yourself. It's important to remember that having empathy and compassion goes beyond the parent-child relationship.

It's also about providing the same empathy and compassion for yourself, especially in the face of adversity, such as cost of living concerns, relationship difficulties, and your own mental health concerns.

If we are attuned to our own feelings and what we are experiencing as parents, we are in a much better position to be attuned to the feelings of our children and to meet their needs.



## **Providing empathy for your child - practical tips from our team**

### **Try to set aside your own difficulties for a moment**

When your own worries and frustrations are at play, it can be really hard to see things through your child's eyes. Setting aside a time just for them can be a helpful way to focus solely on their feelings, without the background noise of your own difficulties

Setting aside some time for your child and parking your own feelings doesn't mean burying the things on your mind, it simply means pausing your own stresses just for a moment, to focus on theirs.

### **Name the feelings**

When children of any age are experiencing difficult feelings, it can be really hard for them to identify how they feel, or to know how to manage their feelings.

By recognizing your child's feelings first, not only are you helping them, but it also brings their emotional state into your awareness. This can help you see through their eyes in that moment.

If you feel their feelings are a result of something going on at home, such as financial worries or a relationship breakdown, this could be a good opportunity to name those feelings, and to explore those topics sensitively.

For example: "I can see you've been quite upset lately. I wonder if it's because of X?" Even if you don't get it quite right, the message is that you are listening, and that you care.

## **Play!**

Play is often the language that children truly understand, no matter what their age. Not only can playing together be mutually fun, but it also tells children that you are fully focused on them, which can help build strong relationships, and help tackle some tricky topics, too.

Whilst on the outside, play might look like simple fun, it can help children express how they feel without words, and in turn, help you to respond with empathy and compassion.

Aside from the fun element, playing can help heal disagreements and hurt, build trust, and increase feelings of security.



## **Looking after your mental health and wellbeing**

Many of us have an idea of what kind of parents we think we should be, but we often don't factor in that our life circumstances can really affect the way we think, feel, behave, and ultimately, the way we parent.

The reality is that although we might want to be that perfect parent, additional stress caused by all sorts of things, such as unforeseen financial concerns, grief and loss, and even relationship issues, can really take its toll on us as parents. Additional stress can affect all sorts of things, including our anxiety levels, and even our sleep.

It makes sense that if we feel overwhelmed by other stressors, it may affect the way we think, feel, and respond as a parent.

Here are some practical tips for looking after your mental health and wellbeing:

### **Take a time out**

This might be something we think of as a coping tool for young children, but actually, taking a breather when things feel difficult can help us, too!

Not only can it help parents to gather their thoughts and calm down if necessary, it can also help them to return in a more relaxed manner so they're in a better headspace to deal with conflict or difficulty.

Some time away from a situation can help us respond in a more empathetic way, rather than dealing with situations by shouting or reacting in a way we might regret.

## **Try not to blame yourself**

If your child is having difficulties, try not to be too hard on yourself. Although it can be quite upsetting if your child is struggling, and can make your relationship with them feel more stressful, it does not mean you are to blame for how they feel.

Children often release their difficult emotions with those they feel safest with, so you might be feeling the effect of their very powerful emotions.


## **Show yourself some compassion**

This is a tough one for many parents. By nature, lots of parents put their children's needs before their own. But this can mean that our own problems are buried, increasing feelings of stress, which can understandably affect the way we parent.

When we find ourselves doing this, thinking about the advice or support we would give to a friend can be helpful here.

TIP: Think about the kind words you would give to a friend in your position and repeat them to yourself like a mantra.

For example: "You're doing your best". Maybe your mantra can become something you repeat to yourself at the start of every day? Do what feels right for you. This simple exercise is a helpful way to show yourself some compassion when you really need it.



## **Give yourself a worry hour**

When we're dealing with our own worries, we can quickly get overwhelmed with our troubles. Giving ourselves a set time to worry, or deal with our problems, might help to contain these issues, and help shield our home life from increasing stress.

Of course, containing our worries to just one hour might sound too simplistic, or not possible at all some days. However, attempting to do this might just help reduce some of the overwhelming feelings, and help us become more aware of the time we give to things that may be outside of our control.

## **Helping yourself will go a long way in helping your child**

If you had a difficult childhood, are dealing with your own mental health problems, or are just facing difficult circumstances, you may be worrying about how this will impact our children.

Meeting your child with understanding and compassion - and even the simple fact that you're trying to help - will go a long way. Finding some help for them, and perhaps for yourself too, can go a long way in strengthening your relationship.

## Support for your child

Your child can check if our children and young people mental health and wellbeing service, Kooth, is available in their area by visiting [kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com).

If Kooth isn't available in their area and they need support, we recommend they explore the following support options:

- [SHOUT](#)
- [Childline](#)
- [NHS Choices](#)
- [Samaritans](#)

## Support for you

If you don't feel like you've got friends or family to support you, there are a number of practical and emotional support options available.

You can check if our adult mental health and wellbeing service, Qwell, is available in your area by visiting [www.qwell.io](https://www.qwell.io).

If we're not currently available in your area and you need support, we recommend exploring the following support options:

- [SHOUT](#)
  - [NHS Choices](#)
  - [Samaritans](#)
  - [YoungMinds support for parents](#)
  - [Mind](#)
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