



ENFIELD
THRIVES TOGETHER

Barnet, Enfield and Haringey
Mental Health NHS Trust



A University Teaching Trust



**SUPPORTING CHILDREN
OF KEY WORKERS
DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS**

27TH APRIL 2020



Key workers children are in an unusual situation: they are going into school even though most children are staying home. It's important to help children let you know what is going on for them. You could:

- Check in with how children are feeling as part of your **welcome routine**. A feelings fan can help with this- everyone can show the teacher how they are feeling by holding it up, but they don't have to tell the other children if they don't want to.
- Provide structured opportunities for children to talk about what is on their mind through **circle time**.
- Listen to what is upsetting them and make **brave guesses** about the feelings that come up, naming them. Being heard and taken seriously can help children feel much better.
- Remember, it's ok if children do not want to say anything at all, you can always **check in again later**.
- Put a **worry box** somewhere where children can pop a message in it- the worry box can hold their worries so they don't have to keep them to themselves. Let them know who will read the worry box and when that person will get back to them to have some 'talk time'. You could make the 'worry box' together, so that the children feel that it is really theirs.
- Provide opportunities to **talk about interests and strengths** - this helps new groups of children get to know one another.



Healthy habits

- Tell the children that it is your job as an adult who cares about them to **remind them to have healthy habits**: for instance, not touching their faces, washing their hands and giving each other plenty of space.
- **Build healthy habits into daily routines**: washing hands when children arrive at school, come in from outside, after going to the toilet, after sneezing or touching their face and before eating. It's also good to get the children to join in with wiping surfaces and making sure the school is clean.
- **Make the healthy habits fun**: make hand washing fun at school with soaps with different colours and smells, or make up songs to help them remember how to wash their hands carefully all over. As giving each other space might be difficult for children to do, try making up fun alternatives, such as elbow bumps, or foot shakes. Children will enjoy making up their own alternatives, or exploring how other cultures greet one another without touching.
- Make up fun ways to **remind each other to show healthy habits**, for instance by having a lot of different silly hats you put on or making putting on funny voice when you remind them to wash their hands or to not touch their face.
- It can help to **check their understanding every so often**. The children may need messages about healthy habits, how adults stay safe and things they can do to help repeated so that all parts of the message stick, rather than just one fragment.



1) 'It's not fair- why do I have to go to school?'

On top of all the other things going on, such as not being able to see some people in the family or go out and about like they used to, a child who is going into school will have many changes there too. These changes might include: a new teacher, different routines, different classmates, different playtimes, different places to put their stuff, different lunchtimes and different people picking them up or dropping them off. On top of all that their school may be nearly empty.

How can I help?

- **Make sure school is fun**- and make the most of all the unusual things that will get to do in school that never usually happens, like not having to queue for lunch or share a computer, and playing in different classrooms than usual.
- Remind them that **the other children don't get out of doing work**- they still have work to do at home! It might also help to point out that other children are at home- they can't run about in a playground, or use the school equipment.
- As far as possible **make sure that the children are supported by the same adults every day**, or at least that they know who is leading their activities and when.
- Make sure that you **create new routines to maximise a sense of predictability** and safety in a world that may seem quite uncertain now. Go through the routine each morning as part of your greeting and welcome routine. And the end of the day, talk through what will happen the next day, including who will be working with them and supporting them.
- Create a **transition book** that can be printed off if you have a new arrival join your school unexpectedly. It can have a picture of the different places in school, where the child will put their things and the adult who will be looking after them.



2) Hidden fears and worries

All the messages out there tell us to 'stay safe/ stay home'. Like all children, the children of keyworkers may be worried that they will get sick, or that their parents could get sick, since they are not staying at home.

How can I help with fears about parents?

- Remind the children that adults take care of kids - and that they know how to take care of themselves too.
- Ask them to write or draw all the ways that their parents keep themselves safe.
- Let them know that most people who get sick with coronavirus get better.
- If they get caught up in worries about their parent, teach them tricks for escaping the worry's clutches- help them to notice the feeling, experience it for a little bit, and then 'let it go'. They might want to imagine the worry floating away like a balloon, or concentrate on something more concrete, like drawing something they like doing with someone who is important to them
- Support them to think about what their parent is doing to help and how much of a difference it makes for everyone. They may want to draw and write about what their parent is doing to help.
- Help them identify all the people who are helping in lots of different ways, including delivery drivers, people helping in shops, on buses and trains, in hospitals, and people helping keep our streets clean.
- Make sure the children know who is picking them up and dropping them off and let them know in advance if there is a change in who is collecting them, so they don't get any surprises.



How can I help a child who has worries for themselves?

Giving clear information about what we know about the Coronavirus can stop fears taking charge. It can help children to know that:

- Kids often don't seem to get sick with coronavirus. Even when they do get sick it tends to be mild.
- You can immediately get help from a doctor if you feel sick.
- Doctors know what to do to help.
- Most people who get sick get better

Giving them messages about why coming to school is safe:

- Adults in school care about children and look after them by reminding them to keep up their healthy habits.
- Adults are showing healthy habits too - a game of 'catch the teacher doing the right thing' is always fun.
- Adults in school clean it thoroughly and regularly.
- The government wants everyone to stick with just a few other people who are important to them in a little 'bubble'. When there are just a few people in each person's bubble this stops the virus spreading. Some people's bubbles are a bit bigger than other people's bubbles, but the important thing is that there are only a few people in each bubble. Both children at home and children at school have their own little bubbles. Children at home and children at school have the same important job- this job is to not 'burst their bubbles'.



Being able to **take positive action** and help others puts children back in the driving seat. Remind them that they can help by keeping up healthy habits:

- Avoiding touching their face.
- Sneezing into a tissue or into their elbow.
- Putting tissues straight in the bin.
- Washing their hands when they arrive somewhere, after they have sneezed or touched their face, and after they have been outside as well as before and after eating and after they go to the toilet.
- Helping wipe down and clean surfaces.
- Staying in their own 'bubble' of people at home and at school.

Let them know frequently that adults in school care about them, are interested in how they feel and want them to feel happy and safe.



Resources:

Books

- *Something bad happened: A kids guide to coping with events in the news* by Daen Heubner

Links

- [Dave the Dog is worried about coronavirus](#) - an e-book for children about parents who may be going to work
- [Guidance to support children of key workers produced by the British Psychological Society \(May 2020\)](#).

This resource has been developed by Enfield Thrives Together, an emerging virtual team of existing school-facing services to provide a focus on supporting the health and wellbeing of our school communities.



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