



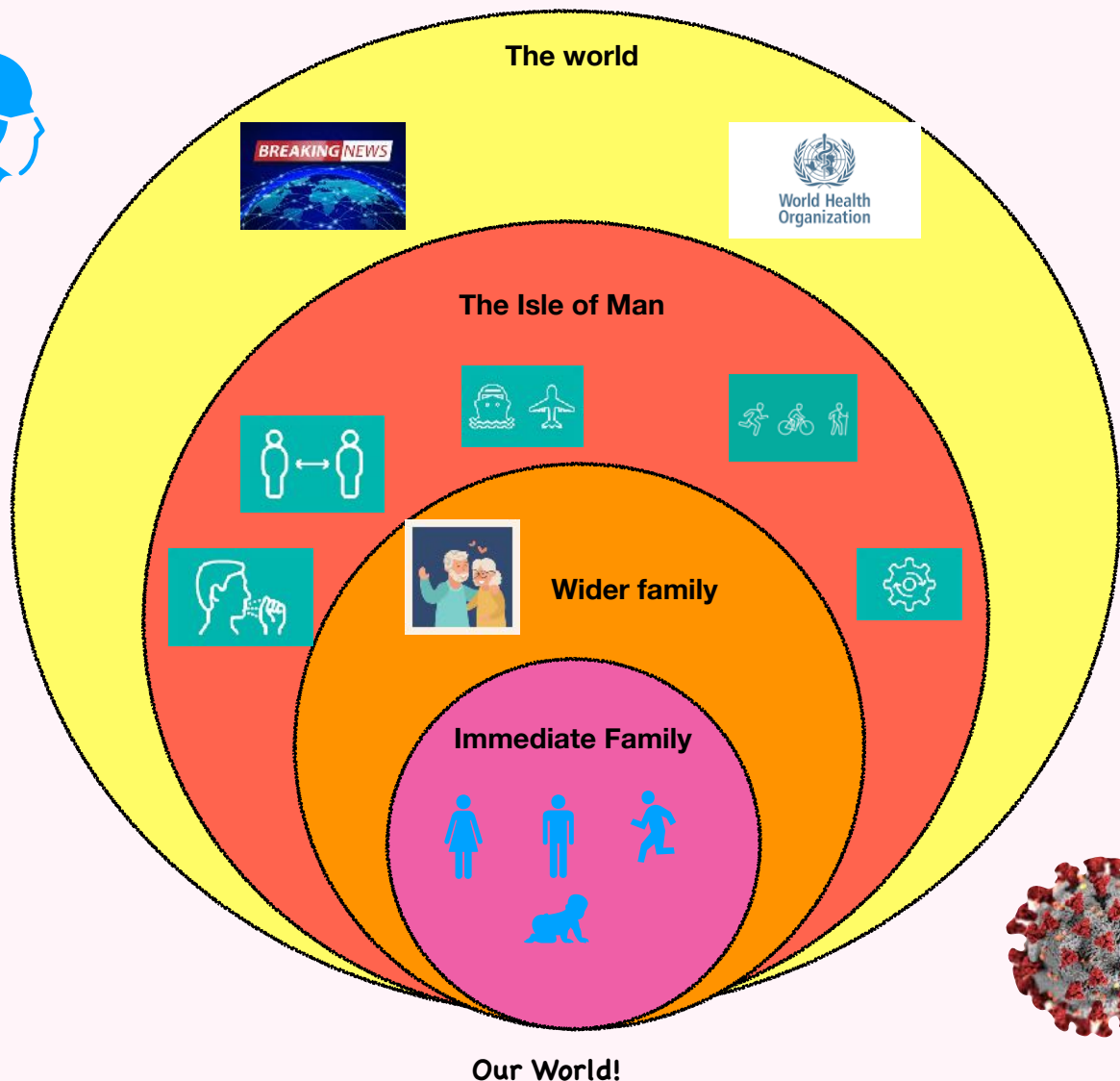
Parenting during the Coronavirus!

Can you really do it all?

A light hearted guide to realising that doing it all isn't possible and thats ok!

My name is Voirrey Sayle, and I'm a specialist teacher, complex needs, at the Pre school Assessment Centre, leading on Children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural difficulties. I have worked with vulnerable children in a variety of settings over the past seventeen years and I also have four children of my own who are aged 10, 7, 4 and 2. So as I write this, I am writing it not only as a professional, but also as a mum trying to juggle work and my family. I am very fortunate to have my husband at home with me, but whatever your family circumstances, you are likely managing as best you can, in the current situation.

The main focus in parenting during Covid-19 is maintaining your role as a parent. Our lives were compartmentalised and we had an established life pattern. Our roles have now increased and we now have to home educate, work from home, look after everyone, keep our children safe and follow Covid-19 guidelines whilst also maintaining daily exercise. No one can do it all, and with four children, I know I can't do everything - but are we failing if we can't juggle it all?



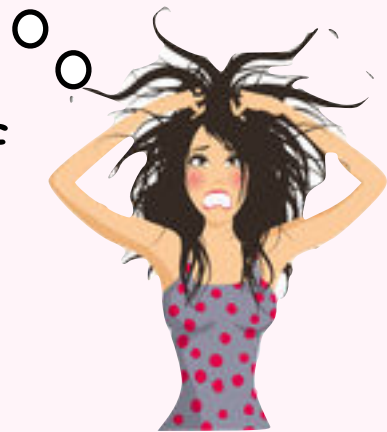
So what are we juggling in our lives ?

- ★ Keeping children safe at home
- ★ Educating children in the home
- ★ Feeding children
- ★ Shopping to be able to feed the children
- ★ Daily exercise
- ★ Keeping children happy
- ★ Supporting meltdowns
- ★ Nurturing children and giving them attention
- ★ Keeping our house somewhat* clean and tidy.
(*I say somewhat because my children have a talent for destroying a room in less than five minutes)
- ★ Financial concerns
- ★ Wondering when normal life will be back
- ★ The emotional rollercoaster of "what if?"s and keeping everyone safe
- ★ High expectations on yourself to do it all

- ★ Shopping for older or vulnerable family members
- ★ Keeping in touch with family and friends
- ★ Easing family and friends' anxiety
- ★ Press releases.
- ★ You may have someone in your household with underlying health issues that you need to protect.



I can't do all of this...



What you can control...

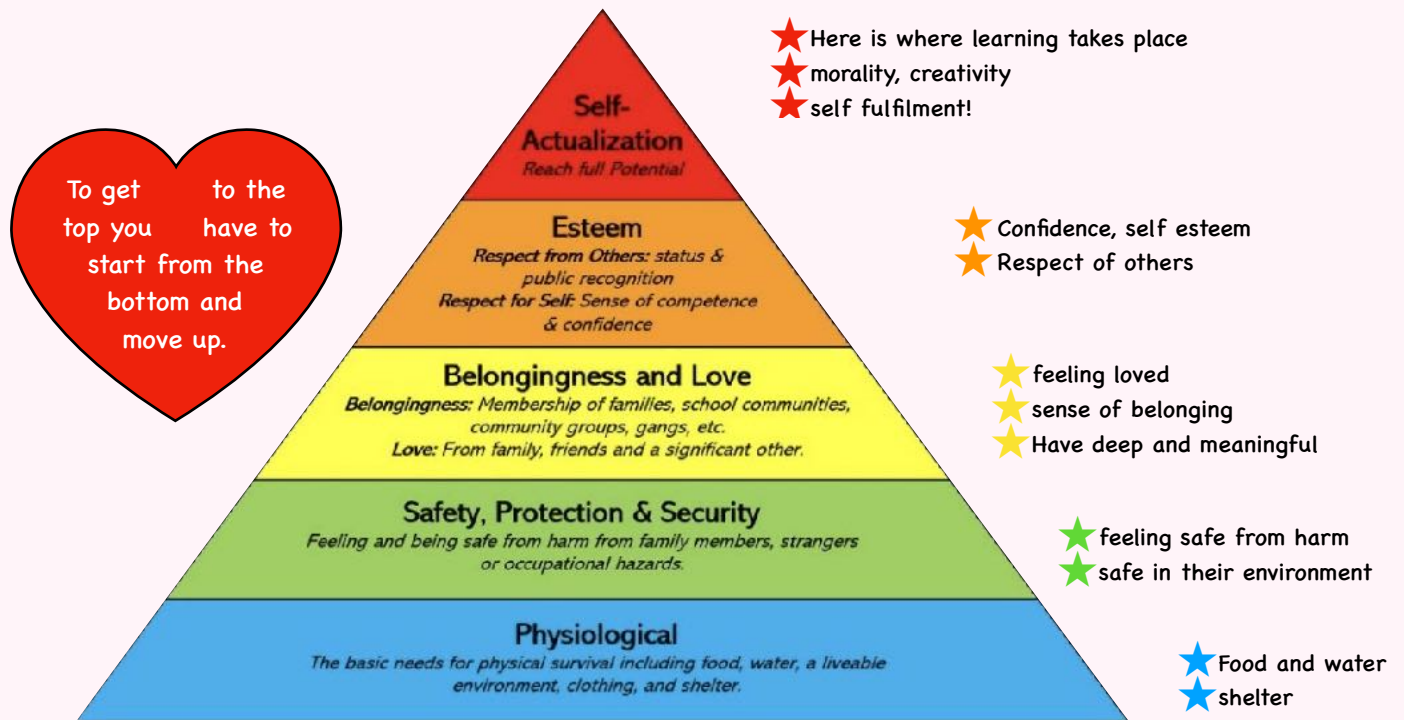
What you can't control...

- ★ Supporting your loved ones.
- ★ Taking care of your children's emotional health as well as your own - you are just as important as your loved ones. A happy parent means you are more able to cope in a crisis.
- ★ Spending time with your immediate family and being grateful for what you have.
- ★ Keep following the IOM government guidelines
- ★ Shopping for vulnerable family and friends
- ★ Staying connected with family and friends
- ★ Being kind to yourself and others
- ★ Accepting you aren't in control
- ★ Judging yourself or those around you for feeling anxious
- ★ Being present in the moment and not worrying about the future.
- ★ Focus on and accept the fact that things aren't going to be the same.

- ★ Constant stream of negative stress from the media.
- ★ How others are acting and behaving irresponsibly.
- ★ Decisions made on your behalf from the IOM government.
- ★ Availability of resources.

There aren't as many things you can't control but they have a major impact on the spread of Coronavirus. We have to focus on all the small things we can control to get through this!

What is important? What can you do?



Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. ... From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation.

Is having all the children at home as well as working at home even possible?



'You aren't my teacher, you don't do things the way my teacher does things and it's really hard to do work at home. I just can't concentrate. You don't understand that this isn't school and I can't learn in the same way here.'

A lot of people are feeling anxious and worried at the moment. That's not surprising given the impact the coronavirus pandemic is having on our lives. Children who are vulnerable are likely to find the changes to their lives difficult to manage.

Children and young people read anxiety easily, so it is important for us to put aside our own very real worries and to stay calm when talking to children so that they don't pick up on them. This isn't always easy.

You may see different behaviours coming out that you haven't seen before. Anxiety can have a massive impact on each and every one of us and it's ok to feel vulnerable.

As we have been at home it was a great time to potty train my daughter. However, she does like to join video conferences so there have been many times when she wants to 'work' too and I have tried hard not to show her bottom to the world.



Your main focus will be your children's emotional wellbeing and responding to any upset with consistency and compassion. You will already do this naturally. Understanding how important that nurturing element is, is even more vital at this current time.

You can't possibly balance everything in your life in one environment. You can't manage work, childcare and the household management and succeed in them all. Otherwise you will crash and burn.

Be kind to yourself, and the main thing is be to be flexible in what you expect from yourself and your children. Certainly my two youngest have had lots and lots of play. My home is not set up like an Early Years classroom. It is a home with toys that they like to empty all over the place all day long. They have had more fun playing with boxes and making dens and chasing after each other than you would believe. Is this learning though? Yes it is! My daughter who does not attend nursery yet has made huge developments in her language and social skills since schools were shut, and my youngest son has been counting, reading and doing lots of craft (Playdoh is not allowed in the living room!! I'm down to earth but I'm not crazy!)

If your child is struggling at the moment

- ★ Try to keep to a daily routine. Normal routine such as getting up, breakfast, lunch, tea, and bedtime. You will now have added in time for work and some outside time. A routine helps us know what is happening in the day.
- ★ Keep any learning tasks short. All children are going to find it difficult to concentrate at home so keep your expectations low and if they flourish with the task then you can celebrate.
- ★ Online learning- keeping learning a bit different than school has helped. Online learning activities, writing online. Maths games etc. They are learning while thinking they are simply playing!
- ★ Keep learning fun...if you are trying desperately to get your child to complete a task that doesn't interest them, you are fighting a losing battle.
- ★ If you find that your child/ren are bouncing off the sofas and throwing stuff around the room, try to get outside and allow them to let off steam. If this isn't possible, ask your child to help you move heavy items around the house or help move the sofa so you can Hoover underneath. This helps give your child the sensory feedback your child needs
- ★ If your child is getting very distressed that they can't see their friends and are becoming upset easily and getting cross all the time, instead of time out, try reconnecting with your child. I have let my eldest child stay up with his Dad and me to watch a movie and snuggle up. This has helped enormously.
- ★ Online games- I am not usually keen on online games and I personally feel that social skills are more important. However, having watched my son get his social time online playing a game and chatting with his friends, hearing him laugh and actually discuss strategy and take the lead on guiding his friends through a creative world has given me a different perspective. Try to hold back from restricting the time online as at the moment it's a lifeline to the outside world for us and our children.

Baking



I love baking, but have baked more during coronavirus for many reasons.

- ★ It keeps the children busy
- ★ Keeps the children fed
- ★ It helps with turn taking and maths
- ★ Baking can give your child lots of opportunity to develop and use both hands together in a coordinated way. Rolling balls of dough, rolling out dough with a rolling pin, and flattening dough with the hands are all great ways of letting children practice their bilateral coordination skills (using both hands together).
- ★ Food deliveries for family and friends in isolation- cake doesn't always bring happiness but it does help.
- ★ Baking makes us connect with our children and brings us closer together.

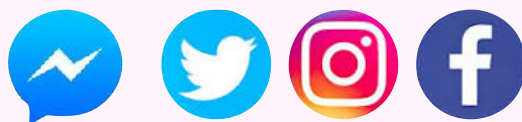
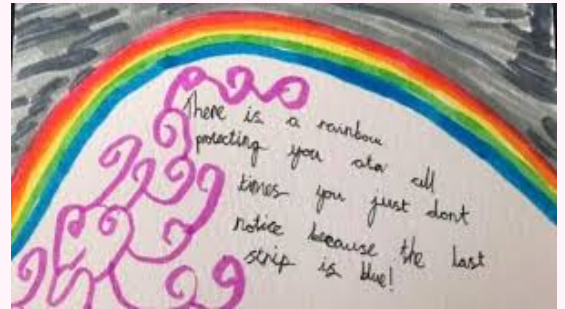
Keeping calm and managing stress

Is this all too much and you can't do it all? Feel like you aren't winning on home learning, work, keeping the house clean and tidy and generally being a 'yummy mummy'?

You aren't alone! This is totally ok!

What you can do!

- ★ Talk to a fellow Mum and know you aren't alone. Even though you can't actually sit with your friends and have a cup of tea and put the world to rights, do it over the phone or on some video conferencing platform. I have done this more times than I can remember and it really does help.
- ★ Take social media with a pinch of salt. I look at all the photos on how successful home learning is going for other people and have a little panic that mine haven't done enough. But acknowledge that not everyone has the same home life as you, and that your role is being their parent and not their teacher. This will avoid children struggling with the change of expectations.
- ★ Take a break when you can. My youngest two are permanently attached to me and sometimes I'd just like to go to the toilet by myself. Be honest. - we've all been there. This for me involved having a hot bath, as I just needed a little bit of time to myself. I'll be honest here, they did find me, and the youngest two ended up in the bath with me but it was actually really lovely and I had de-stressed. The twenty minutes I had made sure that I hadn't wanted to throttle everyone anymore. (It's ok to say how you feel...the important bit is to not actually do it!)
- ★ Try to keep calm and if you feel you are reaching breaking point because the children have yet again destroyed the living room (You'd only left them to empty the dishwasher!) Take a deep breath and breathe in and out. Challenge them to tidy the living room or actually if they are entertaining themselves, then let them play. My living room is currently a battle ground of a broken den, with blankets, benches, clotheshorses and toys...but the children are safe and happy and are allowing me to type this for five minutes so that's a winner. Another point to think about here is that no-one is allowed in your house at the moment so if it's messy no one will know. I say this...I have to hoover and empty and fill the dishwasher daily just to keep up.
- ★ Take care of your family and yourself.
- ★ Try to eat regular meals and have some treats. (I'm not saying you should drink gin and eat chocolate on a daily basis...but some days it does help!)
- ★ Get some daily exercise and get enough sleep.



Reframe how you look at the world



'My children are running round like maniacs...driving me crazy!' or 'My children are happy and entertaining themselves so I can load the dishwasher or get work done for half an hour'



Son: 'Is the Coronavirus over yet? I want to play with my best friend Jacob'
Mummy: What is Coronavirus?
Son: 'It's looking after people'.

Reframing is a technique used to help create a different way of looking at a situation, person, or relationship by changing its meaning. It's used to help people look at situations from a slightly different perspective.

'The children are arguing about who gets the next pancake' or 'My children are safe and are getting fed and they are all at the table at the same time'.



Links:

Anna Freud - National Centre for children and families

- ★ [.Coronavirus: From the perspective of a baby or young child.](#)
- ★ <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11465/helping-cyp-manage-anxiety-apr2020-v3.pdf>
- ★ <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11459/7waysanxiety.pdf>

SEBDA Association- Promoting the social and emotional well being of children and young people-

- ★ <https://www.sebda.org/news/supporting-children-at-home/>
- ★ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/parenting-during-coronavirus-outbreak>



I hope this helps you know that you aren't alone in your struggle. Keep safe and happy!

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'To be in a world in whatever way you need to. You do not have to be a certain way, you do not have to meet expectations of being confident or jolly or being vulnerable or in control. If you don't feel any of those things you don't need to pretend to be them. You are allowed to be scared, sad, vulnerable and out of control.' Miranda Hart 2020

