

# Helping babies and young children under 5 through the coronavirus crisis

The coronavirus crisis affects everyone, including babies and young children. They might be affected by the anxiety of their parents, huge changes to their routine, or by a variety of losses, like not being able to see family members or no longer having contact with playmates.

If you are an early years worker, a parent, or a carer, there may be ways you can help!

# 10 ways you can make a difference



## 1. Acknowledge reactions if they happen

Do acknowledge any reaction that a baby or child may show as a result of being upset. Don't just brush over it in the hope that it might just go away.



## 2. Talk to the child about the current situation

To help children feel safe and manage feelings of loss, you can talk to them about their distress and difficulties. You can 'label' areas of concern when talking to them, and discuss the current situation honestly, in a way that is age appropriate and doesn't provoke fear. Be prepared with answers to questions that might also cause you anxiety or confusion.



## 3. Make explanations fun and visual

It's important to keep explanations simple. Some can be turned into a story. When talking about the virus, try and portray it in a way that feels less menacing, and allows you to include references which are familiar to the child.



## 4. Get to the route of the real problem

Make an effort to explore exactly what it is that is causing a baby or child to become anxious. For instance, you may find that a child may be worried about something specific, like missing friends or grandparents, rather than the coronavirus itself.



## 5. Be aware that babies and children can pick up on anxiety

Babies and young children can be affected by the anxiety of the adults around them. This will take its toll on them, even if they do not yet have the ability to put this into words. Adults need to be mindful of this when expressing their own feelings when children are present.



## 6. Let them know it's not their fault

Young children can sometimes believe they are responsible for events which are beyond their control. Reassure them that none of this is their fault and that you are here to keep them safe



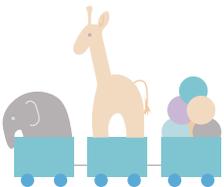
## 7. Compare to other experiences of life changes that worked out OK

If you can, think of a time in the past when the child experienced change that didn't create any negative impact. Talking about this experience with them might soothe their fears and help them to feel understood. For example, they may have moved to a different nursery but managed this transition well. Doing this will help the child start to feel less alone with their feelings and the sense that things are not the way they used to be.



## 8. Establish routines

Many children and babies will have had their usual routines disrupted. It's important to create new routines that can be repeated on a daily basis, or to re-establish existing ones. This can help them to feel safe. Keeping regular mealtimes and bedtimes, setting a daily time to play games together, read to them, or sing songs, will all contribute to their sense of stability.



## 9. Create a set time in the day for playing

Playing is important to the wellbeing and development of a baby or child. But it can also be a safe way for children to act out things that are worrying them. It can help you to pick up on worries or misunderstandings, and talk about them. It's also a great way to reduce stress in adults.



## 10. Look after yourself too

Even if babies and young children are not directly exposed to the trauma of the coronavirus outbreak, they can recognise stress and worry in the adults and older children they live with. So, looking after yourself puts you in the best position to look after those who are important to you.

## How to tell if a baby or young child may be struggling?

- Frequent crying
- Difficulty staying still
- Sleep difficulties (e.g. problems falling asleep, staying asleep, or having nightmares)
- Clinging to caregivers, or a fear of being alone
- Whining behaviour
- Increased temper tantrums
- Aggressive or angry behaviour
- Withdrawing into themselves
- Repetitive play (e.g. a child might keep repeating something they have heard, or start taking special care of a doll or teddy)
- Regressing to a younger age (e.g. a child might lose their toilet training, attempt to go back to drinking from a bottle, or start talking like a much younger child)

## Join Early Years in Mind

The Early Years in Mind learning network is a free network for early years staff and practitioners.

By joining the network you will have access to termly newsletters and events, updates on current research,

thinking and training, in regards to the mental health and wellbeing of babies, infants and their families.

[Register to join Early Years in Mind.](#)

### **About the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families:**

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families has developed and delivered pioneering mental health care for over 60 years.

**Our aim** is to transform current mental health provision in the UK by improving the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of treatment.

**We believe** that every child and their family should be at the heart of the care they receive, working in partnership with professionals.

**Our Patron:** Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge

The Anna Freud Centre, operating as Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, is a registered charity, number 1077106, and company limited by guarantee, company number 03819888.

---

Anna Freud Centre  
Kantor Centre of Excellence,  
4-8 Rodney Street, London. N1 9JH

T: +44 (0)20 7794 2313  
E: [info@annafreud.org](mailto:info@annafreud.org)  
W: [www.annafreud.org](http://www.annafreud.org)