



Parenting during pandemic

Day 25: What are children learning from lockdown and social distancing?

Well, essentially we won't know the full extent of what children are learning from lockdown and social distancing until more time has passed and further studies emerge. What we do know, however, is that children will be learning from what they hear about lockdown and social distancing as well as coronavirus. It is important, therefore, that they have a child-friendly explanation of these things. You may have seen our guides to talking to children about coronavirus but we posted these on our website early on and they focus on speaking about COVID-19 without much focus on lockdown and/or social distancing.

The risk in not speaking to children about lockdown and social distancing is that they can pick up on bits of information and without a full explanation or understanding, make assumptions, jump to conclusions and have their own perceptions of what they think is going on. This can lead to uncertainty, worry, anxiety and other difficulties. For example, children at present are being told to stay away from other people. Without an explanation they could jump to all sorts of conclusions about why this might be. They may think they have done something wrong and that people don't want to be near them. Even if they understand that social distancing is due to coronavirus, they may think that other people are dangerous and scary because they may have coronavirus. Some of the international charities have been keen to spread the message that there is a risk of racism emerging if particular people or groups of people are associated with coronavirus or the spread to others.

While some children may initially have thought that getting out of school for a bit would be great, they may now be bored and missing it. The same may be true for some adults when thinking about their work! It may be helpful to think what we are all learning from lockdown and social distancing and what we want children to learn. We are unlikely to want to teach children to be fearful of others and/or worried about going out so we need to give them an understanding around lockdown and social distancing that is positive and helpful but not unrealistic.

Similarly to our advice about speaking to children about coronavirus, it is important to be honest with children about lockdown and social distancing. Allowing them to ask questions

can be helpful but it is important to note that we don't have to have all of the answers. If we don't know then we can just say we don't know and agree to try to find out where possible or to look into it together. Obviously they will be likely to ask when lockdown and social distancing will be over and we can be honest about the frustration of not knowing the answer to this.

The language we use with children is also important. Instead of talking about being stuck at home, we can say we are safe at home. Rather than talking about staying away from others, we can talk about keeping each other well by having a bigger bubble between people. Social contacts can be kept up in other ways where technology allows.

Discussing the practicalities of social distancing can be helpful so that children know what to expect when out for walks. Children learn a lot from watching what we do so modelling how to socially distance from others without it being a big deal can be helpful. If they see that we can be a safe distance from people but still smile and be friendly, then they are less likely to take negative meanings from social distancing.

It may be helpful to talk to children directly about what they think of lockdown and social distancing and how they feel about it. Doing this allows them to know that they can talk to us about these things and this can set up open lines of communication both for now and for the future. The end of the conversation can be important in this regard too because children will pick up from us whether this is something they can talk to us about again or whether this is something we expect to be finished with this one chat.

If children don't like to talk, there are lots of other ways to communicate with them about lockdown and social distancing. This may be through play, drawing, painting, asking them to make posters to help people with these things or to teach teddy about them etc. The more fun it is, the less scary it is likely to be for children.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing another day off school and we hope you will join us again on Monday.

Monday's topic: The new "normal". Overwhelmed or settling into parenting during pandemic?

Please contact us with questions, comments or topics you'd like to see covered. We'd love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.