

## Advice for Parents Part 3: Create a routine and structure to your day with HOOGARH moments!

(HooGarh: my take on Hygge. I love saying, 'Let's have a HooGarh moment'!)

There has never been a better reason to create 'HooGarh' moments alongside routine and structure. I'm sure we all need to take care to reduce our anxiety and stress, and to avoid over focusing on the news.

There is a reason that we have structure and routine in our lives. There is much research out there that suggests that it is good for our mental health. It doesn't have to be rigid or set in stone. It doesn't have to put a stop to our creativity. But in actual fact, the most creative and chaotic of us, are creative and chaotic within a structure that works for us.

With children at home now, creating the structure for you all to work around one another is probably a very good idea for the following reasons:

- gives a logical sequence and flow to our day;
- gives an air of security and grounding to children;
- develops self-discipline and independence in children (if they know the structure of the day they can feel more in control and then make more informed decisions about when they do things);
- instils good routines so that they become habits, such as brushing your teeth, starting the day with learning task - if this becomes the routine/habit there will be less struggle over time; and,
- reduces the need for procrastination and deliberating - the routine is set, which leaves more time for doing which leads to less decisions that need to be made which reduces stress.

I loved visiting my grandparents when I was younger as their whole day circled around a series of traditions and structure. They were so set in their ways, from breakfast to sherry time to after supper chess time! It worked for them.

I discovered HooGarh when I realised that I was about to face one of the toughest times of my life. Being informed that cancer had returned and that it wasn't curable forced me to readjust my aspirations. I had lived a fun and busy life: travelling the world and following a career that I loved. Despite being brought up on Mersea Island where my parents instilled a love for the outdoors and fresh air, I took Mersea and 'home' for granted. Suddenly I had to stop the life I knew and start a new one of endless NHS appointments and treatment. However, during this time a very good friend and colleague introduced me to the idea of making the most of the small things. She has a Norwegian heritage and told me this...

"In Norway we have the concept of Hygge (Danish pronounced 'HooGa') but we tend to call it 'Kos'. A cuddle is a kos; if you're sitting in your favourite chair, reading a good book we would say that 'du koser seg'- quite literally you're cosying yourself. Norwegians look for the light everywhere, particularly through the winter and spring. So when they go to their cabin in the mountains (they're not allowed to at the moment but they will again!) they will find the outside wall which gets the most sun and that is literally the sun wall (sol veggen). If there is snow (and there often is) a bench seat will be dug into the snow. Make sure you use your sitteunderlag (a knitted/felted or less environmentally friendly polystyrene pad to insulate you from the cold) on the snow though. Any little bit of sun they get will see them all outside at solveggen with either a hot chocolate or coffee in hand. And maybe a Kvikk Lunsj. Which Brits may think is a Kit Kat but which we assure you is sooooo much better. These little rituals are important to make the most of the light in the dark, the warmth in the cold."

I was sold. I wanted to jump on a plane and go to Norway that instant.

Some words to describe 'Kos' or 'Hygge' could be cosy, contentment, well-being, homely, everyday togetherness...

More importantly, it is free and an atmosphere, not to be associated with succumbing to the huge marketing scam out there encouraging you to spend tons of money on candles and throws to create a Scandi-style house!

Why not get together with your family and check your daily routine, then discuss what HooGarh moments you can have? What does it mean to you? (Always phone free). Some moments may be scheduled, others may happen spontaneously.

Ideas...

- 10 minutes in the sunshine with a hot chocolate together
- putting on a song you all enjoy and lying flat on your back listening to it
- family movie time with cushions, rugs and dimmed lighting
- baking together, licking the bowl, sharing the first bite of warm bread together...
- look through old photos, talk to your child about some happy memories from the past and how you will have them together again in the future, discussing the places you would like to travel to
- no agenda or moaning or discussing the news!