



CONVERSATIONS

# Emma Freud's legal highs: dysfunctional families

Emma Freud | Saturday May 16 2020, 12.01am, The Times

**I**'m writing to you from self-isolation in a small village on the coast in Suffolk. I had intended my legal high this month to be the joys available to a family living in confinement.

I was going to tell you what happened when we all went to separate windows and sang *Nessun Dorma* into the street to cheer up our elderly neighbours - and how the empathetic pride in engaging in altruistic activities created a dopamine high that kept us buzzing all night.

I had planned to describe how we gathered chilli peppers and made the hottest of hot sauces to release natural endorphins, which are chemically similar to morphine. You were going to be inspired by the earthy joy created by our family baking sessions using vegetables from the garden: "Beetroot instead of chocolate, you say?" "Oh yes, it's a serotonin lifter."



And I was hoping you'd be just the tiniest bit jealous that we had disconnected the TV and electronic games, and, once we had completed our morning exercise sessions, were filling the day with crafting, making porcelain crockery and gathering samphire to enhance the vegan feast we were communally cooking at nights.

That was the plan. The reality is that yesterday my 16-year-old got up at 3pm and stayed in bed watching cartoons before eating three bowls of cereal for supper. My 18-year-old is in charge of the laundry, but every time he shrinks one of his shirts, he blames me for not having brought him up better. My kids are binge-playing video games, complaining about their household chores every single day - and behaving so badly in home school that one is serving out a detention and I'm on the point of expelling another.

To top all that, I have never known arguments like it. We argue about who talks too loudly, who eats too noisily, and who has control over the remote (despite living with a sister who's written an actual book about feminism, her three brothers like to insist remotes are male territory). We argue about how many times we have argued and who is behaving worst. And quite often the winner of that particular crown turns out to be me, but only because the rest of them are all so annoying.

It turns out my column is here to give you a serotonin rush as you realise how much better your family is than someone else's - and the oxytocin-filled relief that everyone's family is as hopelessly dysfunctional as your own.