

Supporting your child's play during a crisis



Children play naturally. Usually the most important things you can do to support this are giving your child enough space and time to play every day and having an understanding attitude. If your child sees that you are happy they're playing, they tend to enjoy it more.

During this coronavirus pandemic, your child is expected to be at home for long periods of time. They may be physically separated from friends, family, routines and places that are important to them. It is a new situation for them – and for most of us.

You might see your child playing in a different way. They may return to play they enjoyed when they were younger. They may play games that are linked to illness, loss or even death. Their play might show feelings such as frustration, boredom or confusion.

Responding to your child's play

Playing is one way children deal with stress and cope with the situation they're in. When children play, they are working out what they think and how to respond.

Unless your child seems distressed or stuck in their play, you can usually be reassured that it's part of how they are coping.

However, your child might rely on you more than usual to make sure they have things to play with and space and time for them to play every day. Sometimes they might need extra attention to feel safe and cared for.

Examples of how you can support your child's play, without leading or taking over.

- **Wait to be invited to play.** If your child is happily playing, it's fine to leave them to it.
- **Help protect your child's play from interruptions.** If your child is absorbed in playing, avoid switching on the TV or games console, asking questions or asking them to stop for other activities.
- **Let your child explore and make mistakes.** Let your child use trial and error and their own ideas without feeling foolish or judged.
- **Let your children develop skills at their own pace.** It's tempting to step in to help your child when they find something difficult but that's how they learn.
- **Let children choose the themes of their games.** Even if the themes seem difficult or upsetting, it's their play.

These are general tips for supporting your child's play. Trust your own judgement.

Your child might like you to play with them or simply be nearby, so they feel safe and cared for. They may also like some privacy while they play – for example, if they're not used to spending so much time indoors with you.



The *IPA play in crisis* series is designed to offer straightforward advice and suggestions to help you and your child keep playing through the coronavirus pandemic.