



Brussels, May 15 2020

Dear Parents, Dear Teachers,

We are in week 9 of confinement.

The 2 months have proven to be challenging in many ways. They have also proven our capacity to adjust to adverse reality.

Equally Parents and Teachers, continue juggling professional life, household, children's schoolwork, couple and whole family life.

As much as adults and children have gained more or less the rhythm / routine of working and learning, the situation remains emotionally intense, stressful and tiring. The fatigue creeps in. The resources wear out for both adults and children.

Undoubtedly the immediate and lingering psychosocial impact of confinement on adults and children is still to be examined and determined. Meanwhile let us be attentive and preventive about our and our children's well-being.

**Below you will find some points to be aware of and vigilant about.**

It seems like we are running a long marathon. Let us manage the energy and resources to sustain us as long as it is needed. In such a different reality we might find some new ways of facing difficulties and learn how we can support our children and when we need to seek professional guidance and help.

The school psychologists of the EEB1 remain available to students, parents and school staff who wish to seek advice. We will support you, share our ideas, resources, and answer your questions. Our contact and availability you may find at :

<http://www.eeb1.com/en/eeb1-psychologists/>

Wishing you pleasant holiday week.

Julia LEMBERGER, Violetta SZEWCZUK & Yannik GLADSTEEN  
Psychologists European School Brussels 1

**CONFINEMENT & EMOTIONAL RISKS AT STAKE**  
**Signs of alert that would help you to prevent and act in time**

***Longing for social interactions***

9 weeks of restricted contact with friends, family, classmates and colleagues makes a great mark on our general well-being. All of us, children as well as active professional parents, spend most of the day surrounded by “other” people. The relations “outside” may vary from very positive and uplifting to negative and draining.

For young people school is as much about learning as socialising. It’s there where they learn to live in groups and in society. Not being able to “see and touch” their friends might provoke feelings of loss and solitude even for those who stay connected virtually.

***Confinement highlights prior existing traits***

Lots of parents have remarked significant and worrying changes in their child’s behaviour and mood. The emotional burden of confinement and all that it implies has marked the well-being of small / young people. Worrying children might become very anxious; normally lively children might be irritable, quarrelsome; usually not very expressive children become withdrawn, tearful; children with low self-esteem become apathetic...

Confinement accentuates certain traits that have been there already. In our busy life they were hidden - covered with school, activities, family and social buzzing. Now they are intensified and much more pronounced and so more obvious to adults, especially parents.

***New fear***

As the restrictions are slowly alleviated, some children (and adults) might actually be afraid of “life after confinement”. Not necessarily they will be able to put it into words but you may notice changes in behaviour or other “signs”.

***Child’s emotional world***

Bear in mind that fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, worries, low moods are expressed differently by children. Identifying emotions is sometimes not easy for adults, let alone young people. Depending on the developmental age of a child, the abilities to be aware of emotions or thoughts put it into words and actually express it, might be challenging to read.

The younger the child, the more you can rely on information drawn from observation. Teens tend to be private about their emotional life therefore they may tell you “everything is fine”. This answer may cover up their concern to worry, disappoint or make you angry.

Look out for any changes and warning signs in your child’s mood and / or behaviour. In such case you may want to find some support to address it through: discussion with partner, friend, online resources, etc.

If these changes persist and show no improvement over time, it is important to verify them with somebody who is qualified in psychological support. The longer a child stays in an emotionally vulnerable state, the higher the risk of developing more severe psychological issues. Hence early intervention can make a whole lot of difference.

Below you will find the list of signs that, of course, is not exhaustive. For those in **bold** we highly recommend to contact a psychologist.

### **1. Emotional:**

- Upset, irritable, on edge, explosive
- Tearful, down, sad, anxious, nervous, worried
- Negative about self, school, friends, future
- Lower self-esteem: giving up on tasks, statements like “I can’t do anything”, “I’m stupid”, “I’ll never manage / get better”
- **Dark statements: “it all doesn’t matter”, “it will never get better”, “I don’t want to be here”, “I’d like to disappear /not wake up”**

### **2. Behavioural:**

- Agitated / restless, verbally or physically aggressive, quarrelling frequently, tensed
- Emotional “meltdowns”, cry more than usual, more clingy, needing more physical contact and reassurance
- Quieter than usual, excessively withdrawn (eg all the time in room on the phone or, online gaming etc), interacts / participates less, seems tired, plays less
- Passive, “bored” and not being able to engage even in otherwise pleasant activities
- Anxious separating from parent
- **Changes in sleeping patterns (interrupted sleep, difficulties to fall asleep, unusual early waking up, etc)**
- **Changes in eating patterns (restricted eating or overeating, unusual selecting foods,**
- **Wetting bed**
- **Obsessive thoughts that are unsettling in the child’s or adults eyes**
- **Rigid behaviours: rituals (repeating a sequence of actions in very rigid way, e.g. having specific order to put clothes while dressing) or having certain compulsions (not being able to stop oneself, e.g. checking if the door is “properly” closed)**
- **Harms self or others: hitting, kicking, pushing, scratching; toward self: putting fingernails in the skin, hitting face or head, playing with hair and pulling it out**

### **3. Physical:**

- Stomach aches
- Headaches
- Feeling tightness in chest
- Rapid heart beat
- Constipations / diarrhoea

#### **4. School related:**

- Lower motivation, interest in any activity
- Lower concentration, unfocused
- Passive
- Difficulties to follow tasks even though usually child manages and follows instructions

#### **Parents' well-being (surely by now stretched)**

It is important to be aware of your capacities and limitations. Recognise when the threshold of tolerance is getting low. Situations, children's behaviour, that otherwise were "bearable" may now cause instant explosive reactions. Losing control, it is likely to cross limits of what you consider acceptable behaviour. Let us remain attentive to these risks which present real dangers, verbal or physical, for you and those around you.

It is possible to avoid these situations and if they arise, to overcome them. At times asking for help could be more constructive than engaging in the same solutions that bring the same results. Many professionals remain available despite confinement and are specifically trained to support you in this very challenging situation.

For more INFORMATION, GUIDELINES & TIPS, RESOURCES & CONTACTS you can reach at the School website *COVID19-PSYCHOLOGUES*

#### **Some things to try and be aware of:**

- ➔ When you have observed changes in your child's behaviour, talk to her/him about it.
- ➔ Children might not come to you specifically with a question. Try to have a guess as to what might be troubling them. Name possible feelings they may be experiencing. They will tell you if you are on a wrong path and might start explaining their views.
- ➔ By doing that you will help your child identify and name feelings or thoughts that she/he might experience.
- ➔ Offer time and a calm space to chat about the current situation and other issues the child might have. If in crisis, delay the discussion until a more suitable moment.
- ➔ Children and adolescents react, in part, to what they observe from the adults around them. Your emotional constitution can greatly influence your child's stability and attitude. You can be more supportive to others around you, especially children, when you are better emotionally suited.
- ➔ Therefore, it is crucial to take care of yourself in the first place. We all have our capacities and limitations. Recognise and admit them - you will be able to take some actions to get better. You may want to refer to the document: *COVID19 EASTER BREAK*
- ➔ Reach out for help – the sooner issues are addressed, the better prognostics.