

Look after yourself to look after others

As parents, the single most important thing we can do to support our children and young people is to look after our own wellbeing.

This can feel counterintuitive. But as parents in a household we have enormous influence over the emotional tone we set for our children and young people. What this means is that if we are feeling stressed and anxious these are the feelings that will ripple through our families. And while it is perfectly normal and human to feel anxious and stressed some of the time it's not helpful for our wellbeing or the wellbeing of anyone else in the household to feel like this all of the time.



So, what can we do about this?

We can make sure that we are putting our own "oxygen mask" on first.

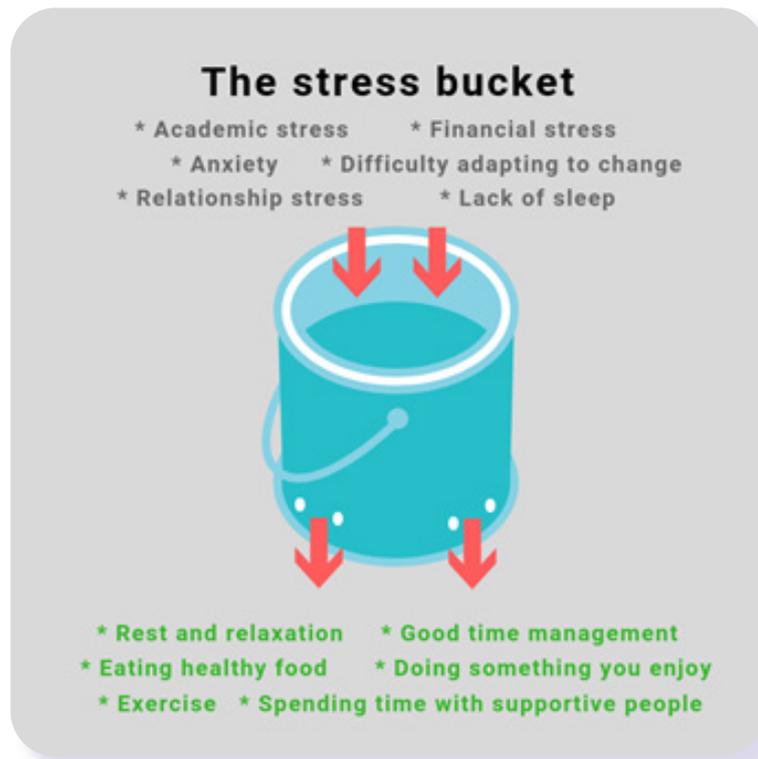
You all know the scenario, you have managed to stop your children squabbling over the remote control, you have taken the dog out, prepared lunch, found a repair person to fix the leaking toilet and suddenly one of your children is crying hysterically because their best friend blocked them on social media.

In this moment what our child needs more than anything else is a compassionate, kind response that leaves them feeling seen and understood. But in this moment, this can be incredibly difficult and perhaps impossible if we have not taken the time to look after our own wellbeing.

This doesn't have to be complicated, it simple means making sure you are taking the time to refill your own resource bucket. This is especially important during those times when things feel really difficult and our inclination is to put our own selfcare at the bottom of the list.

Developed by the psychology in schools team. The psychology in schools team is made up of clinical psychologists and senior psychotherapists who have worked in specialist mental health services. They have both generic and specialist skills and are trained across the life-span to work with both children and adults. As a team we are passionate about empowering communities to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and work in schools across Suffolk.

Simple ideas to look after your wellbeing



Prioritise the basics

- Get enough sleep
- Do some exercise (this can be a five-minute walk or a kitchen disco!)
- Eat regularly

Spend time in nature – we know from the science that spending even a small amount of time in green spaces is extremely beneficial to our wellbeing.

Spend time connecting (virtually or in person) with people you find supportive – this can be a five-minute phone call or a quick cup of coffee.

Think about the things we are grateful for – our brain is really good at noticing the stuff that is going wrong but not so great at noticing the stuff that is going right. Try writing down (or just thinking about) three things that you are grateful for each day.

Spend time doing something you enjoy - watching TV, drawing, reading a book, having a cuddle (a six-second cuddle releases something called oxytocin which really helps our body to relax).

Give yourself permission to feel all the emotions while remembering that these emotions will eventually pass. Sometimes it's helpful to say "I feel really frustrated ... for now".

Our children will listen to what we say but they will do what we do. When our children watch us looking after our own wellbeing it teaches them that this is something to be prioritised and opens the way for them to develop their own wellbeing practices. Sometimes we will manage this really well and sometimes we won't and that's OK. Being mindful of the ripple is the most helpful first step we can all take.