



## Helping Babies, Young Children, Parents and Carers in the COVID-19 Crisis

This is a stressful time for everyone: adults, children and babies. Here at PAIRS (Parent and Infant Relationship Service) we suggest ways you can support babies and young children with their feelings.

### Help your baby and young child to cope with change

- Young children will have lots of questions about changes in their routines due to COVID-19. "Why have I stopped going to nursery, the playground or visiting grandparents and loved ones? Why are adults more worried? Why do I need to wash my hands so often?"
- Young children need help from adults to understand change and to explore their feelings. Even babies and children not yet talking will notice and feel these changes, particularly differences in their parents' mood.
- Respond to your children's questions so their worries do not build up over time. Young children need simple answers that will not scare them, and babies and young children need soothing and reassurance.
- Think about your child's level of understanding when explaining things. Some children may understand words like 'germ' and 'virus', others may respond better to pictures or stories.



## Protect your baby and young children from too much anxiety

- Young children need adults to be honest, but they do not need to know all of the worrying details about COVID-19. Protect your babies and young children from too many worrying conversations, pictures and news stories. They will not understand everything they hear or see, but they easily pick up on fear and anxiety (even when the TV is on in the background).
- When parents are stressed it can make your baby or young child even more worried. It is not always possible, especially in this period, but try to stay calm in front of your child.
- Some ways to cope with anxiety (for both parents and young children) include:
  - listen to and understand your worries
  - keep your mind and body active
  - find ways to distract yourself
  - notice positive things.

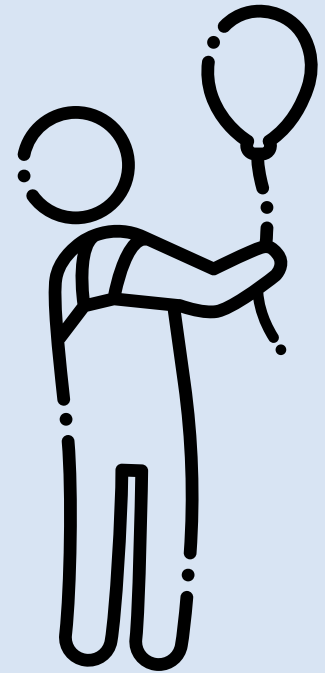


## Think about your baby and young child's feelings

- Babies and young children will have big feelings right now; they may feel happy about having more time with you and unhappy about other changes.
- Children's stress comes out in many ways:
  - they may be more upset/angry/clingy
  - their sleep may be disturbed
  - they may be more or less communicative
  - they may go back to younger habits.
- Babies and young children feel helped when parents try and understand their feelings, even if adults cannot get it right all the time!
- Watch, listen and play with your child to understand more about what they are feeling.
- You are the best person to soothe and reassure your baby or young child, especially when you know what is worrying them (remember, sometimes young children worry about things you least expect!).

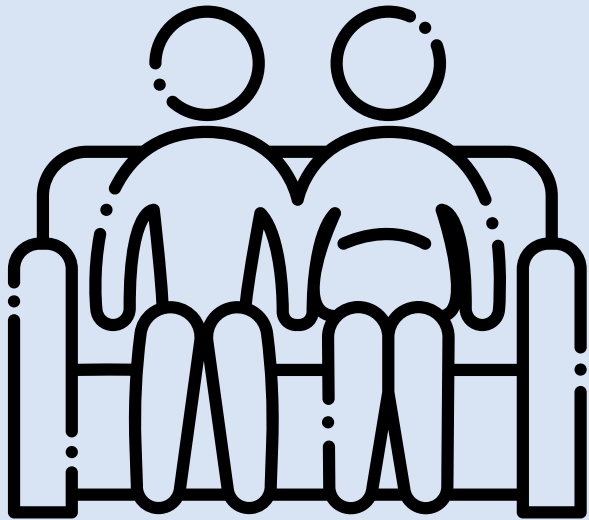
## Think about your feelings, too

- This is a very stressful time for parents and families. Understanding your own feelings, and looking after yourself, will make it more possible for you to help your baby and young child.
- Think about what keeps you going in difficult times and how to best manage your worry. For example:
  - limit the amount of news you watch
  - use relaxation techniques
  - exercise
  - keep connected to family members and professionals.
- Being held in mind by other people is very important in times of social distancing. Think who makes you feel safe and stay connected with them by phone, video, social media or just in your mind. The more you feel supported by others the more you can support your baby or young child with their feelings.



## Social distancing and isolation

- You are the centre of the world for your baby or young child. Being close to you, they may feel less deprived of contact with friends, relatives and loved ones compared to older children.
- You can help your young child keep in touch with others in different ways. Set up chats with friends and family over phone and video calls.
- Remember, children don't need to have a 'conversation' in these calls, they can play with other children or adults, and toys/stories can help with this.
- Spending more time with your baby and young child can feel great but it can also feel overwhelming, especially without the support of others. Be kind to yourself!
- Routines are always helpful for parents and children to get through the day. Don't feel you need to have the perfect timetable planned - young children are happy with very small things. If it's safe for your child, take time for yourself to rest and recover, especially when you are feeling very stressed.




### **Pregnancy – mothers/fathers to be and your baby**


- It's normal for pregnant mothers and their partners to have strong feelings including lots of worry. The current situation will make these feelings even bigger. Inside, your body and mind are changing to help a growing baby, and now you are coping with lots of outside changes caused by COVID-19.
- You may feel worried and disappointed about changes to your birth plan, your midwife changing, not being able to introduce your new baby to loved ones straight away because of social distancing. Both mothers and fathers will experience these worries and frustrations.
- Now more than ever think how you can look after yourselves and your baby. It is not always possible, but try to keep a calm environment. Keep connected with your baby and reassure him/her through talking, touch and music. Reach out to friends, family and loved ones. Take exercise, use relaxation and use distracting techniques. If you need help, ask a professional like your midwife or health visitor.

The PAIRS team can provide one-to-one support via phone and video to families in four Lambeth wards: Coldharbour, Stockwell, Tulse Hill, and Vassall. Contact the team to discuss your needs and what support can be offered.

Call **020 3228 6771** or email: **PAIRS\_Lambeth@slam.nhs.uk**

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