It’s ok to find parenting hard during COVID-19

A resource pack for support with parenting during COVID-19
Please feel free to print out your favourite pages

This pack was created by the Early Intervention team in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in NHS Grampian
## Contents Page:

- How this pack can help ................................................................. 1
- Challenging behaviours you may see in children ............. 2-4
- Having family discussions .............................................................. 5-8
- Parenting tips during COVID-19 .................................................. 9-11
- Reward chart .................................................................................. 12
- Family time ...................................................................................... 13-14
- Routines ........................................................................................... 15
- Blank routine template ................................................................. 16
- Ten minute ‘me-charge’ ideas ......................................................... 17
- Additional resources ................................................................. 18-20
How this pack can help

COVID-19 is a new virus that has created different challenges for people in a very short space of time. We have been asked to stay at home so we are spending a lot more time indoors than usual. Some children are no longer able to attend their usual activities. There may also be changes specific to your own household, such as adults working from home or budget changes.

We are all still learning to adjust to these changes brought about by COVID-19. This pack offers some suggestions for how you can:

- Promote your children’s sense of security
- Encourage positive behaviours
- Look after your own wellbeing during COVID-19

Remember that every child and every family are different so you may feel that some of the suggestions are not applicable to your family.
Challenging behaviours you may see in children

Children experience a range of emotions and express themselves in many different ways. As children’s social and emotional skills are still developing, when they have difficulty managing their emotions or are feeling uncertain this can often present as challenging behaviour.

Children may be finding it tricky to adjust to the sudden changes to their usual routine or feel frustrated as a result of being indoors more than usual. They may also be worried about their own and their family’s health or miss their friends and extended family members.

You may have noticed your children displaying some of the following behaviours or that challenging behaviours that were present before COVID-19 have increased:

**Very young children (0-3 years)**

- Not wanting to be alone/clinging
- Regressing to younger behaviour (e.g. speech difficulties)
- Temper tantrums/irritability, whining or crying
- Becoming more oppositional or demanding
- Suddenly fearing things that did not frighten them before
- Sensitivity to the reactions of others
- Increased activity levels and poor concentration
- Changes in play (less or no interest in playing, shorter episodes of play, repetitive play, aggressive/violent play)
- Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation or bedwetting
Preschool/early primary school aged children (4-7 years)

- Clinging to adults
- Regressing to younger behaviour (e.g. thumb sucking)
- Reduction in verbal communication
- Inactivity or hyperactivity
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Reduction in play or repetitive play
- Worrying
- Sleep or appetite disturbances (e.g. nightmares, over/under eating)

Mid-late primary school aged children (7-12 years)

- Whining
- Fearfulness
- Aggressive behaviour (e.g. anger and defiance, irritability)
- Competing for parents’ attention
- Restlessness, difficulties with concentration/attention
- Withdrawal from social contact or usual activities
- Talking about COVID-19 in a repetitive manner
- Concern for others, self-blame guilt
- Sleep or appetite disturbance (e.g. nightmares, over/under eating)
- Physical symptoms (e.g. headaches or stomach aches)
Secondary school aged children (13-18 years)

- Aggressive behaviour (e.g. anger and defiance)
- Risk-taking or self-destructive behaviour
- Decrease in energy
- Withdrawal from social contact or usual activities
- Change in how they view the world (e.g. feeling hopeless)
- Self-absorption/self-pity
- Increase in social media/news reading
- Physical symptoms (e.g. headaches or stomach aches)
- Sleep or appetite disturbance (e.g. difficulty falling asleep, over/under eating)
- Difficulties in maintaining good hygiene

Feeling anxious about COVID-19 may underlie or have increased the frequency or intensity of these behaviours. You can find helpful strategies to support your child with anxious feelings in the ‘It’s ok to worry about Coronavirus’ resource packs in this series.

See: https://www.camhsgrampian.org/covid

If you are concerned about a young person’s wellbeing see the additional resources on pages 18-20 for links to supports you can access.

These lists are not exhaustive and every child is unique. As their parent, you are the expert when it comes to your children and you are best placed to identify the changes you may be noticing in their behaviour.
Having family discussions

Children may find it difficult to adjust to changes going on around them and to understand what is expected of them in new situations. Often children are reluctant to say when they do not understand something. Open and clear communication reduces frustration that arises from misunderstandings and helps children to understand the things that you would like them to do.

You can support their understanding by having a clear family discussion about COVID-19. This could include talking about the changes taking place in your children’s lives, their responsibilities, and things you expect of them - especially if these are different from usual.

The steps listed below provide ideas on how you can have a helpful family discussion:

1. **Prepare yourself and the environment**

Choose a distraction-free environment and ensure children are not hungry or tired. Children will pick up on your body language; try to maintain a calm voice, give them your full attention and use supportive gestures (e.g. nodding and smiling).
2. **Find out what they already know**

We cannot assume that just because children are aware of what is happening around them that they understand the situation. Ask them open questions (e.g. ‘TED’ questions rather than yes/no questions). **Be curious**, children may have different views and concerns about the situation than adults.

**TED questions**

**Tell** – "Tell me more about that"

**Explain** – "Explain to me what you mean by (word/phase they have said)"

**Describe** – "Describe what that has been like for you"

3. **Explain changes and adjustments**

Explain the changes that are happening and what these will involve. Building a family routine together can help support this transition (see pages 15-16 for further information on creating a routine and for a blank routine template).
4. **Create a family agreement**

We all need clarity about what is expected from us and part of nurturing children’s social development is setting clear boundaries. These help families to understand what behaviours are acceptable towards each other.

Make a family agreement that everyone in the house will follow and let children contribute their ideas to this list. This is also an opportunity to introduce the concept of rewards for following the family agreement if you feel this will be helpful for your family (see page 10 for rewards and page 12 for a reward chart).

---

Remember, children’s ability to regulate their emotions and behaviours can be affected by factors such as being unwell, changes and transitions. The current situation is emotionally demanding and requires many adjustments from the entire family. If you need to relax boundaries and allow for more flexibility, that is ok.

**Do what you feel is best for you and your children right now.**
5. **Acknowledge their feelings**

Normalise difficult emotions by assuring them that it is natural for children (and grown-ups!) to feel all kinds of different feelings. Let them know that you understand this is a difficult time for them and that you are there to help them manage their feelings.

6. **Ending the conversation**

Balance the situation by highlighting the positives and the things that are going well, no matter how small they may seem. Remind them of all the helpful things your family are doing to stop the virus spreading and that these actions are making a positive difference to your community.
Parenting tips during COVID-19

Supportive and warm relationships between parents and their children are powerful protective factors when it comes to children’s emotional wellbeing. Here are some tips that you may find helpful in maintaining positive relationships through your interactions with your children:

**Positive attention**

Children enjoy receiving attention from their parents. This can simply involve spending a few minutes listening to your children telling you about something that interests them or letting them show you something they have created. If you do not have time when they approach you, let them know you are busy right now but will make time later and try to follow this through.

**Praise**

Try noticing, praising and encouraging the good things your children are already doing and the behaviours you want to see more of. Even simple things such as saying “good job for washing your hands so well” or giving them a smile or a thumbs up is enough to make them feel good. Make sure you are specific about which behaviours you like and want to encourage.
Rewarding positive behaviour

Rewards can be very motivating for children when they are practicing a new skill or working towards improving a certain behaviour. Rewards do not have to be expensive - a picnic in the garden or getting to choose the movie you watch together make for excellent prizes. A reward chart allows children to see their progress. Try the reward chart on page 12 or ask your children to create their own and keep it in a place they can see it all the time.

Offering choice

Allow children to make some decisions for themselves by offering them choices (e.g. “You can put the iPad away or give it to me”). This gives them a sense of control over their own lives and making decision.
Family time

Pleasurable interactions through doing enjoyable activities together as a family give you all something to look forward to and help maintain a positive family connection. Family time does not have to be lengthy - even ten minutes a day is enough. If the activity your family would like to do is lengthier or requires preparation, you could plan ‘family time’ for it into your weekly schedule. Try to include your children in making these plans. There are suggestions for family time activities on pages 13-14 and in our other resource packs and podcasts.

Showing affection

Showing affection does not always mean saying “I love you”. You can show affection through physical gestures, such as a hug or a pat on the arm or back. Affection can be demonstrated verbally through using pet names or reminding them of treasured memories.
## Reward chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am working on</th>
<th>My stars/stickers</th>
<th>My Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family time

Ideas for the entire family

- The ‘rose and thorn’ exercise- everyone shares the best (rose) and worst (thorn) thing that happened to them that day
- Look through photo albums and share family memories
- Family board game night
- Family movie night
- Family disco/dance party
- Take a picture together every day and turn them into a photo book
- Exercise together (see our ‘exercising and wellbeing’ podcasts for some ideas https://www.camhsgrampian.org/podcast)
- Cook dinner or bake together
- Living room/garden camp out
Ideas for younger children

- Create something - what can you make out of a cardboard box?
- Play games that use their imagination - e.g. ‘I spy’, the floor is lava, ask them to put on a play for you
- Treasure hunts
- Painting
- Reading
- Picnic in the garden
- Talk about what is important to them
- Activity of their choice

Ideas for teenagers

- Help them turn their bedroom into a space they enjoy
- Creative projects
- Pamper night
- Learn a new skill together – e.g. try an online class or tutorial
- Teach them a skill you value - e.g. knitting or baking
- Learn something from them - e.g. playing a computer game, ‘keepy uppies’, Tik Tok dances
- Listen to music or sing
- Talk about what is important to them
- Activity of their choice
Routines

Most children are used to a certain amount of predictability and routine in their day. Building a daily routine during COVID-19 helps children to know what to expect from their day, which can reduce worrying and boredom. Allow your children to contribute their ideas when planning the routine (see page 16 for a blank routine template).

Do not put pressure on yourself to match a usual school day – you are not expected to be your children’s teacher during this time. Children can learn in many ways and even games can be beneficial to their learning.

Creating a routine

- Try to include your pre-COVID-19 activities (e.g. wake up time, mealtimes, caring for pets, bedtime).
- Try to find balance between activities on and off-screen.
- If you can, plan activities your children enjoy after ones they may find challenging. You may also wish to plan breaks/snack times following learning activities.
- Choose times for activities that suit your entire family (e.g. plan tasks that children need assistance with when you are available to help them).
- Planning hand washing breaks can help encourage good hand hygiene during COVID-19.
- Try using pictures of your children’s interests (e.g. dinosaurs) when drawing up your family’s routine.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 9:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-11:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-2:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-3:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30-3:45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:45-4:45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45-5:30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30-6:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00-8:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ten minute ‘me-charge’ ideas

Being a parent can be hard work. Remembering to take care of yourself is important. Be kind and compassionate to yourself - **you are doing your best in an uncertain and difficult time.**

- Have a quick shower
- Take a technology ‘break’
- Phone, Facetime, Skype - stay in touch with your friends and family
- Wrap up in a soft blanket
- Bring an old instrument out of retirement
- Do a physical activity
- Watch part of a favourite TV show/movie
- Watch a YouTube tutorial
- Use mindfulness and relaxation exercises (try using one of the apps on page 20)
- Play relaxing music
**Additional resources**

1. **Parenting support**

   Parent Club, set up by the Scottish Government, provides tried and tested tips from other parents on a wide range of topics:

   [https://www.parentclub.scot/](https://www.parentclub.scot/)

   Family Lives are a charity that provide professional, non-judgmental support and advice for parents:

   [https://www.familylives.org.uk/](https://www.familylives.org.uk/)

   Children 1st, Scotland’s National Children’s Charity, offer practical advice and support in difficult times (including telephone support) for parents:

   [https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/](https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/)
The Spark specialise in online and telephone counselling services for couples, individuals, youths and families:

https://www.thespark.org.uk/

Phone: 0808 802 2088

2. Mental health support

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have created downloadable resources for coping with COVID-19 stress and uncertainty. There are also links to apps and websites for further mental health support:

https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/coronavirus

If you, or a member of your family, are struggling due to the changes COVID-19 has brought to your life the Psychology Resilience Hub can help. They offer guidance and support by phone or virtual appointment. Adults and children aged 14-18 years old can self-refer; children under the age of 18 can be referred by an adult.

3. Practical support for yourself and your family

**Grampian Coronavirus (COVID-19) Assistance Hub**

This website is a focal point for information and assistance for anyone affected by coronavirus in the Grampian area:

[https://www.gcah.org.uk/](https://www.gcah.org.uk/)

Phone: **0808 916 3384**

4. Free apps to support emotional wellbeing

**Smiling Mind**

Smiling Mind is a meditation program to help bring mindfulness into your life.

*Available on iOS and Android*

**Mindshift**

Mindshift can be used to help manage and reduce anxiety. It includes a feelings check in, chill zone with audio bodyscan, breathing exercises, coping cards, and a thought journal.

*Available on iOS and Android*
If you feel your children’s difficulties are becoming serious or you are struggling to cope you can contact:

Samaritans: 116 123
www.samaritans.org

Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87
https://breathingspace.scot/

NHS 24: 111
https://www.nhs24.scot/

Your local GP