**Midlothian Educational Psychology Service**

**When children are worried about going outside**

We have been having lots of conversations lately with parents who are finding that their children are really anxious about going outside for daily exercise. This is something that has been noted across the country – the University of Oxford’s ‘Co-SPACE (COVID -19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents and Children in Epidemics) Study’ found that almost a fifth of primary aged children were feeling fearful about leaving the house.

Being worried about catching the virus is actually a very healthy response! It is sensible to fear something that is a real threat and it is this anxiety, and the behaviours we use to avoid the threat, that helps to keep us safe. But at the same time, we don’t want our fears to become overwhelming and stop us doing other things that are important for our well-being.

So what can we do when our children are worried about going outside?

Firstly, we need to think about how we manage our own anxieties and the emotional impact we have on our children. Remember, It is important to attend to our own feelings and wellbeing in the first instance, just as we would put on our own oxygen masks first before helping others (as we discussed in our post on self-care).

We can talk to children about the recommendations that the government has made(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others-social-distancing/pages/staying-at-home/>) to help us keep safe while we are out and about. We can plan an activity such as going for a bike ride and discuss the ways we will keep safe before leaving (for example, moving out of the way of other people exercising, not stopping to chat, not touching fences, gates or benches, not clapping dogs) and when we get home (for example, washing our hands thoroughly).

BBC Newsround has created a short video that explains social distancing using dominoes ( <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51989370>) and we have created a short visual story for children who are worried about going outside that you might find useful.

It is important that we know, and that we communicate to our children, that it is okay to feel worried. If we are concerned about going outside then we are more likely to follow the guidance and do the things that help to keep ourselves and others safe, like social distancing and handwashing.

If you have further concerns about anxiety and your child then please also take a moment to read our booklet ‘Anxiety in Children: Advice for Parents and Carers’ (<https://mideps.edublogs.org/files/2020/04/Supporting-your-child-with-anxiety.pdf>).