



A WAY OF BEING WITH CHILDREN

Showing Affection During Covid-19

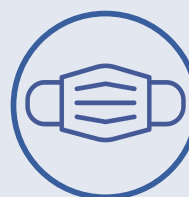
Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience

COVID-19 Affects Closeness with Children

As human beings, we all need physical contact to feel secure and loved, and children are no exception. The limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have made it increasingly difficult for adults to show affection to children, which may have resulted in feelings of isolation, loneliness, and disconnection. Reduced physical contact has also impacted adults, especially teachers and caregivers in the classroom environment. But there are ways to safely show affection and care while still adhering to safety guidelines.

Health & Safety Recommendations That May Affect Classroom Dynamics:

- Social distancing
- Wearing masks
- Limiting the number of children in classrooms
- Avoiding physical contact with others
- Discourage sharing items in classrooms
- Washing hands
- Sanitizing items/equipment



The Power of Touch

When we hug or feel a friendly touch on our skin, our brains release oxytocin, a hormone that increases positive, feel-good sensations of trust, emotional bonding, and social connection. It also decreases fear and anxiety responses in the brain at the same time. That's why oxytocin is affectionately known as the "love hormone." Physical contact with loved ones is an essential part of healthy growth. Children need snuggles, kisses, hugs, physical closeness, and protection just as much as they need food. You can reinforce your relationship with your children and enhance a secure attachment with them by using touch in a safe manner to convey those caring and important messages which words or deeds alone cannot show.

Physical Contact Has Been Shown to Improve:

- Attachment
- Communication
- Social Relationships
- Growth
- Sensory Development
- Mood (Reduced stress/anxiety)
- Motivation
- Learning



Encouraging Social Skills Without Physical Contact

You may need to get creative to help children express their feelings to you, and to find ways you can show them how much you care.

Think about trying a few of these activities:

- Making cards for peers
- Doing drawings for peers
- Sing songs for peers
- Provide words to children; help describe feelings
- Use reflections and encouragement



Showing Affection Without Physical Contact

- Heart sign
- Signing & saying "I love you"
- Butterfly hugs
- Waving
- Reading books
- Music and dance
- Drawings
- Reflections and validating feelings
- Encouragement
- Positive affirmations



How to Teach a Hug

Demonstrate to your children how they can hug themselves to aid regulation and create a feeling of comfort and care. Come up with a fun name for it like a "butterfly hug", "gorilla hug", or "panda bear hug" -- something that makes them smile! When a child is sad, announce that it's time for a "gorilla hug". Wrap your arms around yourself and have the child wrap their arms tightly around themselves. Together, count to 20. By encouraging mirroring, you create a sense of connection. You can also integrate deep breathing to be completed during the self-hug as this will also encourage self-regulation and help children develop healthy coping-skills.



Reading Resources

"When We Can't Hug"
- Eoin MacLaughlin

"The Invisible String"
- Patrice Karst

"I Love You Rituals"
- Beky A. Bailey

Get more resources at: www.centerforchildcounseling.org/awayofbeing