

Two Step Family Wellness

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Caring for ourselves with kindness and compassion involves paying attention to our bodies and minds as well as to our environment, including connections with other people. This programme is all about relationships but regular exercise and balanced nutrition as well as quality sleep are also core parts of wellness.

We aim to support you to understand what happens in your brain when you feel overwhelmed or stressed out. The programme is designed to support the wellness of young people, parents and carers. It is best completed with someone you feel at ease and safe with (close friend, a member of your family or a trusted person at school or work). Try and find time to look through the links below before you begin:

- [Dan Siegel's Hand Model](#)
- [John Gottman's Emotion Coaching](#)
- [The Biology of Stress](#)

You may find it helpful to listen to [Dr Sarah Temple make the link between neuroscience and mindful activities](#). You can find out more by going to www.mindfulemotioncoaching.co.uk and accessing video clips and a free e-learning portal.

Too scientific for you? Try watching Amy talking about Dan Siegel's Hand Model at www.thehandmodel.co.uk.

The two steps:

1 : Noticing your warning signs

2 : Noticing moments of calm when you're feeling good

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Getting to grips with the theory behind [Mindful Emotion Coaching](#)

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Mindful Emotion Coaching is based on the extensive evidence base and practical learning materials created by Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. We work with evidence based metaphors that are easy to remember and practical to use. By now you will know a bit about Dan Siegel's Hand Model and John Gottman's Emotion Coaching. How about also taking a look at the biology of stress using the model of [positive, tolerable and toxic stress](#).

Positive Stress is a normal and essential part of a healthy life where we are challenged by every day events. We may feel brief increases in heart rate or things like sweaty hands or even needing to go to the loo!

Tolerable Stress activates the body's alert systems to a greater degree as a result of more severe, longer lasting difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, or a frightening injury. If this doesn't last too long and is **buffered by compassionate emotion coaching style relationships**, the brain and other organs recover from what might otherwise be damaging effects.

Toxic Stress can occur when we experience strong, frequent, and / or prolonged adversity or difficulties **without access to compassionate emotion coaching style relationships**. This can include things like physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and / or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship and is much more common than we think. As a child, experiencing this sort of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the [development of brain architecture](#), affect immune systems, hormonal systems and how our DNA is read and expressed. In other words it **can change how our cells work together**. If you experienced toxic stress as a child you may find you more easily tip from tolerable to toxic stress as an adult.

This programme focuses on psycho-education tools that build skills and capabilities in emotion intelligence and executive function so that we can all learn to manage better situations that might otherwise trigger a toxic stress reaction.

This video clip from 'Circle of Security' [explains how toxic stress can affect our ability to parent](#).



1: Noticing your warning signs when your lid is starting to wobble

Think about the last time you got really emotional and then think back to how you were feeling in the time leading up to that moment. Research by [Paul Ekman](#) tells us that **all humans experience seven core emotions** - Joy, Anger, Sadness, Disgust, Contempt, Surprise, Fear. Sometimes emotions overwhelm us and affect our behaviour. Learning to notice both feelings and physical changes will help you take action early and make changes.

'All emotions are OK but not all behaviour is OK' [Professor John Gottman](#)

If you're having trouble talking about your feelings and labelling your emotions it can help to work with a trusted adult such as a Parent Family Support Advisor(PFSA) or Family Support Worker. Close friends and family may also be in a good position to spot any changes that you might not be aware of. Here are some 'Noticing' handouts which we have designed for parents and carers of children in Early Years.

[Handout One](#), [Handout Two](#), [Handout Three](#), [Majella's Handout](#)

You may also find 'Sometimes I feel' Cards by Pia Jones helpful.

Write down your warning signs

SUGGESTIONS :

worrying about little things, not sleeping, more fussy than usual about food, heart rate up, sweaty, head aches, tummy pains, binge eating, feeling unusually tired, feeling anxious about everyday things, snappy with friends and family, difficulty getting organised or planning ahead, arguing with people, mood changes, struggling to keep up with usual things, feeling hopeless, feeling trapped, drinking alcohol or taking drugs to cope.

Need help now? You can call or email Samaritans 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org

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2: Noticing your moments of calm when you're feeling good and your lid is down

When you're having thoughts or feelings that overwhelm you, it's easy to get caught up in the pain you're feeling and forget the positives in your life. Thinking about moments when you feel calm, happy and 'tuned in' may help you 'bring your lid down'. Professor Dan Siegel talks about 'The River of Wellbeing' in *The Whole Brain Child* page 9. Try and feel what it's like to be peacefully floating along in a good relationship with the world around you - sometimes you will drift toward the bank of rigidity (lack of flexibility and adaptability) and sometimes toward the bank of chaos (total lack of control). This exercise is about noticing when you are feeling calm and content in the flow of the river.

[River of Wellbeing Hand Out](#)



Describe the things you do that make you feel calm and content

SUGGESTIONS:

taking a long bath, exercising, spending time with a close friend or family member, walking my dog, spending time with my parents, painting, drawing, pottery, being creative, my faith or spirituality, spending time with my pet, helping others, sitting still, walking slowly thinking about my feet on the ground, yoga, massage, meditation, mindful breathing, mindful eating



ACTION PLAN -Caring for ourselves with kindness and compassion involves paying attention to our bodies and minds as well as to our environment, including connections with other people.

Managing my Sleep

Making sure I exercise

Eating well

My emotional and mental health

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