



Northamptonshire
County Council

Educational Psychology Services COVID-19 Support

Family briefing for children –
Nursery, Reception and Year 1

Learning to live with a world in which there is COVID-19

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



Northamptonshire
Educational Psychology Service

Information for Parents and Carers

Be Hopeful, Belong and Feel Feelings

This briefing brings together information that has been written to support families at the present time. Going back to nursery or school maybe is exciting and scary at the same time for you and your child. If you are worried your child is likely to be worried too even if they cannot say this for themselves. Children, especially young children are good at noticing their parents or carers emotions.

Here are a few ideas to help you and your child prepare.

Remaining hopeful

We can't change what's happened. We might be able to change how we feel, think and act about the situation.

Remaining connected

COVID-19 is happening to everyone, in different ways, all around the world and there are ways we can still feel connected.

Showing feelings

It's ok to talk about the feelings you are having. These are normal feelings in a strange situation. Everyone has different feelings of different strengths at different times.

It's ok to feel the way you feel.

You may have worries about your child not socializing and seeing their friends, falling behind, missing their teachers or keyworkers and playing outside with friends. Going back to nursery or school may seem overwhelming for you, even if your child is ready to go.

My child is ready but am I?

You may be thinking: Will they miss me too much, will I miss them, how will I know they are ok, will they bring COVID-19 back home? Will the teachers and nursery workers let me know if my child gets upset? How will they comfort and reassure them if they aren't allowed to touch or cuddle them? All of these thoughts and feelings are normal.

It's OK to not feel OK.

Even being prepared for something new affects everyone and in different ways. Over the past weeks you and your child may have found lots of things that are joyous about being at home and some things hard. Now you may be feeling stress from making a decision about allowing or not allowing your child to go back to nursery or school. Pressures of money, working, going out from your home, seeing people you haven't for many weeks, new routines and a fear of what might happen because of your decision. These thoughts and feelings are all normal reactions to the unknown. Whatever your decision, it is right for you at the moment. You can always change your mind later.

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.

If your child goes back to nursery or school as usual they want to know that you are still thinking about them. Just knowing that someone cares about you, understands your worries and your joys helps. It's the same for adults too!

We all need time to adjust to how the world has changed and continues to change. You and your children need time to adjust to moving into the world of nursery and school. It will look and feel different to how it was before COVID-19 lockdown. Read the guidance on opening nurseries and schools from 1 June 2020.

- [Opening schools and educational settings guidance – GOV.UK](#)

The Three 'C's

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.

Relationships

It's OK to feel NOT OK

Kindness.....

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

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. Protecting time for yourself, each other and your child e.g. bed time.

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. **A simple act with massive healing power.**

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

Sing Singing releases endorphins and oxytocin – which in turn relieve anxiety and stress and are linked to feelings of trust and bonding. Sing out loud when washing your hands.

Hugging each other

One of the effects of COVID-19 means that people are becoming uncertain of physical contact. To balance out the effects of social distancing that is occurring in children's lives when they go back to school it's even more important now to hug your child, offering them warm, kind and loving hugs.

Did you know hugging each other does these things?

Giving a loving hug helps us mentally and physically. The chemical “oxytocin” also known as the ‘love’ hormone is activated. Oxytocin has many benefits in our physical and mental health. Hugs reduce the body’s stress hormone levels.

Hugging helps us, among other things, to **relax, to feel safe and calm** our fears and anxieties.

Hugs could keep you healthy. Hugs strengthen the immune system and can reduce the chance of getting sick. Affection also has a direct response on the reduction of stress which prevents many diseases. Hugs are heart-healthy. Women who hugged more had higher oxytocin levels and lower blood pressure.

Hugs can help reduce conflict. People who were hugged in a given day were less affected by exposure to a conflict.

A hug **talks without having to say anything out loud.**

Hugging **boosts self-esteem**, especially in children.

Going to nursery or school

Use positive language about Covid-19 rules i.e. “Do...” rather than “Don’t.....” Check these out with staff before your child’s goes to nursery or school. Rehearse at home as natural opportunities arise. **Keep language simple and short.**

Remind your child about their nursery or school – walk past, point out main features, share pictures on line if nursery or school has prepared these.

Prepare passport book for your child in discussion with your child’s key adult or teacher via email or telephone call.

Discuss drop off and pick up with the key adult or teacher beforehand – it will be natural for your child to be anxious, tearful, especially after a long break. Practitioners will want to help make sure your child separates in a way that’s best for both of you.

Take time with transition at the beginning and end of the session. Separating is an important part of moving on from home to nursery or school.

If your child wants a comforter with them (transitional object) ask your child’s teacher or keyworker if they can take it with them if they need it.

Virtual transitional objects can also convey equally important reassurance, a kiss or a smile to keep in your child’s pocket for when it’s needed, or an imaginary ‘heart string’ that stretches from you to the child and can’t be broken even though it stretches all the way from home to the classroom. Read together the story book called The Invisible String.

- [The Invisible String – YouTube](#)

Feeling safe

Praise and encourage by noticing the little things your child does. This builds your child's confidence and resilience. Aim for 5 praises a day.

Talk hopefulness - lots of people get better - you got better too when you were feeling poorly.

It will be exciting to make new friends and get to know your teacher when you go to nursery or school.

Listen to feelings expressed by your child - stop, acknowledge, normalise, keep language simple and short.

Share simple stories such as folk tales, fairy stories that encourage a sense of building strength through danger and managing anxious feelings.

Remember **good communication with young children**: come down to their level, eye contact, speak slowly, use simple language appropriate to their development and use calm tones.

Enjoy fun time together no matter how short, find moments to share - colour a picture, share a book, find a flower, and count the birds on the grass. Take photos to remember and talk about together.

Connect with the natural world: notice what shapes the clouds make – what do you imagine they look like; how many different coloured flowers did we see on our walk, listen to that happy bird sing.

Familiar routines help us feel safer.

Answer your child's questions about COVID-19 simply and honestly. The **centre for research in early childhood website** has some resources that can help.

Being good to yourself – helps your child too

Not a good day, especially with all the extra demands placed upon us by COVID-19? Every parent feels not good enough at times - important to remind ourselves that parenting can be difficult, nobody is perfect! **It's OK not to feel OK all of the time.**

Talk to a friend, member of your family or parent group or support worker. You are not alone.

Celebrate your achievements – no matter how small e.g. "I managed to do the ironing today!"

Notice what's on your mind – check in with your feelings, share with others – accept without blame – good modelling for all within the family, 'it's OK to feel fed up and down sometimes.'

Reduce too much news – aim for one time in the day, best when your child has gone to bed. Avoid social media hype.

Take time for yourself and time to do what you enjoy - that's for everyone, children and parents or carers.

Do a **calming activity everyday**– what works for you – no matter how simple or short.

Use 3 deep breaths when **anxious** feelings/thoughts arise – **count for 3 for in-breath and out for 4 out-breaths**.

Successful changes

Parents, carers and children have more successful new experiences in nursery and school **when**:

- They have an idea of **what will happen**, what will **be the same** and what will **be different**.
- Everyone is **told the same thing** and we know who to talk to or see.
- People in nursery and school are willing to **talk with** parents, carers and children regularly.
- Everyone **notices** how adults and children may be **feeling** and help **reassure** them.
- **Safe, secure, kind relationships** are everyone's experience.

Further links and resources:

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

- Children's stories that deal with feelings.
- Everybody Worries – book for young children by John Burgerman.
- Coronavirus: Supporting transition into Reception
- Science says hugging is good for kids
- Finding the calm
- Northamptonshire Baby Room website

The NSPCC website and ChildLine website are further recommended sites with resources for parents and children. Gov.uk also has further information:

- COVID-19 Domestic abuse – Gov.uk

Veronica Lawrence and Alison Gardner
Specialist Senior Educational Psychologists – Early Years
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