



OVERVIEW

During the uncertain time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to take the time to ensure that children and young people's wellbeing is nurtured and that their views and wishes are heard and considered.

There are a variety of ways in which we can be more child centred in our approach. The Institute of Child Protection Studies has developed a series of resources for all adults who support children and young people based on the Kids Central Toolkit.

The series includes an overview and a range of tip sheets based on the Kids Central principles.

Find these tip sheets on the [Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal](#)



Principle 4: Make it fun during COVID-19

Environments for children and young people should be friendly and provide them with opportunities to develop and grow.

Children and young people tell us that the most important place in their life is their home. That's where they feel most safe, where they can play and learn how to deal with the world around them. But home life has changed dramatically in many homes as a result of the pandemic - loss of job, loss of home, 'home schooling', transitioning back to school, increased online time, caring for family and friends who are elderly, sick or isolated. Everyone in the family is affected by these changes.

While practitioners will have received COVID-19 information, resources and innovative tools to help parents and carers through these times, one important ingredient – fun – might have been overlooked. Take a moment once in a while to turn the dial down on serious and turn the dial up on fun. Play is something we all can do to have fun!

Play is the work of childhood. Play is a vital part of a child's experience. Through play children learn about their world and practice how to take part in it. Brain research shows that early play experiences profoundly impact a child's brain development. The benefits of play include:

- giving children a sense of power and control
- enhancing imagination
- allowing for investigation and repetition
- promoting longer attention span
- fostering deeper interests
- decreasing stress
- building social and turn-taking skills
- allowing children to practise different roles
- encouraging language development
- having fun!

Tips for play. Play and creativity are great ways to support and comfort children and young people during this time. Here are some tips:

- let the child or young person lead the activity
- get down to their level
- be attentive and listen first, reflect and then respond
- model communication skills
- communicate your thoughts and feelings sincerely
- encourage them to talk about what's on their mind and offer their opinions on topics that are important to them
- avoid distractions; keep your focus on the child or young person.

Activity 1: Friendly maps

Use this activity to gauge how child friendly an area is, to get feedback from kids on what areas feel safe and don't feel safe, and to get ideas from children on how things may be improved for them.



Click on the page icon above to access the activity.

Activity 2: Having fun in quarantine

Adults have come up with light-hearted terms for the current situation, such as *coverload* (for information overload), and working at the *isodesk*. During the more restricted lockdown period, some families invented creative solutions to celebrating birthdays, such as putting teddy bears and dolls outside the neighbours' houses, or hosting drive-by birthday parades. Children and young people can come up with their own creative words and their own alternatives to play. Encourage them to be inventive.

Have you seen some of the great fun [family quarantine activities](#) on YouTube? You could watch them together - or even better make one of your own!

How can I create fun?

Creating fun spaces. During this pandemic, children and young people are spending large amounts of time in confined spaces, in new environments or in a new residential setting. Try to ensure that the environments are child friendly and inviting. Caring adults can also encourage them to have a sense of ownership and control over their environment and provide fun opportunities to feel connected to the people around them.

Children and young people have told us that putting up their own artwork on the walls, setting up and moving furniture and being able to unpack and spread out their belongings helps them feel at home. It's the little things that count – these can make the greatest impact when creating a child-friendly space. It's also important to create emotionally safe places.

Here are some tips on creating safe havens for children and young people to play in:

- Set and communicate clear expectations about the space and how people will treat each other while in the space.
- Create a vibrant and natural space outside by hanging a bird house or feeders.
- If you are lucky enough to have a garden, you can design a garden bed, plant it with flowers, herbs and other scented plants for the children to tend and play in – gardens contain mud and mud makes great mud pies!
- Create quiet places in the garden where children and young people can play hide and seek or sit and hide or read.
- If you don't have a garden space, transform an indoor environment like a lounge room corner into a safe fun place, e.g. make a cubby with blankets.
- Allow children and young people to design and have some control over their own space within the garden or home environment.
- Ensure that the space has adequate access, is inclusive and has alternative activities for children and young people with differing needs.

Being more child friendly everywhere. Sometimes contact with children and young people needs to take place in environments that are not child friendly, such as offices or meeting rooms. And sometimes work can take a parent's or carer's attention away from children. This can be stressful for adults and kids alike. One way to remedy this is to take child-friendly treats with you:

- pens, pencils and textas
- brightly coloured tablecloths
- smiley face stamps
- a packet of tissues
- small packet of chips, lollies or a healthy snack
- a packet of novelty adhesive bandages (great for little ones)
- a small ball, doll or toy car
- picture books
- mouldable clay face (available at markets or online). (The [Make it Fun booklet](#) - from page 21 onwards - has lots of fun craft activities to do together at home or when you are out.)

Providing time, support and opportunities to strengthen parent-child relationships is one of the most crucial tasks for workers who support families. Helping to develop the parent-child relationship through play and fun makes it even more worthwhile.