



Brussels, 3rd of April 2020

Dear Parents,

The first three weeks of confinement proved to be very difficult. Not having any precedent experience in such conditions, the adjustment was enormous and difficult on several levels: being confined to your home 24/7, managing telework, parenting, family and couple life, teaching... and all at the same time being in constant interaction.

The fatigue, frustration, stretched patience have certainly started to make a mark.

In a previous document, the psychologists of the Brussels EEs offered you some important suggestions for dealing with current events as serene as possible: it is available on our new Web page (see below).

The Easter break will present with a need for yet further adjustments: having less of the school activities and managing free time will be even more challenging. The parents will still need to juggle between their personal occupations and the children's needs.

We invite you to discover below some important recommendations to take into consideration for the holiday period.

Please note that the school psychologists will not be available during the Easter holidays. However, on a special page of the school website, we have made available a series of tools, resources and links to useful websites to help you find solutions. Contacts to professionals are also available: <http://www.eeb1.com/en/eeb1-psychologists/>

The current file and any further edited document will be host on this Web page.

At times it is important to ask for help. Many professionals remain available despite confinement and are specifically trained to support you in this very challenging situation. At the end of the document, you will find a list of the available contacts, if necessary.

*We wish you, above all, to stay healthy! And remember to take it easy!
Happy Holidays to all!*

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SOME SUGGESTIONS TO FACILITATE THE TIME OF CONTAINMENT

All we can do... is do our best!

1. *Let us be kind to ourselves*

Be parent-employee-spouse-friend and finally ... be me ...

None of us are superheroes! You cannot be a parent, teacher and perfect employee all at the same time. Remember, in these circumstances, it is impossible to be as effective and as attentive as you were in life before confinement.

Let's remember that there's nothing unusual about the situation: working "as before" is not possible. Try to be flexible with our children, our partner, our colleagues: we are all in the same boat.

Let's put things into perspective and keep the priorities in mind: our physical health and our psychological well-being. And remember that the situation is temporary.

2. *Structuring the day helps!*

Your young children as much as your teenagers need to keep a minimum of rhythm; it gives them structure, therefore feelings of safety in a predictable environment. Try to organize the day around: awakening, hygiene, food, physical exercise, creative and leisure activities, screen time, social contacts, rest, family tasks, without forgetting homework. We advise you to make a simple timetable.

3. *Quality before quantity*

You do not need to be available to your children at all times: it is not the quantity that matters. It is more important (and more pleasant) to spend a moment together, having full attention in a real connection, than to juggle between guiding their teaching while trying to perform your professional obligations; it may only lead to tension and frustration.

4. *Fun activities for both of you*

If you do take time to connect with your child, opt for activities that are as enjoyable for the child as for you. There is no point to insist on "educational", "intelligent" activities if that creates tensions. Do not give up on movies and series if this moment is peaceful; find the music that you both love ... You are not an "animator"; these moments are not intended to occupy them but rather to share pleasure. And your pleasure is just as important.

5. *Choice of activities*

The children have probably already done all the possible activities they can think of. Help them make a list of new ideas for indoor and outdoor occupations (if you have a garden) to which they can refer.

6. Establish essential rules for "living together".

These rules, in connection with the different occupations of each member of the family during the day, will help to clarify the framework within which we can function better. It can be, for example, deciding on screen time per day, school work, moments dedicated to being alone or being together. Explain them to the children: be clear about the rules and consequences (realistic, proportionate and applicable). Try to respect them as a family.

7. Involve the whole family

The time spent together is an opportunity to learn to live in a community called family. Household chores are an important part of a day. They can be divided among the family members, taking into account each person's age and abilities. From 3-4 years old, a child can clear their plate! Very young, they can fold clothes, empty a dishwasher, and unload shopping bags. This may require showing them and helping them the first time. If necessary, change tasks from time to time.

It takes a burden off your shoulders and teaches the child potentially new skills. Being validated by playing an important role in family life can also improve one's self-esteem. In addition, these lessons of life skills are valuable assets for their future. Having a schedule of each person's tasks, strengthens the feeling of belonging to their family.

8. Our emotions are important

We are all human ... and at some point, we will probably feel: upset, frustrated, sad, worried, depressed, exhausted, ... that's normal! We all have our own ways to calm down ... and yet, sometimes, it's just "too much." In these situations, talk about it around you or call a professional.

Parental burnout exists

Managing your children, your couple, your professional life, your household, your anxieties, your emotions, your shortcomings at the same time ... this sometimes leads to moments when you explode, you lose all control and you no longer recognize yourself. Do not panic: you are human. But the situation of confinement is also accompanied by real risks of exploding or even becoming violent: verbally or physically. Let us be attentive to these risks which present real dangers for you and those around you. It is possible to avoid these situations and if they arise, to overcome them.

Preventing parental burnout

1. *Choose your battles and let go*

“Choose your battle” is true even more in our current circumstances. The family rules of confinement probably cannot be the same. If you expect the same quality as in “normal” circumstances, you will exhaust yourself! During this confinement, we need to let go and keep in mind what really matters. Set an order of priorities between what is totally inadmissible or compulsory (2-3 things) and which are not necessarily an important issue at that moment. For what is generally difficult to bear or unacceptable, give yourself and give them a break (too bad if the room of the big one is not tidied up; it does not matter if the daily screen time is exceptionally prolonged,...).

2. *Support each other as parents and partners (if 2 parents under the same roof)*

- The distribution of tasks between adult "parents" is essential, regardless if they live together or not.
- Organize the teleworking time and the time with the children alternately, remaining as flexible as possible. The mental burden needs to be distributed. Caring for children is as tiring as working. Sharing this function, taking into account your respective requirements, is important.
- It may be necessary to ask your employer for more flexibility.
- Expressing gratitude to the other parent for their help is supportive and rewarding.

3. *Express your needs*

Clearly and constructively express your need for help or taking over a relay to your partner or child. Do not imagine that the other "guesses" what you need. If you are upset, wait until you are better able to express your needs.

4. *Listen to your emotions: take a step back*

Staying confined to your home is undoubtedly a daunting task for parents and children. It awakens all kinds of emotions, from the pleasure of spending more time together to frustration, irritability or being very much on edge. Patience begins to wear out. The tolerance threshold for certain behaviours decreases considerably.

Pay attention to these situations of conflicts, quarrels, words or gestures that sometimes explode and go beyond the limits of what you deem acceptable and which sometimes exceeds your intentions.

Take air! If the anger builds up, avoid the explosion by leaving the room and taking a moment to ease the tension. Allow twenty minutes to find an emotional state that will allow you to face situations in a calmer state. Breathe ... rephrase things to your interlocutor in a more posed and more constructive way.

5. *Be flexible*

Be prepared to accommodate slight schedule changes, unexpected events, etc. Being flexible and letting go of control somewhat will keep you from feeling frustrated, overworked, stressed, etc. After all, we find ourselves in unprecedented circumstances and we have no miracle recipe for maintaining perfect serenity.

What if you or your partner breaks down? What if your child needs help?

... It does not matter ! Being a good parent is not about knowing how to manage everything; sometimes it's just asking someone to help you or your children to get better.

Sometimes it is important to turn to a professional who can support you, without judging. Above all do not blame yourself: your fragility and your sensitivity is a precious asset that you sometimes need to just embrace. Psychologists are specially trained to listen to you, to give you the support you need, whether you are exhausted, stressed or in a situation of violence. Remember, taking care of yourself is important. This will allow you to recover your strengths and resources or to find more peaceful family relationships.

- **Allo Pédopsy: 02/477 31 80** (Monday-Friday, 9 am-4:30pm / child psychiatrists QFCUH)
<https://www.huderf.be/fr/news/full-txt.asp?id=2239>
- **Helpline: 02/477 20 30** (7/7, 9 am to 5 pm / psychologists CHU-BRUGMANN)
- **Helpline: 025/01 01 27 or 28 or 29** (M-F 6pm-10pm; Sat-Sun 9am-5pm / psychologists)
- **EN Helpline: 02 648 40 14** (24/7 psychologists and psychiatrists CHS)
<https://www.chsbelgium.org/en/>
- **SOS parents: 0471/414 333** (7/7, 8am-8pm / psychologists specialized in parental burnout FR/EN - www.burnoutparental.com)
- **SOS-Enfants St-Luc Hospital: 02/764 20 90**
<https://www.saintluc.be/services/medicales/psy-infanto-juvenile/sos-enfants.php>
- **Kind in Nood: 02/669 40 50** (SOS-Enfants Flandres) <http://kindinnood.be/>
- **Ecoute-enfants: 103** (free and anonymous, 7/7, 10 am-midnight / children & teenagers)
- **Enfant en danger: 101** (24/7 / police) Child in danger
- **Ecoute Violences Conjugales : 0800/300 30** Domestic violence
www.ecouteviolencesconjugales.be
- **Tele-Accueil: 107** (24/7 / anonymous listening "someone to talk to")