



# BRACCO CPP PSYCHO-PEDAGOGIC CENTRE IS STAYING AT HOME WITH YOU

## TIPS AND STRATEGIES FOR MUMS AND DADS IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS

**The Bracco Psycho-Pedagogic Centre, which supports schools in the areas where the company operates, also wants to help our own families during this trying time.**

**This is certainly an emergency period for everyone in which fear and irrationality risk taking the upper hand.**

**This guide gives brief and simple pieces of advice to help us reassure and calm the emotions of our children.**

**“MUM, STAY HERE WITH ME. I CAN'T SLEEP!”**

### LET'S CONVEY SECURITY

First of all, to feel safe a child needs an adult that can transmit calm and control their own anxieties. If we can't calm ourselves down, how can we convey security to our child? If you find yourself in difficulty, get support from your family and friends and perhaps even contact a specialist.

**“HELP... WHAT'S HAPPENING?”**

### ANSWERING QUESTIONS FROM SMALLER CHILDREN

Children, even if they are small, need information that is true, filtered according to their age, maintaining the realistic focus. We need to explain the nature of the virus in simple terms, the fact that it has infected thousands of people in China and is now also here in Italy, that some people, though not that many, have died and this is certainly very sad. But anyway, let's paint a reassuring picture. Underline everything that adults are doing for this difficult situation: in China the virus is under greater control, thanks to the restrictive measures introduced; not many people fall ill with serious symptoms and children hardly ever; several researchers are studying how to fight this virus and there are plenty of doctors ready to look after those who fall ill.

**“MUM, DAD, I READ ON THE INTERNET THAT...”**

### LET'S HELP OUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND

With preadolescents and adolescents, who are often overexposed to news, it's important to create a dialogue that explains the meaning of images and information that they often absorb in a confused way. Let's help them filter these data and be close to them, which is what they need even if sometimes they don't ask for it openly from us adults.



## **“ON TV THEY SAY MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE DYING AND THEY ALL SEEM WORRIED!”**

### **WHAT SHOULD WE AVOID AT THIS TIME WITH OUR CHILDREN?**

Avoid exposing children to delicate images or worrying news that could leave them feeling confused or lost. It's useful first to try to understand how they perceive the event, their questions and worries about it and then reply in a specific way. Avoid using communication channels not suitable for their age: encourage them to draw – often children spontaneously portray their fears and their perception of the event – and watch cartoons on the subject. For younger children, this emergency can be explained by telling a story or reading a nursery rhyme; you can find material suitable for their age online that you can adapt creatively. Avoid painting a picture with no hope of what is happening.

## **“MUM, I'M AFRAID GRANNY'S GOING TO DIE!”**

### **HOW TO HELP THEM MANAGE THEIR FEARS**

Let's help our children bring out their fears; if they tell you about them they are already easier to handle. If we stimulate our children to portray the virus we help them make visible something that is very frightening because it's imperceptible. Explain to children the meaning of fear and how valuable it is for protecting us from threats – “how could primitive man defend himself from fierce animals?”. We can explain to our children that fear is always “attached” to a certain thought and we can try to identify the deep fears of the child to calm them. -“I'm afraid that the Coronavirus will make granny die, and I'll be all alone and won't be able to look after myself.”

## **“WHY CAN'T I GO TO THE PARK?”**

### **HOW TO HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE RESTRICTIONS**

Let's explain to our children that the restrictions, including that unusual “don't go to school” and going out less, are the rules that grown-ups have decided on to protect us and improve the situation. Children accept limitations if they are properly explained, like a protective barrier adults have designed for them. If we explained to them in a simple way the importance of following the necessary hygiene rules, they will know they have a way of keeping the virus at bay and will feel less impotent.

## **“DAD... TONIGHT I'M GOING OUT WITH MY FRIENDS!”**

### **HOW TO HELP CHILDREN OBEY THE RESTRICTIONS**

In recent days, children are experiencing limits on the spaces they can explore and on the freedom that until yesterday was the driving force of their lives. They will manage to obey the rules only if they understand the reason for these limits in a profound way. They will do so with pride and a sense of personal growth if they understand that these responsible actions can save their lives and above all those of their dear ones and people outside the family. They are asked to make an effort they are not used to making, to play a leading part in looking after and worrying about others and bearing this responsibility with their peers. We must recognise the value of the huge sacrifices they are making in limiting their outings; afterwards, they will come out stronger.

### **HOW TO SURVIVE AT HOME DURING CORONA-TIME**

The extraordinary closure of all schools in Italy and of most offices means we are forced to live with our children: for us it means smart working, for them adapting to a new kind of teaching that means working online and off-line. It's certainly not easy to organise times and spaces to respect the different ages of our children, but it is possible. We need to explain to our children that this suspended time is not an unexpected holiday but is structured space that, if we handle it properly, can become profitable and effective. After all, our children to have their commitments to attend to and we mustn't feel guilty if we have no time to amuse them and help them have fun. Maintain a rhythm for the day as close as possible to our lives of a month ago, even though it seems a century ago now. A routine is calm and reassuring, especially in times when so many things are of necessity overturned. Set the alarm clock just a bit later than usual, and don't let kids lie in bed until 11 o'clock, pay the usual attention to our personal hygiene, don't wear pyjamas all day, respect mealtimes, rather than snacking continually on the sofa, and don't put the children to bed too late to make sure they get enough sleep and wake up fresher.



## **“MUM, CAN I HAVE A CUDDLE?”**

### **HOW TO RECONCILE WORK WITH THE CHILDREN'S NEEDS**

In an emergency like this one, you are more likely to experience solidarity from your neighbours. A couple needs to help each other and share responsibilities: while mum works, dad looks after and amuses the children and vice versa.

Small children need continual attention and this takes a lot of energy, so it's better to share the job! You can catch up on work while they have their afternoon nap. With preschool children, you can try organising games together, helping them draw, cut out, colour, glue and knead plasticine. The older ones can help in many home activities (baking a cake, cleaning their room, washing their fluffy toys, rediscovering old games (cards, snakes and ladders), read, do exercises, listen to music and sing in the evening altogether on the balcony, rediscovering neighbourhood values. Everything can become a game and games transform everything.

### **MUM, CAN YOU HELP ME WITH MY HOMEWORK? DAD, CAN WE PLAY?**

Explain to the children that their parents need to work and they must keep quiet, and block their questions.

Make a temporary agreement with them: “while I work, you study”; set the time on the kitchen timer and then have pauses when they are allowed to interact with you, to check a home work, or receive a comforting smile and a warm hug.

In infancy children still need to be guided and supported by a parent in what they do, although they are beginning progressively to discover autonomy.

Great, I've already finished my homework!

Praise them when they behave well, it will help them build self-esteem!

Children today – there are few of them and they were longed for – are used to receiving plenty of attention from parents, we often have made them feel they are the centre of our world, so they'll probably find it a bit hard to adapt to rules and restrictions.

## **WHAT SHALL I DO NOW?**

Boredom in kids is a potential, a fertile ground for encouraging commitment and creativity. It's better for them to invent the toy with something symbolic (remember how your fingers can become a pistol?), rather than receiving the umpteenth structured toy. Very useful are construction games that allow you to create original spaceships and castles!

### **DUTIES BEFORE PLEASURE, BUT IS THIS STILL TRUE?**

#### **INDICATIONS FOR PREADOLESCENTS**

There is no freedom, no kicking a ball around with friends, no girls gossiping on the park bench; more exuberant boys, in particular, could feel like caged lions.

We need to understand them, but also tell them that studying comes before Fortnite!

Youngsters are easily attracted to the Internet, hypnotised by videos on their smartphone, they live in chats, a kind of flight from alienating reality that is all too frequent in our times.

But virtual life needs careful dosing, it mustn't replace real life but be a chance to let off steam and relax once they have finished their schoolwork. It's not easy to convince them, but our job as parents is to educate as well as love and, if we are doing the right thing, we will be able to put up with shrugs and moans. With older kids we can offer them a private space, leave them in their room while we work in the kitchen; they will feel less constrained and policed; at their age, parental control is really hard to tolerate. They will come to find us if they need us. The “empty” moments we are going through are a good chance to strengthen family ties, both with small children and older ones.



# **#STAYHOME**