**10 Tips for supporting very young children during Coronavirus Pandemic**

What a year 2020 has been! In the midst of a pandemic we are all trying our best to keep work and family life afloat. It is easy for us adults to assume that our very young children don’t notice what is happening or are unaffected by it. It is true that children are enormously resilient but we also know that young children struggle when their routines are changed or stop abruptly. Lockdown meant that nurseries & schools suddenly closed and families were expected to stay home, work, learn and play alongside each other. Then schools and nurseries reopened but life didn’t really resume as normal. Children across the world were having to learn to separate from parents all over again and parents and staff were having to manage their own anxieties about this. We know that little ones pick up on parent stress, noticing changes in tone of voice and behaviour. In addition to this our children might be experiencing all sorts of losses that they cannot verbalise, such as missing grandparents, their favourite play areas and close friends. This leaflet is designed to help you to support your child in easy ways at home.



**How to tell if a baby or young child may be struggling?**

* Sleep difficulties (e.g. problems falling asleep, staying asleep, or having nightmares)
* Clinging to caregivers, or a fear of being alone
* Whining behaviour
* Increased temper tantrums
* Aggressive or angry behaviour
* Withdrawing into themselves and/or asking lots more ‘why’ questions.
* Repetitive play (e.g. a child might keep repeating something they have heard, or start taking special care of a doll or teddy)
* Regressing to a younger age (e.g. a child might lose their toilet training, attempt to go back to drinking from a bottle, or start talking like a much younger child)

**Dr Louisa McClean Clinical Psychologist Stand.By.MeChildPsychologyServices@gmail.com**

**1. Acknowledge reactions if they happen**

Do acknowledge any reaction that a baby or child may show as a result of being upset. Don’t just brush over it in the hope that it might just go away.

**2. Talk to the child about the current situation**

To help children feel safe and manage feelings of loss, you can talk to them about their distress and difficulties. You can ‘label’ areas of concern when talking to them, and discuss the current situation honestly, in a way that is age appropriate and doesn’t provoke fear. Be prepared with answers to questions that might also cause you anxiety or confusion.

**3. Make explanations fun and visual**

It’s important to keep explanations simple. Some can be turned into a story. When talking about the virus, try and portray it in a way that feels less menacing (see book recommendations at the end)

**4. Get to the root of the real problem**

Make an effort to explore exactly what it is that is causing a baby or child to become anxious. For instance, you may find that a child may be worried about something specific, like missing grandparents, rather than the coronavirus itself.

**5. Be aware that babies and children can pick up on anxiety**

Babies and young children can be affected by the anxiety of the adults around them. This will take its toll on them, even if they do not yet have the ability to put this into words. Adults need to be mindful of this when expressing their own feelings when children are present.

**6. Let them know it’s not their fault**

Young children can sometimes believe they are responsible for events which are beyond their control. Reassure them that none of this is their fault and that you are here to keep them safe

**7. Establish routines**

Many children and babies will have had their usual routines disrupted. It’s important to create new routines that can be repeated on a daily basis, or to re-establish existing ones. This can help them to feel safe. Keeping regular mealtimes and bedtimes, setting a daily time to play games together, read to them, or sing songs, will all contribute to their sense of stability.

 **8. Create time to play with your child**

Playing is important to the wellbeing and development of a baby or child. But it can also be a safe way for children to act out things that are worrying them. It can help you to pick up on worries or misunderstandings, and talk about them. It’s also a great way to reduce stress in adults.



**9. Keep communicating (kindly) with the adults who care for your child**

This may sound simple but your child will feel safe if the adults in their lives work together respectfully, providing consistency in routine. Communication is key and acknowledgement that both parents and nursery/school staff are working in the most challenging of circumstances right now.

**10. Look after yourself too**

Even if babies and young children are not directly exposed to the trauma of the coronavirus outbreak, they can recognise stress and worry in the adults and older children they live with. So, looking after yourself puts you in the best position to look after those who are important to you.

**Resources for explaining Coronavirus**

**You may be very tired of talking about coronavirus and it can certainly help to be mindful of too much news and ‘scary’ talk at home. However, if you think your child might need more information the following resources are free and age appropriate.**

* **This is a lovely book about a dog who is worried when he hears so much talk about Coronavirus. He turns to Nurse Dotty for some answers.**

**Dave The Dog is worried about Coronavirus – nursedottybooks.com**

* **This is a good book for school aged children but as it is illustrated by Axel Scheffler, younger children also recognize the style of drawings from the Gruffalo, Stick Man etc.**

[**https://issuu.com/nosycrow/docs/coronavirus\_ins/1?ff&hideShareButton=true&fbclid=IwAR2RNitWYRxIIdvngbWglRPcqrLRCISRPXcXHaszcPf0ENmyu3nEXN9YjV**](https://nam10.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fissuu.com%2Fnosycrow%2Fdocs%2Fcoronavirus_ins%2F1%3Fff%26hideShareButton%3Dtrue%26fbclid%3DIwAR2RNitWYRxIIdvngbWglRPcqrLRCISRPXcXHaszcPf0ENmyu3nEXN9YjV&data=04%7C01%7C%7C65a5378ece114a7db9a508d8963dbb66%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C637424539170156117%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=BbtMkMIYasNxlmtT2n82bXUJwlcN1PZMZOKKPecLCbY%3D&reserved=0)

* **This is a 5 minute video made using Playmobil people to explain the Coronavirus and the need for social distancing**

[**https://www.heart.co.uk/news/coronavirus/playmobil-video-explain-virus-children/**](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.heart.co.uk%2Fnews%2Fcoronavirus%2Fplaymobil-video-explain-virus-children%2F&data=04%7C01%7C%7Cbf364f23b7634a24a93908d8963dddcf%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C637424539741255608%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=gtpHaT6Z%2Foo1NBJMoLTUnobY3DahzdlcY9VRwLEg7XY%3D&reserved=0)

**Resources for exploring emotions with little ones**

**The Invisible String – By Patrice Karst (a beautiful book about separation anxiety)**

**Kind – By Alison Green and illustrated by Axel Scheffler**

**Little Monkey Calms Down – board book by Hello Genius**

**When Sophie gets angry – Really, Really Angry – By Molly Bang**

**Llama Llama Mad at Mama - By Anna Dewdney**

**The Huge Bag of Worries – By Virginia Ironside**

(N.B: most of these books can be tried out by listening to readings of them on You tube before you buy them).