



Northamptonshire  
County Council

# Educational Psychology Services

## COVID-19 Support

### *Family Life Briefing*



MKFM.com

## *Learning to live with a world in which there is Coronavirus*

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Northamptonshire Educational Psychology Service...Bringing positive change and growth  
from the application of psychology through innovation and excellence

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**Embrace, Enjoy, be Excited with each other**



Lancashire Telegraph



## Northamptonshire Educational Psychology Service

### Information for Parents and Carers

This briefing brings together information that has been written to support families at the present time. Muddling along seems to be how many families are coping with what is happening at the moment. Here are a few ideas to help.

Families are currently spending far more time together. Worries about COVID-19, news showing numbers of people dying, scary pictures of hospitals, losing jobs, no school- are all affecting families. It can feel overwhelming for everyone at home. For children not being able to see friends, play outside, go to the park, see grandparents and having to have school at home is probably confusing and stressful. Parents becoming teachers, not having friends to see, not going to work, not having a break from home is also challenging. Not being able to eat usual foods, having to learn new skills such as cooking, creating new routines, checking what children are doing places pressure on everyone. Who is looking after whom at home? How can we live contentedly together? When we lose our social and physical networks, have new routines and things expected of us, life can seem very hard.

New research from Save the Children finds the biggest worries for parents in the lockdown are getting enough food, helping children with schoolwork and concerns about money. Children are worried about someone in their family getting sick, food shortages and not seeing friends. In fact 85% of children said they were upset about not seeing friends and relatives (Save the Children, 2020).

Inevitably with the additional stresses of the current situation there will be increased stress for families and feelings that might be overwhelming.

Sudden, unprepared for change affects everyone and in different ways. Over the past weeks you may have found it hard to believe the changes that are happening, found yourself becoming angry or down about these. All of these feelings are normal with change. You may have noticed how your feelings have changed over time or vary depending on the daily challenges that you face.

***All families are different. What works for you and your children will often be different from what works for your friends. What is ok one day may not be on another day. Feelings change. Feelings affect what and how we do things.***

Generally, children want to know that you are there, feel your presence. This is different from being actively involved. Just knowing that someone cares about you, understands your worries and your joys helps. It's the same for adults too!

## Remaining hopeful

We all need time to adjust to how the world has changed and continues to change. We are just at the beginning of this journey with our families. Be kind to yourself as a parent living through this difficult time with your children. **It's OK to not feel OK.** If you feel overcome by information that causes you anxiety, for example, about what is happening in the world, or about how well others' are coping when you feel you are not, consider limiting your access to such information. Resist watching the TV, streaming the news or listening to the news on the radio. Reduce time with people on social media who are scared, or saying everything at home is wonderful.

Read together *My Hero is You A book written for children around the world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.* IASC, 2020 : [Book for children](#)

Have a look at the easy to digest guidance for parents from WHO at the end of this briefing and explore the links provided.

Now is the time to express our capacity to care, show compassion and give emotional containment: The Three 'C's designed by Veronica Lawrence

**Caring:** about each other and care for yourself. For us to care for our children showing we care about them, we need to look after ourselves. When we feel nurtured we are able to nurture others.

**Compassion:** an act of kindness towards each other helps release feel good chemicals in our brains.

**Containment (emotional):** when we feel as though another person is able to hold our feelings for us it helps us deal with feeling scared, unhappy and cross.

Parents and carers offer emotional containment for their children. Adults in our lives will help us when we feel scared, angry, and unhappy by listening and understanding how we are feeling and we can offer this for ourselves by knowing and doing things that help us feel calmer.

## Emotions



See how ripples move out when raindrops fall, what you do can affect people more than you imagined

(Veronica Lawrence & Susanna Coventry 2020)

Being worried for a long time affects our brains. Living with uncertainty heightens the release of cortisol and other danger alerting chemicals in our brains. Unintentionally, the COVID-19 lockdown is increasing the chance of this over a prolonged time

- Get **outside** when/ if you can. **Physical activity** and **laughing** help reduce stress by releasing endorphins and other chemicals in our brains to make us feel good.
- **Talk about feelings** and worries with your children. Help to contain the emotion as it is felt to help those sharing their feelings to feel safe and secure. Help children understand their experience is normal and problem solve together what might help (see CONNECT link).
- **Routines** can give reassuring structure, Remember to include down time and me time.

## Relationships



<https://unsplash.com/photos/JfolljRnveY>

### It's OK to feel NOT OK

Expect some rows, crossness causing some friction in relationships, along with happy laughing afterwards.

**Pause**, take a breath before saying or doing anything.....and breathe

**Take time** for yourself and time to do what you enjoy (that's for children and parents/ carers).

**Reassure** it won't be like this forever, things will be different.

**Keep in touch** with others. Screen time can be a great help.

**Boundaries are reassuring.** Consider using screens as part of a healthy routine to help maintain a healthy balance of screen and non-screen activities.

**Seek help** if you experience domestic violence/abuse.

## Brain



**Smile often** – where and when you can. Smiling helps our brains release chemicals that help us feel better.

**Hug** each other. Giving a loving hug helps us mentally and physically. A hug talks without having to say anything out loud. The chemical “oxytocin” also known as the love hormone is activated. Oxytocin has many benefits in our physical and mental health. It helps us, among other things, to relax, to feel safe and calm our fears and anxieties.

**Laugh** even when you don't feel like it. Helps our brains release 'oooo' chemicals and for us to feel better than we did.

## Further links and resources:

The links and resources below are from other organisations and professionals that you may find helpful.

◆ WHO Coping with stress for adults and children. Brief one page, easy to read guides.

[Coping with stress adults WHO](#)

[Helping children cope with stress WHO](#)

Error! AutoText entry not defined. ◆ Emotion coaching steps: Valuable examples of how parents can support their child with managing emotions in the moment

[CONNECT](#)

Error! AutoText entry not defined. Finding the calm: Activity menu to keep calm and occupied includes ideas for all ages

[Finding the calm](#)

◆ Northamptonshire Baby Room Knowledge Zone for activity ideas for babies

[Northamptonshire Baby Room](#)

◆ NSPCC and Childline websites are further recommended sites with resources for parents and children.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

◆ [Government guidance for COVID19 Domestic abuse](#)

◆ See our other document on this page: Smiling, singing and shielding: a brief overview of helpful support strategies for families.

## References:

Save the children (2020): Families in Lockdown: Save the children reports 56% of parents worried about their children's mental health Save the children.org.uk

**Veronica Lawrence and Susanna Coventry, Educational Psychologists**

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help

observe  
encourage

consult

assess  
develop

focus  
advise  
appreciate

# 5 COVID-19 PARENTING

## Keep Calm and Manage Stress

This is a stressful time. Take care of yourself, so you can support your children.

### You are not alone

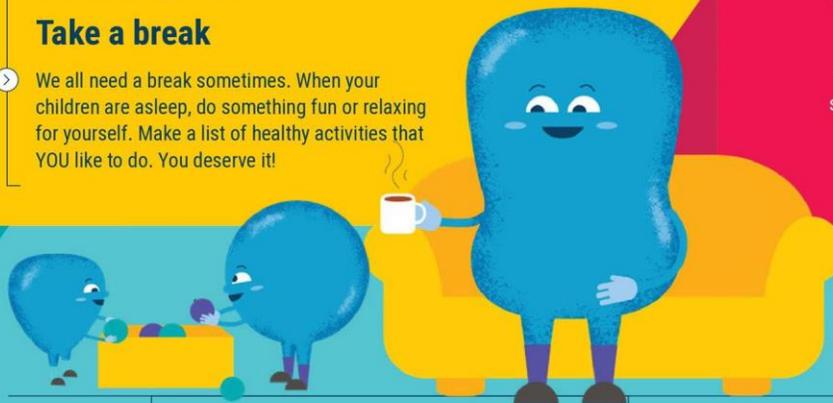
- Millions of people have the same fears as us. Find someone who you can talk to about how you are feeling. Listen to them. Avoid social media that makes you feel panicked.

### Take a break

- We all need a break sometimes. When your children are asleep, do something fun or relaxing for yourself. Make a list of healthy activities that YOU like to do. You deserve it!

### Listen to your kids

- Be open and listen to your children. Your children will look to you for support and reassurance. Listen to your children when they share how they are feeling. Accept how they feel and give them comfort.



### Take a Pause

1-minute relaxation activity that you can do whenever you are feeling stressed or worried

- Step 1: Set up**
  - Find a comfortable sitting position, your feet flat on the floor, your hands resting in your lap.
  - Close your eyes if you feel comfortable.
- Step 2: Think, feel, body**
  - Ask yourself, "What am I thinking now?"
  - Notice your thoughts. Notice if they are negative or positive.
  - Notice how you feel emotionally. Notice if your feelings are happy or not.
  - Notice how your body feels. Notice anything that hurts or is tense.
- Step 3: Focus on your breath**
  - Listen to your breath as it goes in and out.
  - You can put a hand on your stomach and feel it rise and fall with each breath.
  - You may want to say to yourself "It's okay. Whatever it is, I am okay."
  - Then just listen to your breath for a while.
- Step 4: Coming back**
  - Notice how your whole body feels.
  - Listen to the sounds in the room.
- Step 5: Reflecting**
  - Think 'do I feel different at all?'
  - When you are ready, open your eyes.

Taking a Pause can also be helpful when you find your child is irritating you or has done something wrong. It gives you a chance to be calmer. Even a few deep breaths or connecting with the feeling of the floor beneath can make a difference.

You can also Take a Pause with your children!

For more information click below links:

Parenting tips from WHO

Parenting tips from UNICEF

In worldwide languages

EVIDENCE-BASE



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# 1 COVID-19 PARENTING One-on-One Time

Can't go to work? Schools closed? Worried about money? It is normal to feel stressed and overwhelmed.

School shutdown is also a chance to make better relationships with our children and teenagers.  
One-on-One time is free and fun. It makes children feel loved and secure, and shows them that they are important.

## Set aside time to spend with each child

It can be for just 20 minutes, or longer – it's up to us. It can be at the same time each day so children or teenagers can look forward to it.



## Ask your child what they would like to do

Choosing builds their self confidence. If they want to do something that isn't OK with physical distancing, then this is a chance to talk with them about this. (see next leaflet)

### Ideas with your baby/toddler



- > Copy their facial expression and sounds
- > Sing songs, make music with pots and spoons
- > Stack cups or blocks
- > Tell a story, read a book, or share pictures

## Switch off the TV and phone. This is virus-free time

### Ideas with your teenager

- > Talk about something they like: sports, music, celebrities, friends
- > Cook a favorite meal together
- > Exercise together to their favorite music

### Ideas with your young child

- > Read a book or look at pictures
- > Make drawings with crayons or pencils
- > Dance to music or sing songs
- > Do a chore together – make cleaning and cooking a game
- > Help with school work

**Listen to them, look at them.  
Give them your full attention.  
Have fun!**

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# 2 COVID-19 PARENTING

## Keeping It Positive

It's hard to feel positive when our kids or teenagers are driving us crazy. We often end up saying "Stop doing that!" But children are much more likely to do what we ask if we give them positive instructions and lots of praise for what they do right.

### Say the behaviour you want to see

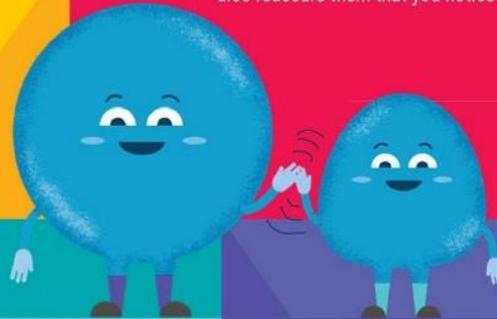
- Use positive words when telling your child what to do, like 'Please put your clothes away' (instead of 'Don't make a mess')

### It's all in the delivery

- Shouting at your child will just make you and them more stressed and angrier. Get your child's attention by using their name. Speak in a calm voice.

### Praise your child when they are behaving well

- Try praising your child or teenager for something they have done well. They may not show it, but you'll see them doing that good thing again. It will also reassure them that you notice and care.



### Get real

- Can your child actually do what you are asking them? It is very hard for a child to keep quiet inside for a whole day but maybe they can keep quiet for 15 minutes while you are on a call.



### Help your teen stay connected

- Teens especially need to be able to communicate with their friends. Help your teen connect through social media and other safe distancing ways. This is something you can do together, too!

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