



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

www.bps.org.uk

ADVICE FOR KEY WORKER PARENTS

Helping your child adapt
to changes due to the
Covid-19 pandemic.



IT IS NATURAL FOR CHILDREN TO BE EMOTIONALLY AFFECTED BY THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC. THESE EFFECTS MAY BE SHORT TERM OR LONGER TERM.

SOME OF THE EFFECTS WILL BE GOOD BUT SOME MIGHT BE MORE WORRYING.

Your child might have worries about coronavirus and how it has affected their lives. Helping your child understand and adapt to these changes may add extra stress and worry to you.

We hope this information will help you and your children through the pandemic and to make more of the changes into good ones.

ARE MY CHILDREN LIKELY TO BE EMOTIONALLY AFFECTED BY THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC? WILL THEY BE AFFECTED BY ME BEING A KEY WORKER?

Changes for parents can also affect their children. Many of the changes in this pandemic are outside of your control and so please be kind to yourself about the impact of them. It might be helpful to remember that all the care and support that you have given to your children already will help to protect them emotionally.

Children have their own ways of coping, based on what has happened in their lives so far and different children react differently.

Some children will be less troubled but others might be more worried, stressed, or frightened. When children feel like this, they can find being away from their parent more difficult and be very clingy. This may be more difficult for you to cope with as a key worker as you still have to go to work. Children may also be worried about your safety and worry that they will catch the virus from you.

When children are more worried or stressed their behaviour often changes. Young children especially often show their stress rather than talk about it.

Your child might:

Be more clingy.

Become angry or upset more easily.

Change their sleep or eating patterns.

Seem to be more naughty.

Wet the bed or have nightmares.

These are all signs that your child might be unsettled by the changes in their life. For many children these things will settle when they feel less stressed.

What you can do

Ask your child questions.

Children often have a good imagination and can be creative. They might make up stories or draw pictures that give clues about their feelings. You can talk to them about their pictures and stories. It may help them ask any questions they have about coronavirus.

Give your child choice where you can.

Feeling out of control leaves children feeling unsettled. Ask them to help plan an activity, let them decide what to play or what family meal will be cooked.

Make sure that your child's routine is as regular as possible.

Children do better when they know what to expect. This is important when there is more stress and worry around.

Bedtime routine is especially important.

Make a plan with your child if you will miss part of a routine so that someone else can step in and they know you are thinking about them. Many families have special routines e.g. how you say goodnight to each other, and it is important for these to carry on as much as they can.

Help your child understand how they feel and to share their feelings.

Children might struggle to understand that feelings in their body (e.g. butterflies in the tummy) can mean they feel worried. Helping to name their feelings can help them understand how they feel. Spending time together playing, drawing, telling stories can all help a child tell you how they feel. Reading, watching TV or films together and using the internet together might mean your child can talk to you about something they have seen. Sharing how you are feeling in simple ways that they can understand can also help.

Find time for your child.

Set some time aside every day for your child to have some time with you. If this is not possible because of your work, try to make sure this happens with another trusted adult. In this time, your child should have all of your attention and the time should be led by them.

Talk to your child.

If you have been at work, ask your child about their day and give lots of praise for what they did during this time. Your child might ask you about your day – think of one or two things to tell them about. These should be things that are suitable to your child's age.

Children need to feel safe and secure.

Making sure that a child feels loved and valued by their parents during this crisis will be of greater benefit to them than a parent spending precious time doing times tables and spelling tests. Tables and spellings will be there after the crisis.

We have created a leaflet for children of key workers called **When your parent is a key worker** which you might find helpful to show or read through with your child.



HOW CAN I MANAGE THE DEMANDS OF HOME AND WORK?

As a key worker you will have lots of different things you need to manage – your child’s home routine, home schooling, going to work, and all of the jobs around the house. Sometimes you will feel too tired after work and need to rest. It is good to remember that even small things will make a difference to your child’s happiness so spending small chunks of time listening to them, reading with them, and playing games will all help.

Many parents say that they feel overwhelmed at times and can struggle to feel like they are doing a good job at everything. Just like it is natural for your child to feel worried and stressed about these changes to life, it is natural for you to feel this way sometimes too.

Even small things can make a difference to your child’s happiness.

What you can do

Be kind and honest with yourself.

You are not super human! Spend time every day reminding yourself of what you have achieved – whether it is in work or at home.

Do what you can in the time that you have.

Make a list of tasks and decide which are more important.

Trying to be with your child for special moments will be important.

If you miss something exciting or special, make sure you spend time with them talking about it.

Remember that there is a lot of advice out there.

You will know what is best for you and your family and so try to remember that not all advice will work for you.

If your child is in school, talk to your child’s teacher about how things are going.

Explain that you are a key worker and arrange to speak at a time that is convenient for you both.

CHILDCARE IS A PROBLEM AND MY CHILD NEEDS TO GO TO A DIFFERENT CHILDCARE PROVIDER/ SCHOOL

If you have to go to work, childcare may be an issue. You might feel torn between your role as a key worker and being a parent. You or your child might be worried about unfamiliar childcare.

What you can do

Accept that you are in a difficult situation and there might not be a perfect answer.

Focus on things you can do to make the situation feel better, such as:

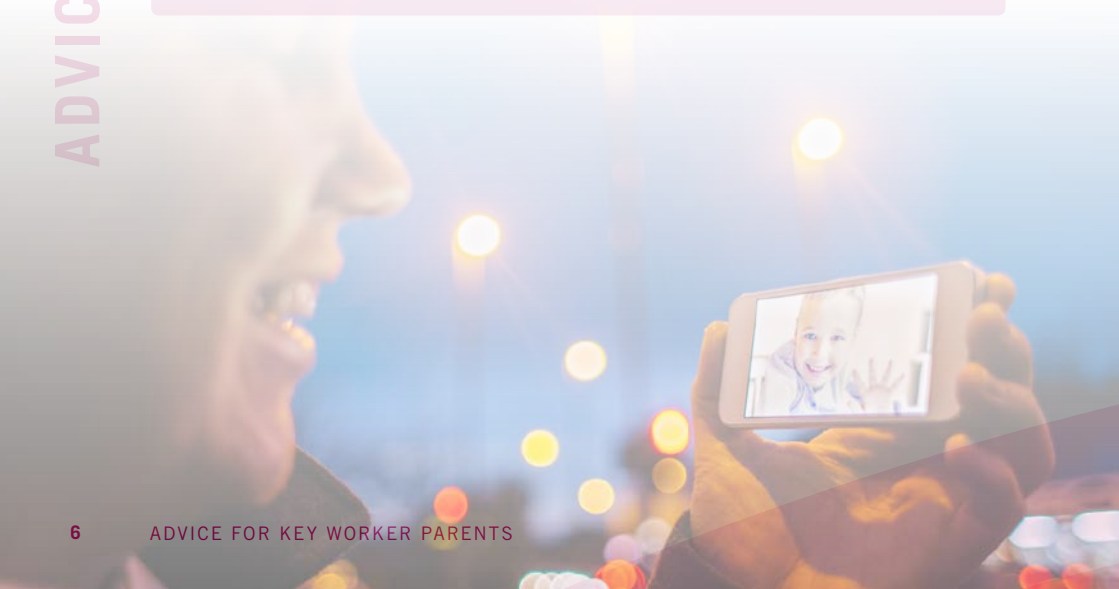
- giving your child a photo or other item to take with them to school;
- arranging to text them during the day;
- thinking about how the adults who will be looking after them can get to know them better.

Talk to your partner, family, friends, employer and school about how this could

work for you. Others might have ideas to share about what has helped them and their child. Employers might be able to be flexible to help you. Schools might be able to reassure you.

If your child is old enough, asking them for their ideas for what will help them.

This is a good way of helping them feel in control. Developing a positive story about why you need to go to work will help them to feel more positive about why it is important.



WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO MANAGE CHILDCARE FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

You might need to make different childcare arrangements during the coronavirus pandemic. This might be more difficult and cause additional stress. You might need to leave your child with someone who is unfamiliar to you and them, and so you will need

to develop trust in them quickly. Talk to family and friends, to your employers and your childcare provider if you have worries about this. It is important that you can ask any questions you need to, and to feel reassured about your child being well cared for.

What you can do

Home is best. If possible arrange for the carer to care for your child at home.

Moving between locations. Spend time with the carer and your child making sure that the child knows that you are comfortable with the carer.

Comfort items. Give your child something of yours to keep such as a favourite item of clothing.

Your child's toys. Make sure your child has their own toys with them.

Consistent routines. Ask the carer to follow your routine.

Familiar conversations. Ask the carer to talk about you and the family to your child, so that they hear about familiar things.

Bedtime routine. If they are staying elsewhere make sure your child has their own bedding and other items they will feel more at home with. Ask the carer to copy your usual bedtime routine including reading your child's favourite bedtime story.

Communicate with technology. Use telephone or video call your child to wish them goodnight or even read their story for them if you can.

WHAT CAN I DO TO ENSURE THAT MY TEENAGER IS CARED FOR?

Most school-based childcare provision only includes children up to age 14 (Year 9). You can think about how your teenager will be supported if staying at home during the school day.

Teenagers will have had big changes too – like not seeing their friends, changes to exams, and feeling like they are missing out at an important time.

What you can do

Talk to your child about the changes and how they feel about them.

If possible, your child should be involved in making a plan. Accept that this plan is probably not going to be what you or your child would have wanted at this time in their school life, but you are working together to find the best possible solution under the circumstances.

Ensure your child has contact with friends and other important people in their life.

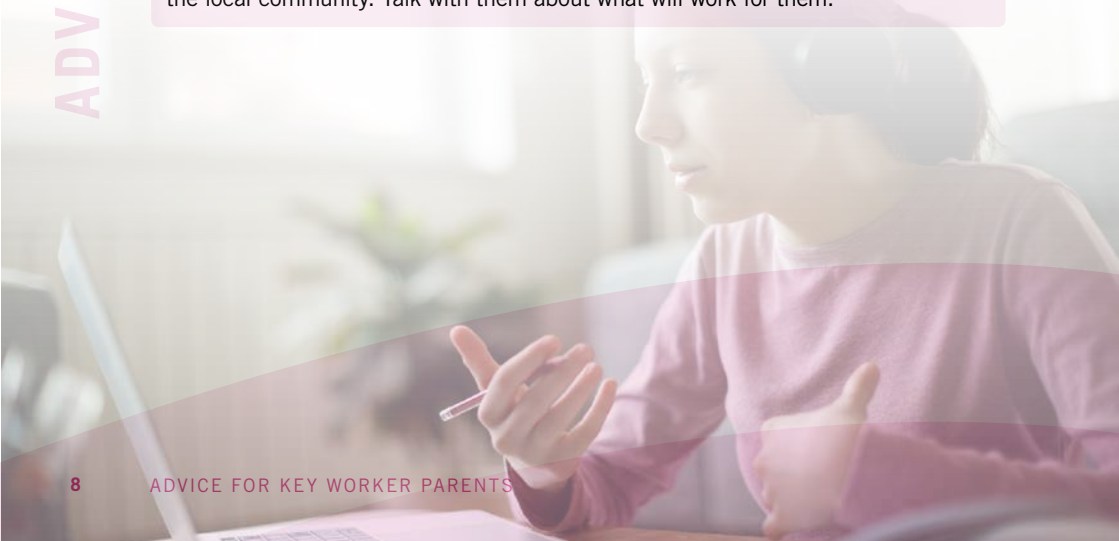
This could be family, family friends – these people may have helpful knowledge and skills that might help your child with school work, too!

Keep regular routine and regular contact by phone.

This will help them feel connected to you when you are not there.

Find ways for your teen to feel that they are using their time productively.

This might help them to feel more in control of their future. This might be catching up on learning, to give them a ‘head start’, or learning new skills or contributing to the local community. Talk with them about what will work for them.



HOW DO I MANAGE FAMILY LIFE WHEN I AM WORRIED ABOUT PASSING ON THE INFECTION?

All key workers will have guidance about infection control – this might include rules around showering, changing clothes etc. Younger children might find it difficult to adapt to these, as they might not understand all of the things we need to do to keep healthy.

You can read more about this in [Talking to children about illness](#). Prepare your child as much as possible, and even make it into a game for younger children may help them to adapt to the changes to routine.

What you can do

Explain to your child why you need to do things differently.

Tell them what you need to do, and why you need to do it. For younger children, keep this simple – mummy or daddy needs to wash their clothes and body to help keep them clean. For younger children, making this into a game such as ticking off a list and giving the parent a star when they have done their tasks may help them feel involved and make it fun.

Involve your child as much as possible and as is safe (if they are interested!)

Your child could make a chart or list to remind the family of things that need to be done, like washing their hands. They might have a ‘special job’, such as getting out the nice soap and towels for when you return.

If you become unwell with the virus, explain to your children about the importance of following medical advice.

Make sure they see that you know what to do and know what they need to do.

Try to plan ahead if you can.

You could create a rest space which can be used if anyone feels like they need a break or feels unwell. This could be used if someone in the house later gets unwell and needs to isolate.

Think about how you explain the illness to your child.

Try to be honest about the risks but don’t give complicated information. Letting your child know that you and everyone you work with are following all the advice to stop you getting sick will help reassure them.

HOW CAN I HELP MY OWN STRESS AND WORRY LEVELS?

It is natural that adults feel worried and stressed about the pandemic too. It can be helpful for children to see adults showing a range of feelings, but it is sensible to think about how you feel and whether your child will pick up on this. Lots of things are outside of our control, such as other people's behaviour, but there are some things we can do to help feel less worried. Make sure you look after yourself too, and your children will benefit from this. There are lots of different apps, articles and advice out there on 'self care'. Not everything will work for everyone. Try a few different things until you find something that will work for you.

The British Psychological Society have written an excellent advice leaflet for health professionals called [The psychological needs of healthcare staff as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic](#) and this would be useful for all key workers.

It is natural that adults feel worried and stressed about the pandemic too.



What you can do

Make sure you look after yourself.

Eating regularly, drinking enough water and getting enough sleep will help you have more energy to spend time with your family.

Noticing and accepting how your feelings may affect your mood and behaviour.

Letting people know if you are feeling tired or worried can help – it can help you and it can help them to know how you are feeling.

Try breathing exercises or keeping a journal. There are lots of ideas you can try to help you relax your feelings, from slowing your breathing down, doing some exercise (see [NHS](#)) – or writing down worries and concerns will help you.

Understand this will pass. Thinking about this situation as a 'different' period of time in your life which will end.

Focus on what you can control and not what you can't. Only worry about things that are your responsibility – try not to take on worry about things that you cannot do anything about.

Try to keep things as 'normal' as much as possible.

Set yourself and the children goals and treats to work towards. In normal life there are things to look forward to such as trips to parks, restaurants etc. While we are in social isolation we need new treats. What feels like a treat now?

Find new skills and games to do as an individual or as a family. Some families are planting seeds, some are learning new things, like singing or crafts.

Be kind to yourself. You are not super human. Focus on what you have achieved today.

Keep some balance. Try to avoid falling into a cycle of sleeping, working, eating, and repeating. Do something fun for yourself and your family. Make sure there is something fun to do each week.

There are free resources being made available for key workers. There is free access to [Headspace](#), [deliveroo vouchers](#), and other [discounts](#). Make use of these as it will help you to feel valued.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD WITH WHAT THEY ARE HEARING ABOUT CORONAVIRUS ON THE NEWS AND FROM OTHER PEOPLE?

Children like adults may be feeling overwhelmed by the information in the media and that we are all hearing from each other. Children will react to this information differently, and some of their behaviours may seem odd or unusual to you e.g. ‘playing Corona chase in the garden’.

See the leaflet we have written for children called [When your parent is a key worker.](#)

What you can do

Try not to worry about these behaviours.

It’s just them making sense of the world through play. Children may also react by behaving like they did when they were younger – you may see bed-wetting, thumb sucking and such behaviours.

Having a parent as a key worker might mean that Coronavirus is talked about more in your home.

Keep an eye on how much conversation there is about Coronavirus and make sure it is not causing extra worry to the children. If you are worried then keep the Coronavirus talk for when they are not about and talk about more ‘normal’ things that you would like them to be thinking about instead.

Helping your children to understand about the virus in an age appropriate way.

This might help them and reduce some of the behaviours that are worrying you. Take a look at the free information book from Axel Schaffer called [Coronavirus: A book for children](#) which is a great resource for children aged 5–9.

WE WISH YOU THE VERY BEST AND THANK YOU FOR THE HARD WORK YOU ARE DOING FOR US ALL.



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

The British Psychological Society is a registered charity which acts as the representative body for psychology and psychologists in the UK. We support and enhance the development and application of psychology for the greater public good, disseminating our knowledge to increase public awareness.

St Andrews House,
48 Princess Road East,
Leicester LE1 7DR, UK

☎ 0116 254 9568

🌐 www.bps.org.uk

✉ info@bps.org.uk

© British Psychological Society
Incorporated by Royal Charter Registered Charity No 229642
BRE30d | 04.05.2020