

The Big School Bell



Parents and Carers Guide





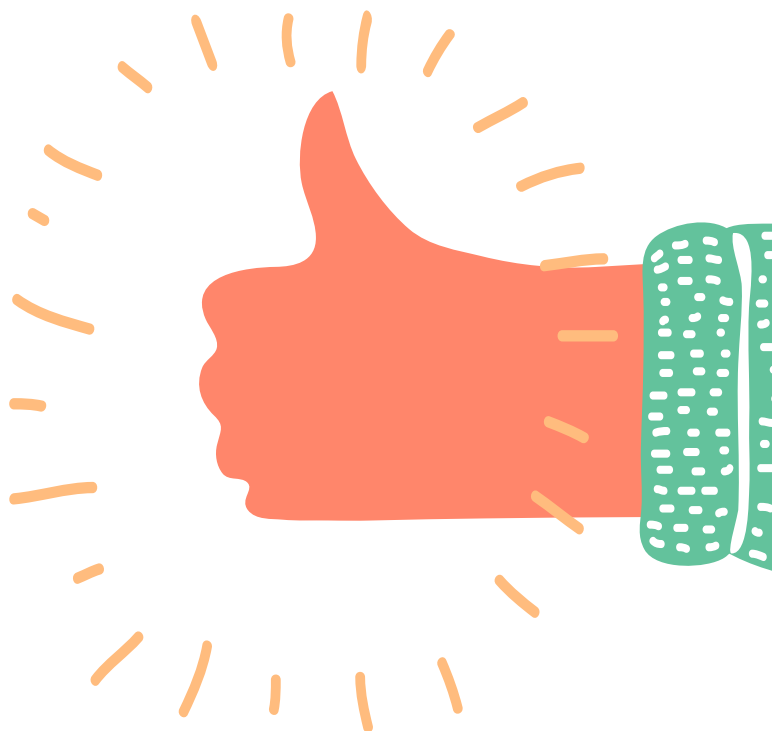
Introduction

Unprecedented. Unparalleled. Extraordinary. Challenging.

These are just some of the words used to describe the past few months of the pandemic. This guide is for you, as parents and carers, to help you support your children to make a healthy transition from this strange school-end to moving up a year in September, or moving on to new adventures.

We're all sailing the same storm but we aren't all in the same boat. Some of you are keyworkers, working hard to look after others and not being able to spend time with your own families – perhaps isolated from your children and loved ones for weeks or months. Some have been furloughed, with a lack of certainty about what the future holds for your jobs. Some of you will have lost your job and income altogether.

There have been other challenges too. Relationships have been strained and some of you will have been navigating their endings under very difficult circumstances. Those of you who are separated or divorced may have been managing childcare between you whilst trying to ensure your children remain healthy (both mentally and physically) while also moving them between houses. Some have lost loved ones. Regardless of your individual circumstances, every one of us has been trying our best to oversee some kind of home-schooling at the same time as managing our own feelings and circumstances.



You are doing a fantastic job!

This guide is to help you parent your children safely through this pandemic. To do this well, you need to be well cared for yourself. So, we begin with strategies for how to look after yourself first. We've included guidance for managing your own feelings during the pandemic, and ways to practise self-care that we've collated from parents and carers in a variety of situations.

We have also included suggestions for activities to support your children. These are adaptable to suit your own personal parenting style and include suggested conversation starters to encourage your children to let you know how they're doing.

Finally, there's a section on how to find further support for both you and your children.

We hope you find this guide useful!

"In order to move joyfully into new stages of life, rather than fearfully, kids need to know that they are part of a great big community who care about and honour their growth and unfolding. We ourselves can help our young – as we always have, by acting together to celebrate them. The Big School Bell is an act of community parenting for all our children, may it be the start of many more."

Steve Biddulph



Take care of yourself first

You can help your children better when you're in good shape.

That's not so easy when you're coping with difficult circumstances. It's useful to remember that you need to look after yourself first to be able to then take care of your children. Like the safety instructions on a plane, you must put your own oxygen mask on first, before putting masks on your children. You're no good to anyone if you can't breathe. It's the same with self-care, you need to take care of yourself so that you can then take care of others.

Your self-care toolkit

Many parents feel they should put their children first and aren't in the habit of giving themselves what they need in order to be in good shape for the job. We can often feel that we don't have time to look after ourselves, or that it's selfish. Below is an activity to help you think about what you need to do in order to take good care of yourself. Reflect on your experiences during lockdown with the following questions...

How has this time of pandemic been for you?

Be honest with yourself. All feelings and experiences are valid. Remember that feelings are never wrong. Everyone's experience is unique and important. Write your reflections here or use a journal if you prefer.

Where is your support?

This could be trusted friends, family, time alone, doing something for yourself that makes you feel good (a bath, reading, walking, gardening, etc.).

What has gone well? Where have you surprised yourself?

Maybe you've coped better than you imagined, perhaps you've mastered a new skill, or discovered a new talent. What have you enjoyed about this time?



Self-care tips

As recommended by parents.

Quality time together – and alone.

It's good to take time alone as a parent or carer even if you can only manage 10 minutes every day – try it!

Set up Routines.

Routines help everyone, especially in times of chaos and uncertainty. Use mealtimes and bedtimes to bring consistency and structure to each day.

Move!

Whenever stress builds up in your body, moving is a great way to help your body relax.

Meditate!

Using your mind to calm your whole system gets easier with practise – there are some great free apps to help you.

Give journaling a go.

Writing down your thoughts and feelings can bring great relief.

Talk to people you trust.

Try not to judge or compare.

It never feels good and everyone's circumstances are unique.

Go outside!

The healing power of nature can't be underestimated. Even if you live somewhere built up, go for a walk and look for signs of nature. You'll be surprised how many there are!

Unplug to reconnect.

Put screens to one side and dig out old family games from time to time!

Help your children stay connected with their friends.

If they're happy, we're happy, right?

Don't expect too much of yourself.

These are testing times and you're doing your best, however that looks.





How do you feel about your child's school end?

Children aren't the only ones worrying about falling behind this term and not feeling ready for the changes September will bring.

Parents are anxious too. That's natural, especially if your child is showing signs of distress. Schools are already thinking about how to welcome children back in September, help them catch up on any work missed and settle back into the rhythms of school life.

You might be remembering difficulties you had when you were at school which is making you feel nervous for your child, but they can have a different experience. Your feelings aren't their feelings, even though they may be similar. And it's also natural for parents to find the pull of a child growing up and moving on uncomfortable, it can be hard to let go. Talk about your feelings with other adults so you can then be there for your child.

Even when your child is anxious, you can trust that your child will get through this. And with you by their side, they'll feel cared for during this time that they're struggling. By remaining calm yourself, you will calm them. You can only do this by using your own self-care toolkit. That way you'll be showing them how to take care of themselves too – a precious life-lesson.

Also, know that you can trust yourself, too. Your parenting instincts will guide you towards what is right for your child. You'll sense when they need you – need you to listen, or talk to the school on their behalf, or advise them, or look for extra support. You've got this!

Find out how it's been for your child

In times of stress, children act out, they regress and revert to old ways of coping. That's natural. They've lost so much of what gives structure and a feeling of safety to their lives – the weekly routine of school, contact with friends, teachers and other adults. Perhaps there have been additional stresses at home too, work challenges, loss of income and worry about vulnerable members of the family. Our children pick it all up and worry, but often don't want to overburden their parents. Their feelings then show themselves in how they behave.

Our [free, downloadable guides](#) will help you support your child to make a healthy transition from this school year and prepare them for their next steps – whether that's heading into the next year, joining secondary school, starting work, college, A-levels or heading off to university.

The guides are a fun way for your child to mark the end of a strange school year. Working your way through it together will give you the chance to chat about how it's been and for your child to express how they feel about going back to school (or on to new adventures) after the summer.



Write your child a letter

Everyone likes a proper letter with a stamp that arrives through the letter box!

Writing your child a letter is another great way that you can help them through these difficult times. Sometimes it's easier for you to say things by writing them down and it gives your child something they can hold on to. A letter also gives you the chance to give your child something every child craves, their parent's acknowledgement that you believe in them and see them growing up.

At Rites for Girls we're here to support you to do your best in difficult times. As well as the free guides for your children, we offer online parenting courses, Girls Journeying Together groups for preteen girls and on-line talks from Kim McCabe, Founder and Director of Rites for Girls. You can find out more, including how to train with us, on [our website](#) and on our social media channels.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- **Even though this last term has not been at all how we expected, I've seen you...** (some things your child has done well)
- **You are really good at...** (tell them their strengths)
- **It's not always been easy, you had...** (name some of the challenges)
- **I saw you coping by...** (notice how they've managed well)
- **It's okay to sometimes find this hard, to feel...** (list some of the feelings you've noticed your child struggling with. "That's quite normal. You're not alone, we're all feeling a whole mixture of things")
- **In those times, I find it helps me to...** (say one or two things you do that help you when you're full of strong feelings)
- **We've had fun too, we...** (celebrate the good times)
- **I've got some good memories of this time, I enjoyed...** (share a couple)
- **We'll get through this okay, I'm here...** (offer your support in a way your child needs to hear it)
- **You've got this! Everything you need is already inside you and I'm here to help.**

You can make it funny and light, add pictures or family sayings, as well as giving them the clear message that you're proud of them and you have their back.

Further reading

Where else can you find help?

Supporting your child through the coronavirus pandemic [Young Minds](#)

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/supporting-your-child-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

Coronavirus advice and support for parents and carers [NSPCC](#)

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/coronavirus-advice-support-children-families-parents>

Parenting during the coronavirus outbreak [Mental Health Foundation](#)

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/parenting-during-coronavirus-outbreak>



The Big School Bell

Written by Kim McCabe and Lisa James.

If you are feeling worried or upset there are always people who will listen and help you at **Young Minds**.

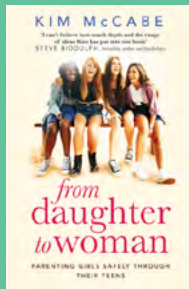
If you are ever in danger or need help, contact **Childline** on **0800 1111**.



These guides have been created by **Rites for Girls** as part of The Big School Bell campaign to help children come to terms with the end of a strange year during a global pandemic. The aim of these guides are to support young people and their parents and carers to identify and process their thoughts and feelings about completing this phase of their education and beginning the next. For more resources, information, advice and support, or to learn more about The Big School Bell campaign, head to our **website**, or follow us on social media.



We have also published **guides for boys and girls of all ages** which you can find on our website, along with information about our **Girls Journeying Together** groups to support Year 6 and Year 7 girls.



Kim McCabe is the founder director of Rites for Girls CIC which, since 2011, has offered year-long Girls Journeying Together groups, support for mothers and training for women wanting to support girls. Author of *From Daughter to Woman* ([available here](#)) and a series of online parenting courses, she guides parents through the preteen and teen years. A passionate believer in the transformative power of creating rites of passage for girls, Kim's on a mission to make the lives of girls kinder, safer and better supported.



This guide has also been endorsed by Steve Biddulph

Steve Biddulph is one of the world's best known parent educators. A psychologist for 30 years, he is now retired but continues to write and teach. His books, including *The Secret of Happy Children*, *Raising Boys*, *The New Manhood* and now *10 Things Girls Need Most* are in four million homes and in 31 languages. They have influenced the way we look at childhood and especially the development of boys and men. Today though, the mental health of girls and young women globally is also a major focus.



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Moving On Up
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