**Early Years**

This is an uncertain and worrying time for us all. Here are some key points to help you consider how you can support young children to reduce any worry or stress they may be feeling.

**Listen and acknowledge their feelings:** All children are different, but there are some common ways in which different age groups may react to a situation like the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Understanding these may help you to know how to support your family. The common reactions to distress will fade over time for most children.

*For infants to 2-year olds:* Infants may become more easily distressed. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

*For 3 to 6-year olds:* Pre-school children may return to behaviours they have outgrown. For example, toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents or caregivers. They may also have tantrums or difficulty sleeping.

Children may feel less anxious if they are able to express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Children who communicate differently to other children may rely on you to interpret their feelings. Listen to them, acknowledge their concerns, and give them extra love and attention if they need it.

**Provide clear information about the situation**: All children want to feel that their parents and caregivers can keep them safe. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe, including any actions they can take to help, such as washing their hands regularly. There are a number of child friendly explanations available:

* **Dave The Dog is worried about Corona Virus** A colourful Nurse Dotty book explaining coronavirus and the importance of handwashing and social distancing. Appropriate for young children who can listen to short stories.

<https://nursedottybooks.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/dave-the-dog-coronavirus-1-1.pdf>

* **Social distancing video** This children's story about social distancing featuring a bear and a bunny is a simple way to explain social distancing and is less than two minutes long, making it easy to follow for little ones who need to understand the new way of things.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA_SsZFYw0w>

**Managing children’s behaviour at the home** can be difficult when you can’t go out and you are all together all of the time. This experience will be a big change for all of you. Create a safe physical and emotional environment by practicing the 3 R’s: Reassurance, Routines, and Regulation.

* **Reassure** children about their safety and the safety of loved ones, and tell them that it is adults’ job to ensure their safety (see talking to children about coronavirus)
* Maintain **routines** to provide children with a sense of safety and predictability (e.g., regular bedtimes and meals). Involve children in setting the day’s routine. Children of this age learn through play so include lots of different play opportunities (see below and the Play section for ideas). Try to build in physical activity each day. Change4Life for some ideas for indoor games and activities, alongside ideas for healthy snacks.

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities/indoor-activities>

* Support children’s **emotional regulation**. For very young children this may be offering to give them a cuddle or reading a book, using distraction or redirection to a different activity. For toddlers and pre-school children you might want to encourage them to join in with some movement or mindful activities and there are lots of resources online. Doing these together may help you feel less stressed too.
* Cosmic Yoga is story themed yoga for children, it includes shorter nursery rhyme themed videos for little ones: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>
* Go Noodle has a number of YouTube videos for mindfulness, relaxation (<https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids>) and breathing activities for children (Flow, Rainbow Breathing, Bringing it Down)

<https://www.gonoodle.com/good-energy-at-home-kids-games-and-videos/good-energy-at-home-more-2/>

**The Ultimate Guide to Toddler Meltdowns** – provides tips to support you to understand your child’s meltdown, alongside practical strategies to help you manage them. It is an American resource but free to download. There is also an Instagram account @Ourmamavillage with links to other ideas and resources to support young children’s emotions. <https://ourmamavillage.com/toddler-meltdowns-pdf/>

**Keep busy**

* Provide lots of play opportunities, including open-ended play, such as ‘loose parts’ play, which allows children to explore and use their imagination with a range of materials you’re likely to have at home or can find outdoors for free. Please also see the Play Section for more information.

<https://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Loose-parts-play-poster.pdf>

* Try rotating toys, so not everything is out at once – this will help increase interest in toys they haven’t seen for a few days. You might also want to consider a toy or book swap with friends. Arranging to safely leave them on each other’s doorsteps.
* The Hungry Little Minds website has lots of simple, fun activity ideas suitable for newborns to 5 years olds. The website contains video clips alongside links to further information and online apps: https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/
* There are books available online for free (e.g. Oxford Owl), alongside lots of readings of familiar stories and fairy tales on YouTube.
* Plan in time to connect with relatives over the phone or video messaging apps (e.g. Zoom, Houseparty, Whatsapp or FaceBook Messanger all have videocall options for free). Are there family members or friends who could read your child a story in this way?
* Try to build in a variety of calming activities each day. There is a helpful list available here to help you think of different ways to do this and keep occupied at home: A menu of activities to structure Routine and Time (collated by Dr Dawn Bradley: [www.summitpsychologyservices.co.uk](http://www.summitpsychologyservices.co.uk))

<https://2950c04d-206b-4c18-b42f-9cec21f46c7d.filesusr.com/ugd/ec3214_ba0712a3d251419294cb129d0151e17d.pdf>

**Further guidance:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak#helping-children-and-young-people-cope-with-stress>