



MAIDEN ERLEGH

CHILTERN EDGE

Headteacher: Mr A. Hartley
BA (Hons), PGCE

Reades Lane, Sonning Common,
Reading, RG4 9LN
0118 972 1500
office@maidenerleghchilternedge.co.uk
www.maidenerleghchilternedge.co.uk

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Dear Parent/Guardian

I hope you have had some sort of break over Easter but most importantly that you are keeping safe and well. We are clearly still shut down for the foreseeable future although it does appear more hopeful that we could re-open at some point later this term. However, that is only my gut feeling rather than any inside intelligence I have from Number 10!

As you will be aware, we will resume our online lessons today. I just wanted to clarify a few things for you but we really want to make sure we use the feedback that we received from 130 parents in the survey we sent out in the final week of term.

The first point I want to make is that the work and our expectations need to be manageable. We have listened to your feedback and also wider discussions going on in the education world and reduced the quantity of work being set. We have also extended the time required for work to be completed. Whilst there may be a few live class Quizlet events, for the most part we have not offered live lessons as it allows families to plan their own routines. We know that not every household has either the space, the IT or physical capacity to all work at the same time so a degree of flexibility is required. My main 'ask' is that everyone has a go at the work uploaded but please only work for a realistic amount of time across the day. However, please communicate if the work is too difficult, too easy, not clearly explained or the resources aren't easy to read- we're desperate to get it right so that when the students return we are in a good position to move forwards without having to do too much catching up.

Whilst these key points came out of the survey there was also a lot of positives and 'thank yous' all of which is incredibly appreciated as I know staff worked incredibly hard in making sure provision was strong before the Easter break.

We will be doing welfare checks and phone calls again this week as it is important that we contact you after the Easter break and use this call as a chance to listen to feedback and support both you as families and the students as we navigate through this period. There will be a particular focus on Year 10 students and families in the next few weeks as we want to ensure they have maintained their progress through the GCSE courses ready for next summer's examinations.

We continue with our key worker and vulnerable student provision at Maiden Erlegh School in Reading. If you feel you qualify for this but haven't previously accessed it, do not hesitate to contact myself or Ms Benham to arrange a place. The day is broken up between working on Google Classroom and at least one activity such as Art, Drama or PE to keep the learning experience varied. We are running a bus from Sonning Common, through Caversham down to Maiden Erlegh Reading to help any students access this provision.

As we prepare for the next few weeks, I know that in my household there is a degree of anxiety from the grown-ups on how we will juggle our own jobs with the prospect of home schooling. I found the advice for adults below quite useful. Please don't think I'm trying to be patronising and I'm sure many of you are coping very well with these circumstances, nevertheless there is some useful advice in here. In addition, there is some useful advice on talking to children and home learning from the same source that also provides a good reference point.

Yours sincerely

Andy Hartley
Headteacher

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

It's really important right now to take care of your own physical and mental health. Children are very perceptive, and they react to what they sense from the adults around them.

Here are some things you can do to help keep yourself healthy:

- **Connect with others** – maintain relationships with people you care about through phone and video calls
- **Exercise** – take some time every day to move. You could go for a walk or run. You'll also find lots of fitness videos online for everything from yoga to dance. Find something you enjoy and that makes you feel good
- **Eat healthy meals** – try to keep a well-balanced diet and drink enough water
- **Get some sleep** – being anxious or worried can have a big impact on your sleep. If you're struggling to get a good night's sleep, try to develop a calming bedtime routine – for example, do 10 minutes of yoga or listen to calming music. There are also apps you can download that provide guided meditation to help you get to sleep more quickly
- **Turn off the news** – it's important to keep up to date, but the 24-hour news cycle can make you more anxious. Limit your exposure to the news to only a small amount of time, just enough to know what the latest government guidance is
- **Do things you enjoy** – now that we're all spending more time at home, we can finally take up that hobby we've always meant to learn. Try baking or gardening or learning to knit. These are also great activities we can share with our children
- **Set goals** – it's easy to lose track of the days in our current situation, so it can be helpful to set daily and weekly goals to give us a sense of control and purpose. Examples might be setting a goal of walking for half an hour at least 3 times this week or reading a new book
- **Connect with the outdoors** – depending on where you live, it may not be possible to spend time outside. If you don't have a garden or terrace, you can still open a window to let some fresh air and sunlight in. Put a comfortable chair by the window so you can look outside and get some air as you read a book
- **Talk to someone** – during this difficult time, sharing with family and friends how you're feeling and what you're doing to cope can be helpful for both you and them. There are also helplines you can call for support – we've included a list at the end of this pack

How to talk to your child about what's happening

The tips here are from our article [Coronavirus: addressing pupil anxiety](#). If you've shared these with parents previously, you could adapt the line below to frame this information as a reminder.

No matter how calmly you manage the current environment, children are likely to be anxious, so it's important to talk to them about what's happening.

For younger children

Children pick up bits of information from their friends, from the news and from listening to adults talking around them – but they can misunderstand what they're hearing.

- **Deal with the news head-on and talk about it openly and calmly, giving them the facts**
 - Give them age-appropriate information – take a look at:
 - [BBC Newsround hub](#) – regularly updated with information and advice
 - [#covibook](#) – for under 7s
 - [Children's guide to coronavirus](#) – a download from the Children's Commissioner to help explain the situation to children
 - Teach them how to know if information they find on the internet is reliable. Explain how some stories on social media may be based on rumours or inaccurate information
 - Encourage them to take breaks from listening to or reading the news – overexposure isn't helpful
- **Encourage questions**

- This will give them the confidence to reach out, if they have anything to ask
- Be reassuring but honest when answering questions – it's ok if you don't have all the answers
- Be ready to answer the same question over and over – children tend to repeat themselves when they're feeling uncertain or worried, so you might have to answer the same questions more than once as they seek extra reassurance

➤ **Be a role model**

- Recognise and manage your own worries first
- Be open about your own feelings and let them know it's normal to be concerned – for example, let them know you're also finding the news a bit worrying and what you're doing to stay calm

➤ **Explain how our body's immune system protects us**

- It's constantly working against germs without us knowing. We can't and don't need to control this process
- Explain that we're taking precautions against this particular germ because it's a new one which our bodies haven't come across before
- Remind them how important it is that they eat healthy food, sleep and exercise, as this helps to fight germs
- If it helps, reassure them that the effects of this virus on healthy young people are very mild

➤ **Keep doing your bit to help children reduce the spread of germs**

- Remind them to maintain good hygiene like bathing daily and wearing fresh clothes
- Encourage them to sing 'happy birthday' twice when they're washing their hands

For older children

Older children will have the same anxieties about their own health and that of their family and friends as younger children. But they're also likely to feel socially isolated, and worried about the result of school closures on their education and what life will be like after the pandemic is over.

In addition to the steps above:

- **Encourage them to maintain social ties** – relationships are especially important for older children, so give them room to keep in touch with their friends
- **Equip them with accurate information** – for example:
 - [Mythbusters](#) from the World Health Organization
 - [Data visualisation pack](#) from Information is Beautiful (regularly updated)
- **Share tools to help them manage anxiety**
 - YoungMinds: [practical steps to take if you're anxious about coronavirus](#)
 - Mind: [how to take care of your wellbeing when staying home](#)

If your child struggles with higher levels of anxiety

Some children are naturally more anxious, such as those with existing phobias or obsessive-compulsive disorders. The current situation can make those anxieties worse.

- Get them to do activities such as counting, ordering and sorting tasks which can help them calm down
- Encourage them to use relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing
- Look out for obsessive or compulsive behaviours and try to get ahead of them early by challenging unhelpful thoughts and assumptions
- If you're worried about your child's anxiety, **YoungMinds** is a charity dedicated to children's mental health. They've opened a [parents' helpline](#) for confidential, expert advice. You can reach them at 0808 802 5544

Helplines and websites for children and young people

If your child would like to speak with someone confidentially, there are helplines and websites specifically for them.

ORGANISATION	CONTACT INFORMATION
Shout Free, confidential support via text, available 24/7	Text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to text with a trained crisis volunteer who'll provide active listening and collaborative problem-solving
The Mix Free confidential telephone helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, whatever the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call 0808 808 4994 for free (11am to 11pm daily)• Access the online community• Email The Mix
ChildLine Confidential telephone counselling service for any child with a problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call 0800 1111 any time for free• Have an online chat with a counsellor (9am to midnight daily)• Check out the message boards

How to make home learning work for your family

We're realistic about what pupils will be able to do during this period, and we want you to be too.

You're not expected to become teachers and your children aren't expected to learn as they do in school. Simply providing them with some structure at home will help them to adapt.

The following tips are designed to help you create a positive learning environment at home. See what works best for your household.

- **Create and stick to a routine if you can. This is what children are used to.** For example, eat breakfast at the same time and make sure they're dressed before starting the 'school' day – avoid staying in pyjamas!
- **Involve your children in setting the timetable where possible.** It's a great opportunity for them to manage their own time better and it'll give them ownership
- **Check in with your children and try to keep to the timetable, but be flexible.** If a task/activity is going well or they want more time, let it extend where possible
- **If you have more than 1 child at home, consider combining their timetables. For example, they might exercise and do maths together – see what works for your household**
- **Designate a working space if possible, and at the end of the day have a clear cut-off to signal school time is over**
- **Stick the timetable up on the wall** so everyone knows what they should be doing when, and tick activities off throughout the day
- **Take stock at the end of each week.** What's working and what isn't? Ask your children, involve them too
- **Distinguish between weekdays and weekends, to separate school life and home life**
- **Give them chores** to do so they feel more responsible about the daily routine at home
- Ask them to **help you cook** and bake
- Accept that **they'll probably watch more TV/spend time on their phone** – that's ok but you might want to set/agree some screen time limits

Please don't worry about your children getting behind with learning. Everyone's in the same boat, and when things get back to normal we'll make sure we get everyone back on track.