

Coronavirus (COVID-19): physical distancing and family wellbeing

Key points

- **Physical distancing can be both challenging and positive for families.**
- **Look after family wellbeing by making the most of family time, using routines, staying connected and managing conflict.**
- **If you're struggling, call Lifeline on 131 114, or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.**
- **If children are struggling, they can call Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800 or Youth Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.**

Physical distancing or self-isolation?

The rules about physical distancing and self-isolation are changing all the time. For the most up-to-date information, you can check Healthdirect's [physical distancing guidelines \(https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-avoid-infection-faqs\)](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-avoid-infection-faqs) and [self-isolation guidelines \(https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolation-faqs\)](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolation-faqs).

This article is for families who are well and are physical distancing. If a member of your family is self-isolating because of a coronavirus (COVID-19) diagnosis, you might be able to adapt some of the tips in this article to help you through this situation.

Physical distancing during coronavirus (COVID-19): what it means for your family

Physical distancing means more time at home with your family. And if you're working, it might mean that you're balancing supervision of children's learning, family time, and work commitments.

This is a challenging experience. It can also be **a positive experience** if you can:

- make the most of family time

- use routines to support family health and wellbeing
- stay connected with others in creative ways
- manage family conflict in positive ways.



If physical distancing is affecting your wellbeing, or you're struggling because you've lost your job or for any other reason, seek help. You can call your local GP. You can also call [Lifeline](http://www.lifeline.org.au/Home/default.aspx) (<http://www.lifeline.org.au/Home/default.aspx>), on 131 114, [Beyond Blue](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/) (<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/>), on 1300 224 636, or your [state or territory parenting helpline](https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/helplines) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/helplines>).

Making the most of family time during physical distancing

Physical distancing can give you more opportunities to spend time together as a family. And by spending more time together as a family, you can **build relationships and help your children feel happier, safer and more relaxed** during this experience.

If you're working from home, you might not always have a lot of time during work hours. So it's all about **making the most of the time you do have** by giving your child positive attention and turning everyday moments into quality time.

Positive attention

You can give your children plenty of [positive attention](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/first-1000-days/loving-relationships/positive-attention) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/first-1000-days/loving-relationships/positive-attention>), even during brief interactions. For example, positive attention can be:

- making eye contact and smiling at your child
- showing your child lots of affection – this could be giving cuddles or elbow bumps if you're comfortable to do this, or saying 'I love you'
- telling your child you're proud of how she's handling the situation
- praising your child for doing schoolwork or chores
- showing interest in what your child has achieved each day.

Quality time

During physical distancing, you can turn everyday moments into quality time. Quality time can be:

- a shared laugh when you're bathing your toddler
- a chat while you're folding the laundry with your preschooler or preparing dinner with your pre-teen or teenage child
- an afternoon break from work so you and your child can make a snack together.

If you can, **plan some regular one-on-one time with each of your children**. Children have different personalities, and some children might seem to need less time than others – but they'll all benefit from special time with you during physical distancing.

Fun tips for family time during physical distancing

Your family might have to do some things differently during physical distancing, but there are still many things you can do together. Here are some fun ways you can spend time together and build your relationships:

- Encourage your child to draw a picture for someone, then take a photo and send it to family or friends.
- Play family games together – you could try board games, 20 questions or charades.
- Have a picnic in the garden or living room.
- Start a chapter book, and read one chapter each day. Or tell a story together – you can take turns to add the next instalment.
- Turn on some music and have an indoor singing, lip sync or dance party.
- Follow along to some YouTube exercise videos.
- Make and edit a short video together.
- Take a virtual tour of a gallery or historic place together.
- Go for a walk or bike ride together if you can keep a responsible distance from other people.



There are many support services that can help your children during physical distancing. Your children can call Kids Helpline (<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>), on 1800 551 800, Youth Beyond Blue (<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/>), on 1300 224 636, and eheadspace (<https://www.eheadspace.org.au/>), on 1800 650 890.

Using routines to support family wellbeing during physical distancing

For health and wellbeing during physical distancing, children need a sense of security, healthy eating, physical activity, good sleep, play and quiet time. You need these things too.

A good way to make sure you all get what you need for physical and mental wellbeing is to plan a new daily routine (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/family-life/routines-rituals/daily-routines-for-your-family-four-steps>).

How routines can help children and teenagers during physical distancing

Routines let children know what to expect. This means they can help children and teenagers feel safe and secure. This is really important during physical distancing, when children and teenagers might be feeling stressed, worried, frustrated or just bored.

If children and teenagers need to do schoolwork, a routine can help them get through lessons and keep up with learning at home. Likewise, you can make time for different kinds of play in your children's routine – for example, outside play, quiet play, craft, reading, digital play and so on. This can help your children get a good balance of activities into their days at home.

Routines can help children and teenagers stay healthy and hygienic too. For example, more careful handwashing can be part of the routine, as can exercising, eating and going to bed at regular times.

Also, routines can reduce stress, and lower stress is good for children's immune systems.

How routines can help you during physical distancing

Routines can help you to:

- get through your daily tasks, freeing up time for your children and time for yourself
- share out household chores in a fair way while everyone is at home
- feel like you're doing a good job as a parent
- feel more organised and in control, which lowers your stress
- step back from sorting out disputes – for example, if Wednesday night is one child's night to wash up, there's no need for a sibling fight about who does the job.

Why routines are good for family relationships

Routines can strengthen family relationships.

For example, if you're all at home during physical distancing, it might be easier to share regular family meals. And family meals can be a great time for you to check in on each other.

If you have younger children, reading a story together before bed can be when you and your child have special, comforting time together during physical distancing. For older children and teenagers, a regular card game could work in the same way.

Here's a tip: why not make **time for gratitude** during your family routine? This is about regularly sharing something from your day that you're grateful for. It can help you all to feel good and stay positive.



You don't need to schedule every part of your day into a family routine during physical distancing. It's also good for you all to have free time to relax. And if you have older children and teenagers, it's important to involve them in discussing and developing your family routine. The more say they have in the routine, the more likely they are to stick with it and get the most out of it.

Staying connected with others during physical distancing

Staying connected with your extended family and friends is an important part of maintaining your wellbeing and staying positive during physical distancing. But it can be hard to stay in touch with people when you can't visit or you're not catching up at sport, church, school pick-ups, family barbecues and so on.

This means you might need to be a bit creative.

Here are **examples of how you and your children can stay in touch** with friends and family:

- Have a virtual lunchtime or playdate so your child can see and talk to friends while they're eating or playing.
- Set up a schedule for phone calls or video chats with extended family members who don't live in your house.
- Help your child set up a group chat using an app so he can talk to his friends and share funny articles or videos.
- Suggest that older children and teenagers spend time playing online multiplayer games with their friends.
- Celebrate birthdays and other achievements by sending e-cards or video messages.
- Get some postcards, writing paper and stamps, so children can stay connected the old-fashioned way.

Family conflict management during physical distancing

Fights among younger siblings (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/family-life/siblings/why-children-fight>) and fights among teenage siblings (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/family-life/siblings/sibling-fighting>) are common at the best of times. During a stressful experience like physical distancing, it's pretty natural for families to experience more conflict.

The good news is that sibling fights and family conflict can be a great chance for your children to practise social skills like problem-solving (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/behaviour/encouraging-good-behaviour/problem-solving-steps>). It's also a chance for you to be a problem-solving role model. When you approach family conflict like this, it can reduce everyone's stress levels and make your family relationships stronger.

There are a few things that can help you prevent sibling fights (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/family-life/siblings/preventing-fights>) and manage family conflict during physical distancing:

- Set some family rules (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/behaviour/rules-consequences/family-rules>) early on. For example, 'We use calm words if we're feeling cross'. Or 'We try to breathe deeply before we react'.
- Praise children when you see them getting along well or working together to sort out a problem. For example, 'It's great how you came up with a roster for the PlayStation'.
- Wait before you step in to handle sibling fights (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/family-life/siblings/handling-fights>). Sometimes this gives children the chance to sort things out for themselves. But if a disagreement gets physical or involves shouting or nasty remarks, you need to break it up.
- Try to get children involved in calmly reflecting on the disagreement, sorting out what should happen next, and discussing how they might be able to avoid a similar conflict in future.

You might find that there's more conflict between you and your older child (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/communicating-relationships/communicating/conflict-management-with-teens>) than before physical distancing. In this situation, it can help to **pick your battles**. So even if you'd prefer for your child to make her bed while she's at home, think about whether it's really worth arguing about. You might want to save your energy for important things like making sure she's getting enough healthy food, sleep and exercise.



If there are problems in your relationship, including family violence, you can get support by calling the National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service (<https://www.1800respect.org.au/>), on 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732). Family violence is not OK. It's never justified by feelings or family circumstances.

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External links

- [Australian Government Department of Health – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) health alert \(https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert\)](https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert)
- [Healthdirect – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus\)](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus)

- [World Health Organisation – Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19)
(<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19>)
- [National Disability Insurance Scheme – Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information and support](https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus) (<https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus>)
- [Google Play Store – Coronavirus Australia app](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=au.gov.health.covid19)
(<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=au.gov.health.covid19>)
- [Apple App Store – Coronavirus Australia app](https://apps.apple.com/au/app/coronavirus-australia/id1503846231)
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