

# How to Support Small Children During COVID-19

We understand that many of our families will find these unprecedented times worrying and confusing. But what about our children? We all want to support our children especially with their emotions however this can feel impossible when we do not know the answer to their questions. Here we have put together some advice on how to support your small child whilst everything is so different in their world.

No family is perfect and please do not put unnecessary pressure on yourselves to have everything worked out all of the time. Support each other as a family and look after each other with lots of cuddles, talking and family time whenever you can.

Some of the below advice may be useful. You know your family better than anyone so use what you think will work.

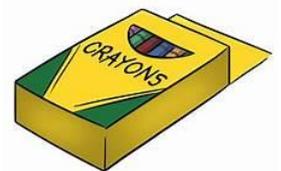


## Keep routines in place

The experts all agree that setting and sticking to a regular schedule is key, even when you're all at home all day. Kids should get up, eat and go to bed at their normal times. Consistency and structure are calming during times of stress. Kids, especially younger ones or those who are anxious, benefit from knowing what's going to happen and when.

The schedule can mimic a school or day camp schedule, changing activities at predictable intervals, and alternating periods of study and play.

It may help to print out a schedule and go over it as a family each morning. Setting a timer will help kids know when activities are about to begin or end. Having regular reminders will help head off meltdowns when it's time to transition from one thing to the next.



## Get creative with new activities

Incorporate new activities into your routine, like doing a puzzle, some simple art and craft or having family game time in the evening after you have finished working from home. Take a daily family walk or bike ride or you could even try some yoga — have a 30 minute session burning off as much energy as possible before returning to some quiet play.

Set children challenges in their play such as 'Can you build that lego house before I finish my email?' or 'Do you think you could do this puzzle by yourself before I get dinner cooked?' Keep checking in and giving them praise to keep going and build their concentration time.

## Allow your child's learning to regress

It is completely normal for your child's learning and independent skills to regress during periods of anxiety. At pre-school we often see this when children are due to go to 'big school'. Children may not remember numbers, letters and shapes like they used to. Don't make a big thing of it and be reassured that these skills will return when they feel more settled. Equally some children may be unsettled with sleep, toileting and eating. Offer lots of reassurance that they are OK and if they need extra support during this time then that's OK.



## Stay in touch however you can

Keep your support network strong, even when you're only able to call or text friends and family. Let kids use Skype or FaceTime to stay connected to peers even if they aren't usually allowed to do so. Communication can help kids feel less alone and mitigate some of the stress that comes from being away from friends. Technology can also help younger kids feel closer to relatives or friends they can't see at the moment.

Children may enjoy drawing pictures or even helping you write letters, send them in the post when out on your daily exercise. This will give your children something to talk to relatives about when they next talk on the phone.

## Manage your own anxiety

It's completely understandable to be anxious right now (how could we not be?) but how we manage that anxiety has a big impact on our kids. Keeping your worries in check will help your whole family navigate this uncertain situation as easily as possible.

For those moments when you do catch yourself feeling anxious, try to avoid talking about your concerns within earshot of children. If you're feeling overwhelmed, step away and take a break. That could look like taking a shower or going outside or into another room and taking a few deep breaths.



## Limit consumption of news

Children are like little sponges and even when we think they are not listening they very often are! Staying informed is important, but it's a good idea to limit consumption of news and social media that has the potential to feed your anxiety, and that of your kids. Turn the TV off and mute or unfollow friends or co-workers who are prone to sharing panic-inducing posts.



## Keep things positive

Though we as adults are feeling apprehensive about the future we must remember that to most children the words "pre-school is closed" are cause for confusion. Let them know that it is only temporary and as soon as we can preschool will be open again. They may enjoy sending photos or videos to their pre-school teachers or friends. Let them know that we are still here and are excited to see them again but also that you are going to enjoy some great time together as a family. Make plans for how you will spend your days and try to find one thing to do each day that they can be excited about. It doesn't have to be much, a simple game, baking or a bit of craft. They will feel your excitement and this will go a long way to helping them feel safe and reassured.

## Keep them in the loop — but keep it simple

Young children may be oblivious to the facts of the situation, but they may still feel unsettled by the changes in routine, or pick up on the fact that people around them are worried and upset. Children who are tantruming more than usual, being defiant or acting out may be feeling anxious. Pick a calm time and gently ask how they're feeling and respond to outbursts in a calm and comforting way.

Talking to children in a clear, reasonable way about what's going on is the best way to help them understand. But remember kids don't need to know everything. Unless they ask specifically, there's no reason to volunteer information that might worry them.

For example you may be seeing grandparents much less than before which may flag up questions of 'where did they go'. Explain that they are Ok and we will be seeing them again soon instead of 'we can't see them in case they get sick'. Try and stick to positive terms where possible so children are reassured that there is nothing they need to worry about.

## Do what is right for your family and don't feel the pressure to be a 'perfect parent'

Remember to be reasonable and kind to yourself. We all want to be our best parenting selves as much as we can, but sometimes that best self is the one that says, "Go for it," when your child asks for more time on the tablet or TV. This situation is unique and none of us know the best way to manage everything. Relax the rules and do whatever works for your family. The old routine can be bought back in later, do what is right for now.

