

EARLY YEARS TEAMS MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

During these difficult and scary times, we all have worries about our families, our friends and ourselves. Some of you might also be thinking about the children and families who avail of your services. As an early years educator, **you have a wealth of knowledge** and experience that will be a valuable asset for parents and children over the coming weeks. With this in mind, we have come up with a **few suggestions** to help keep a sense of connectedness **through text, phone, email or social media**.

Look after yourself

This is a very stressful time for everyone and your **self-care is important**. You might be caring for your own children or other members of your family. Try to create some quiet time for yourself. You will also need relationships and connection so keep in touch with family and friends. Don't put too much pressure on yourself to be working at the capacity you were before this crisis.

Stay connected

We want children and families to know we are thinking of them, care for them and miss them. **Use social media to stay connected** such as What's App, Facebook and Instagram, and let parents know they can join or follow. Teleconferencing apps such as Zoom and Skype can offer ways to maintain face-to-face contact. Emailing can be an easy way to contact parents and share information. If you have a website, updates can be added regularly. And let's not forget the old reliables – talking over the phone or sending a letter or card by post. Give parents a choice and ask them how they would prefer to be contacted.

Reassure parents

When interacting with parents it is important that we **acknowledge their fears and concerns** and not try to make it all better. Providing a friendly and listening ear can help to create a sense of calm. Remind parents that they are not alone and that it is important that they look after themselves at this time. Have a list of contacts ready in case you need to refer parents for more intensive supports.

Support a daily routine

As we know, **establishing a consistent daily routine is very important** for children as it creates a sense of stability and predictability. Offer ideas and support to parents around creating a flexible daily routine with their child.

Establish direct links with children

With parents' permission and support, **you might be in a position to engage with children directly**. To let the children know you are still thinking of them, make a recording of you with a message for the children in your group. Record yourself reading a favourite story or singing some of the action songs they know. You might also be able to use video calling technology to link in with some of the children to tell a story using puppets or just for a chat. You know your children and their interests, plan something that might hold their interest for a little while.

Encourage movement

Children will most likely be spending a lot of time indoors and ideas **on how to encourage more movement activities during the day might be welcome**. Be creative - maybe you could lead a movement activity through video call or a recording. Share ideas for easy to do movement activities with parents such as dancing, indoor obstacle courses or Simon Says. Let parents know about any good online resources you have spotted to support movement such as children's yoga or exercise classes. Ideas on how to engage children with nature such as gardening (indoors or outdoors) will be welcome at this time.

Support learning

Some parents might be putting pressure on themselves to deliver a full schedule of learning for their child. Remind parents that the most important thing at this time is their family's wellbeing and if planning learning activities for their child is adding stress then they should avoid this. As we all know, **children learn best through play**. Offer parents ideas for interesting activities that you think their child would enjoy. Consider what materials might already be available in the home. Share some of the great resources for parents available online, for example, the parent tip sheets on the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide and the free Barnardos ebooks for parents. Sometimes it can be overwhelming for parents if we send too many ideas, consider the interests and developmental stages of the children in your group when thinking about what to forward on. For example, if you know your children love wild animals, you might send a link to the live webcams at Dublin Zoo.

Encourage peer relationships

It is important to **continue to support the relationships children have with each other**. Some children will be really missing their friends at this time and you might be their only link to the rest of the children in their group. Perhaps the children could be encouraged to draw pictures to share with each other. With parents' consent share photos from your setting. This will help the children to think and talk about their friends. Ask parents if they would like their contact details shared with some of the other parents so the children can connect with each other directly.

[Check out Barnardos tip sheets for parents that may be useful.](#)

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