



Support for Managing Children's Behaviour During Lockdown



The Association
for Child and Adolescent
Mental Health

The following messages and advice are taken from The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health and we hope they will act as a reminder/a guide/a reference and a reassurance to help you and your families find as much harmony as possible during this time.

"The current COVID19 crisis is creating unprecedented challenges at every level of society. The closure of schools and restrictions on movement for both adults and children mean that many families face enormous challenges as they try and navigate new ways of living together. Bored children with excess energy not burned off at school, are more likely to play up and cause disruption within the family. In particular, the necessity for parents to home school, or ensure that their child is completing assigned schoolwork at home, is a significant challenge for all parents. Frustrated and worried parents may over-react to these challenges. Very quickly these sorts of behaviours can escalate into repetitive cycles within families leading to the breakdown of relationships and exacerbation of problems." <https://www.acamh.org/>

Message 1: Try to keep things in perspective and stay positive.

If things are not going well with children it's easy to start to feel down and worried about your own parenting. This can reduce parenting confidence and may undermine your ability to manage your children's behaviour as you normally would.

It's vital that you take a break from any negative cycles of thinking.

Allow yourself to recognise that parenting is a real challenge and that nobody is perfect.

Know that small changes in the way you parent during this time can really improve matters.

Look after yourselves and keep a positive outlook by:

- making sure you take time out to relax and do things you enjoy - this can mean sacrificing a want or need of somebody else but this is okay and important in the longer run so don't feel guilty about it
- Try to reach out to family or friends for social support and advice.

Message 2 : Every family needs clear house-rules.

Rules are especially important when families are under pressure because they set out clear boundaries about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour; promote respect between family members and give children a sense of confidence in their surroundings.

Rules should be agreed first by you the adults and then your children should be brought on board.

Rules must be relevant in different ways to different people in the house.

Rules should be -

- few and simple
- easy to follow
- fair and realistic
- displayed publicly
- applied & followed consistently by everyone
- reviewed regularly

Message 3: Children who feel confident in themselves and their place in the family are less likely to misbehave – parents can promote this.

In times when families feel under pressure, children can start to feel insecure. These feelings can manifest as hostility and disruptive behaviour.

Try to take time out to talk to children about your concerns and reassure your children about your feelings for them.

Try to pay attention to your child's positive behaviours and achievements including giving praise and encouragement to bolster self-esteem.

Try to find things your family can do together. This is a great way for you to show how much you care, to praise and build your child's confidence.

Message 4: Good parent-child communication is the foundation to better child behaviour.

If children don't know what a parent wants them to do either because they don't hear what they say or understand what they hear, then it's unreasonable to expect them to follow instructions.

There are simple things you can do to improve communication. First get your child's attention, secondly make sure you are understood and thirdly model good communication skills.

To get a child's attention you can

- move to same room as your child.
- remove distractions like phones or computers.
- make eye-contact.

To ensure a child's understanding you can

- speak slowly.
- use simple short sentences - one idea or point per sentence.
- check that they have understood.

To be a good role model you can be -

- calm and firm - don't plead.
- polite and respectful.

Message 5: Using rewards selectively can help parents encourage better behaviour in their children.

Parents can use rewards to improve their children's behaviour and the extent to which they will follow agreed house rules.

Rewards should be -

- relevant but reasonable; give rewards a child values but are affordable eg. stickers or points collected for a special event or small treat.
- fair; use a similar approach with all children.
- selective; give rewards only when children behave in the expected way.
- clear - make sure children understand what is being rewarded.
- timely - reward as soon after the desired behaviour as possible.
- be "as good as their word" - always follow through on what is promised.
- motivating - encourage "trying" to follow the rules as well as "succeeding".
- consistent between adults - with both parents (if there are two) using the same approach.
- visible - record rewards (stickers or points) on a chart which is displayed publicly (on the fridge for example).

Message 6: Simple common-sense strategies can limit parent-child conflict.

Frustrated and/or worried children are more likely to be oppositional and defiant. Some children are naturally more easily frustrated and reactive. Children with autism or ADHD, for instance, might be like this, through temperamental differences. Home schooling may be a significant source of parent-child conflict in these times, and strategies may need to be developed to support children to learn in a calm and supportive way.

There are things parents can do to reduce the likelihood of such reactions and/or manage them when they arise:

- try as best you can to keep children occupied.
- agree routines and plans for each day with your child. If plans must change then clear explanations should be given.
- try to avoid tasks and situations you know your child will find frustrating, upsetting, provoking or just too exciting.

If despite all this planning a child starts to get upset, try to use distraction. For instance, talk about something the child will find funny.

Try to create a safe and secure space where you can take your child if things really get out of hand.

Message 7: Find ways to avoid over-reacting to children's misbehaviour.

Parenting can be an emotional business and most parents do sometimes get upset with their children and do or say things that they regret. Parenting is most effective in reducing conflict and promoting better behaviour when it combines a sense of calm authority with kindness and respect. When children see parents lose their temper they may lose confidence in, and respect for, their parent which may increase their levels of oppositionality.

To avoid this, parents should;

- avoid situations where they know they find it hard to keep calm.
- use a firm, steady and respectful tone of voice - not critical or harsh.
- take a breath and collect your thoughts before continuing when you feel yourself getting upset. Counting to 10 can help.
- be prepared to walk away to a safe space if you feel yourself getting upset
- if you experience anger management problems, seek advice and help from professionals.

Message 8: Sanctions, used as a last resort, can be put in place to encourage children to follow rules.

If rewards appear insufficient to encourage better behaviour parents may decide to use sanctions such as taking away something that their child values when they break rules. Such sanctions should be used only as a last resort to discourage persistent rule breaking.

- Before starting to sanction, everyone in the family should know and agree with the plan.
- Sanctions should be practical, fair, time-bound and relevant.
- When administering sanctions parents should do so with a sense of calm authority.

Parents should -

- calmly remind the child what rule they broke and the agreed sanction.
- resist getting into a negotiation.
- match the sanction to age and temperament of the child.
- be consistent - always follow through on what you say you will do.
- avoid overusing sanctions - they can become ineffective and be perceived as oppressive.