

COVID-19, Parenting, and Family relationships

Families across the country are adjusting to the changes and challenges of home schooling and the impact of being on lockdown. Here we explore some of those challenges, what impact they may have on you and your family and the importance that looking after yourself will have on those that you love and care for.

Uncertainty

This is an uncertain time for you and your family. Your children's daily lives will have changed drastically. Often you know change is coming and this helps you to prepare. You may choose to move to a new house, or your child will reach a transition like secondary school. Even if change is unexpected it will usually be related to one part of your life while the rest stays the same.

The impact of COVID-19 may mean that most aspects of your lives have changed with little or no warning. Your workload or role may be different and more stressful, your family life and roles may have changed, and you may even be spending time living away from those you care about. This can result in high levels of anxiety and stress.

Anxiety, coping and relationships

Anxiety affects us all in different ways, and it can affect how we relate to those around us. For some, anxiety may be obvious to see, making it easier provide comfort and support. In others, anxiety may show as anger, aggression, slamming doors, and they may push you away. Either can be hard to manage if you are feeling anxious and exhausted yourself. It's important to remember that the behaviour you see is an expression of how they are feeling, and it's not your fault. The world has changed dramatically in the past few months and everyone is adapting. Your children may even be pushing you away because they are worried about you and don't know how to express it.

It's important to look after yourself and understand that the difficulties are because of the current situation and not because of something that you have done, or not done, as a parent or partner.

Connecting with each other

If you are a front-line NHS or other key worker it is understandable that you may have some fears because of increasing demands, possible changes in your job and fear of becoming ill yourself. Your family will also have these fears, but it may be difficult for you to talk about them together because in times of high stress some people cope by detaching themselves from their feelings so they can cope.

You may feel less connected to your family right now. You may be physically separated if you're worried about passing on coronavirus or you may feel emotionally separated because of all the change. It's usual for people to talk about their day when they come together, but right now this could be hard. Your children may not understand how you are feeling and while you may need time to decompress, they may immediately ask for things, draw you into arguments or want your attention.

It's important to remember that you are still a family, even if you feel emotionally or physically separated at the moment.

Change in family roles

While many NHS staff find themselves in new roles, many parents do too. If you're usually the main carer and your partner is now at home looking after the children either with you or on their own, this may be challenging. If they don't do things the same way as you do, it can be frustrating for both of you. Remember, they will probably be feeling out of their depth too. Try and support and advise them while also letting them develop their own way of doing things.

Remember that you are still parenting together even if you are physically apart.

Parenting and working at home

If you're having to work while your children are at home, accept that you are doing the best you can and that everyone will be struggling. This can be particularly challenging if you are a single parent household. Remember that you are the most important thing to your child, and try and spend quality time together when you can.

Accept that no one can be a perfect teacher, friend, chef and parent all at the same time and accept that doing less may sometimes be more.

Celebrate your achievements

This is a challenging time for all parents. Our children and young people are experiencing high levels of anxiety, they are separated from their friends and their daily lives have been turned upside down. This will bring additional parenting challenges. Try and point out things that your partner is doing well, or celebrate your own achievements.

It is important to remind your partner and yourself about your strengths as parents and what you are doing well.

Home-schooling

One of the biggest changes for our young people and for parents is that many of them will now be home-schooled. There is a lot of information about home-schooling being shared and this, while it is intended to be helpful, can add extra pressure. Remember, you have not chosen to home-school your children, they are at home due to the extraordinary situation we are in. Learning is important but you and your children are experiencing significant changes, lots of uncertainty and a lot of your outside support and activities will be reduced. Accept that you can't do everything, the important thing is your relationship with your child.

If your child is being sent more work than you can support them with, try to work with the school to agree a suitable level of work so that it does not cause additional pressure on your family.

Keyworker educating

If your child is going to keyworker educational provision they will also be adapting to several changes. They may be at a different school, their teachers, classrooms and activities will be different, and their close friends may not be there. You may also worry about the choice to send your child to school when so many are staying at home.

Remember that the keyworker places are there because of the vital role you are playing to look after our communities and your child is safe.

Changing plans

A lot of your plans as a family will have changed, like holidays, birthdays and trips to see relatives. These plans would have been something to look forward to. The impact of these changes will be different for everyone, some may feel very upset about the changes, whilst others may be too worried about what is happening now.

The plans we make as a family are often the things that bring us together. Perhaps you can make different plans like a movie night, a games night or a special meal where you all get dressed up. If you are apart from your family is there a game you can play over the internet, or can you talk about plans for when you do get home?

What everyday things are you missing about spending time with your family? Try making a list of what you'd like to do when it's possible again.

The same problems still exist

While you will be facing lots of new challenges at work and home, the old problems still exist. If a family member has health problems or additional needs, they are still there, things still break, roofs still leak, stuff still happens. It may be difficult to manage these things with your partner and family when you are under lots of stress. Your family may also not want to burden you with their own worries.

It might help to agree a scheduled time to talk about these things if they still need talking about, or to agree about things that you will 'park' for when the crisis is over.

Taking back control

Things may feel out of control at the moment. Perhaps there are small things you can do with your family to take back some control. This might be making schedules, planning activities, and tasks within the house. It might be as simple as sticking to set mealtimes and bedtimes for the children. What works for you might be different to what works for another family. Find what works for you and accept that this might take time.

You and your family are in survival mode. Don't feel pressurised to be perfect or do what you think you 'ought' to do because of others and accept that we are all rewriting the rule book.

The most important thing to remember is that self-care is not selfish. It's vital that you look after yourself for the benefit of your family and those you love or care for, as well as to look after your own health and wellbeing.

How to contact us

For information on our services during this time, advice and support on caring for children and young people, and lots more advice on how to look after each other during COVID-19 please visit our website:



<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/covid-19-coronavirus/>

If there are urgent/significant concerns about your child's mental health

- Please contact us on 0300 365 1234 between 8am-8pm Mon-Fri excluding Bank Holidays.
- Outside these hours, please contact the Crisis Team on 0300 365 9999.