

HARINGEY EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

PLAY AND INTERACTION AT HOME DURING COVID-19

Tips for play and interaction with your children at home



The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has unsettled family life around the world. School closures, remote working, physical distancing and restricted social gatherings are tricky to navigate for anyone, especially parents. We've compiled some handy tips to help you prioritise playing with your child in these difficult and uncertain times.

WHY ARE PLAY AND INTERACTION IMPORTANT?

- Play is so important to boost your child's development and learning, so much so that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a 'right of every child'
- Play and interaction do not just keep children and young people busy, they maximise development and contribute to cognitive, physical, social- and emotional well-being.
- Play and interaction offer ideal opportunities for parents to engage fully and 'tune in' with their children.

Current challenges:

- Despite the benefits derived from play for both children and parents, time for free play has been markedly reduced for most children as a result of COVID-19. Family circumstances have changed; schools are closed, children are at home, home schooling is being encouraged, established routines are difficult to continue, parents/ carers are working at home. All these factors in a very uncertain and unsettling time create challenges at home.
- Parents/ carers can feel pressured to be like formal teachers at home and although structured learning at home has its place, play and interaction are equally important.
- Stressed parents/ carers and children trying to emulate a classroom at home can create an emotionally adverse climate where wellbeing suffers.
- Play can help provide children with a protective, secure and stable platform much needed during these turbulent times.



HOW CAN I PROMOTE PLAY AND INTERACTION AT HOME?

Supporting your child's play and interaction at home can be fun and a great way to bond with and get to know your child better! Our homes do not have the same resources as those found in nurseries and schools but although we may be limited, there are still fundamental things we can do at home to create great play experiences.

Here are some parenting tips on promoting play:

- **One-on-one time**
- **Keeping it positive and fun**
- **Try to have a routine**
- **Promoting positive engagement**
- **Keep calm and manage stress**
- **Talking about COVID-19**



One-on-one Time

Ask, or try and find out, what your child would like to do and set aside protected time to spend with your child:

- **It can be for just 20 minutes**, or longer – it's up to you. It would help to be at the same time each day so children and teenagers can look forward to it.
- **Choosing builds their self-confidence.** If they want to do something that isn't recommended with social distancing, then this is a chance to talk with them about this.
- **When playing, always work at your child's level** of concentration/ language/ learning/ interest and let your child determine the pace. Keep it fun!
- **Take time to watch your child play**
- **Tune in and talk** about what you see (like a football commentary).
- **Ask questions** to help develop thinking and learn new vocabulary.

Ideas with your baby/toddler:



- Copy their facial expression and sounds.
- Sing songs, make music with pots and spoons.
- Stack cups or blocks.
- Tell a story, read a book or share pictures.
- Be creative! Use household items to make rattles, drums, tents/ dens, bubbles, boxes.
- Make puppets out of things around the home, e.g. socks!
- Make playdough and corn flour mixed with water.
- Make a 'treasure chest of fun' objects for your child.
- Babies and toddlers love sensory play including things they can touch, smell, see, hear, and taste... think of the five senses

Ideas with your young child:

- Read a book together, look at and talk about the pictures.
- Go for a walk – outdoors or around the home.
- Dance to music or sing songs!
- Do household activities together – make cleaning and cooking fun!
- Do art and creative activities.
- Imaginative play- pretend games such as teddies tea party, pretend shop, superheroes.
- Rough and tumble play.
- Dens, tents, forts etc.



Ideas with your older child or teenager:

For older children, it would be beneficial to learn more about their interests, find ways of exploring these together, taking time to listen, ask questions and show genuine interest.

- Talk about something they like: sports, music, celebrities, friends, keeping up with current trends such as dances, taking part in family challenges can be fun!
- Choreograph, dress up and direct your own dance videos (with special effects)!
- Go for a walk – outdoors (remembering social distancing rules).
- Exercise/ bike rides/ dancing together to their favourite music. There are many apps and videos that your teenager can show you. Do some family yoga or other exercise with YouTube.
- Creative activities such as wardrobe planning, hair/ make up/ pampering sessions, redesigning bedroom etc.

Eliminate other distractions where possible, for example, try and switch off the TV and phone. Listen to them, look at them. Give them your full attention. Have fun!

For children or young people with additional needs, it is important to adapt to your child's individual level, needs, likes and dislikes so they can access and benefit from play experiences. For example, if your child is hypersensitive, introduce new materials carefully or if your child has a physical or mobility impairment, make sure activities are accessible. You could access support from your child's school or look up supporting websites offering guidance to parents/ carers of children with particular needs such as [www. autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) (National Autistic Society), www.downs-syndrome.org.uk (Down's Syndrome), www.ndcs.org.uk (National Deaf Children's Society) and www.portage.org.uk (pre-school children with SEND).



Keeping it Positive and Fun

It is important to try to keep positive in these challenging times to promote wellbeing and good relationships. Children are much more likely to do what we ask if we give them positive instructions and lots of praise for what they do right.

Say the behaviour you want to see.

Use positive words and show encouragement.

Help your teenager stay connected.

Teenagers especially need to be able to communicate with their friends. Help them connect through social media and other safe distancing ways. This is something you can do together, too!



At the end of each day, **take a minute to think** about the day. Tell your child about one positive or fun thing they did. This could be for example, *'I loved the fun dance move you made up today. You are fantastic!'*

Try to have a Routine

COVID-19 has taken away our daily work, home and school routines. This is hard for you and your family. Making new routines can help us incorporate play/interaction into our day.

Create a flexible but consistent daily routine

- Make a **schedule** for you and your children that has time for structured activities as well as free time. This can help children feel more secure and be better behaved.
- Children or teenagers can **help plan** the routine for the day – like making a school timetable. Children will follow this better if they help make it.
- Include **exercise** each day - this helps with stress and kids with lots of energy at home.



Promoting Positive Engagement

These times are very challenging for our children and their fear, anxiety and reaction to change can show in their behaviour. This can create a difficult and stressful situation for everyone at home.



Relax and take a pause

Try to create a relaxed and calm atmosphere. Take a break or pause if necessary. Create a safe space for people to zone out. This can be especially important for children with Autism.



Keep Calm and Manage Stress

This is a stressful time. Take care of yourself, so you can support your children.

- **You are not alone-** millions of people have the same fears as you. Find someone who you can talk to about how you are feeling. Listen to them. Avoid social media and news that makes you feel panicked.
- **Take a break-** we all need a break sometimes. When your children are asleep, do something fun or relaxing for yourself. Make a list of healthy activities that **YOU** like to do. You deserve it!
- **Listen to your kids-** Your children will look to you for support and reassurance. Listen to your children when they share how they are feeling. Accept how they feel and comfort them.



Talking about COVID-19

During play and interaction, issues and questions about COVID- 19 will naturally arise and this can be a good time to talk in an open and honest manner. Think about how much they will understand. You know them best. Please look at the **Haringey Educational Psychology leaflet on the Haringey Local Offer 'Supporting Families during Corona Virus'**

- **Be open and listen-** allow your child to talk freely. Ask them open questions and find out how much they already know.
- **Be honest-** answer their questions truthfully. Think about how old your child is and how much they can understand.
- **Be supportive-** your child may be scared or confused. Give them space to share how they are feeling and let them know you are there for them.
- **It is OK not to know the answers-** it is fine to say, "We don't know, but we think..." Use this as an opportunity to learn something new with your child!
- **Focus on all the people who are helping** e.g. NHS staff, shop keepers, delivery drivers. Tell your child that we can be compassionate to people who are sick and those who are caring for them. Look for stories of people who are working to stop the outbreak and are caring for sick people.
- **There are a lot of stories going around-** some may not be true. Use trustworthy sites like [UNICEF](#) and the [World Health Organization](#).
- **End on a good note-** check to see if your child is okay. Remind them that you care and that they can talk to you anytime. Then do something fun together.



WHICH RESOURCES CAN I USE TO PROMOTE PLAY AND INTERACTION AT HOME?

Here are some starter ideas for fun activities, play and interaction:

- Dance challenges
- 100 things you can do indoors:
- <https://www.spreadthehappiness.co.uk/product/100-things-to-do-indoors/>
- Making a cosy fun space to share quality toys, games and stories
- Bringing the outdoors inside- aquariums, zoos and museums:
- <https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/animals/live-cams->
- Dublin Zoo: <https://www.dublinozoo.ie/animals/animal-webcams/>
- Visit museums around the world: <https://artsandculture.google.com/explore>



Fun activities for children with SEN,

- Dough Disco
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-lfzeG1aC4>
- Miss Veronica on You tube – all about dancing to different emotions:
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yl4RxcmGr9Y&feature=emb_logo

Traditional Play:

Living in a world of advanced technology and video games, screens can monopolise children's time, but traditional play can offer benefits which more modern play cannot. These include:

- Traditional board games such as Monopoly, Scrabble, Battleships, Jenga, Pictionary, jigsaws, puzzles etc
- Card games, dominos
- Traditional games like hide and seek, scavenger hunt, hot and cold, guess who? games, charades
- Construction play and junk modelling
- Making tents and caves, creating own spaces
- Dolls houses, teddy bear picnics
- Artistic and creative challenges
- Malleable play- playdough, kinetic sand
- Cooking/ baking/ making a café with menus and staff/ play money
- There are many traditional children's games easily available or ask extended family and grandparents over Face Time to describe games they played as children.

