

FRONT LINE PROFESSIONALS

ADVICE ON HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN



The work of healthcare professionals is key in the current situation and therefore they are under a lot of pressure, since their workload is enormous these days. If you are one of them, you may be facing a situation when instead of taking care of the needs of yourself and your family you are spending many hours at work, taking care of others at places with a high infection risk. Below, we have prepared some **tips for you on how to react in this situation, how to take care of your own feelings and of your children** who may be experiencing negative emotions in this situation. You can use the specific sentences listed here if you are the parent working as a healthcare professional as well as if you are the other parent.

This text is intended for doctors, nurses, social workers, laboratory technicians as well as other front line professionals.

What may the child be experiencing?



1 FEAR

- The child may fear many things, for example getting sick, or their parent getting sick.
- Give the child space to talk about their fears, explain how you are protecting yourself from getting infected. You will probably not be able to get rid of the child's fears completely, but you can help them reduce those fears and live with them. Below, you can find specific tips on how to do

2 CONFUSION

- The child hears a lot of different information from many sources, some of which they don't understand at all while understanding other information wrong, so they start speculating.
- It is recommended to explain the situation to the child. You can find tips on how to do it below, or in the [leaflet](#).

3 MISUNDERSTANDING

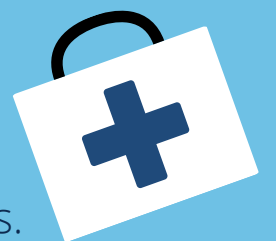
- It may be difficult for the child to understand why the parent goes somewhere dangerous or why they are doing something the child doesn't want them to do.

4 HOPELESSNESS

- The child may be feeling powerless and helpless since the parent is not considering their wishes.

5 PRIDE

- The child is proud of their parent who is saving others.



6 RESPONSIBILITY

- Some children may take over the parent's duties; start taking care of others or of the household. They may pretend to be coping with the situation fine. However, that doesn't change the fact that it is difficult for them and they need support.
- It is important for the child not to be overburdened with the tasks, to be able to share their emotions, including the negative ones, with someone, and to be able to still enjoy their playtime.

How can you help the child?



1 EXPLANATION

- Explain the situation in an **age-appropriate way**.

2 HONESTY

- Be **honest**, don't lie to the child and **don't promise** something you are not able to fulfill (e.g. that you definitely can't get ill).

3 NO DETAILS

- On the other hand, there **is no need to burden the child with details** which are not important for them (such as too many details about the course of the illness in the patients in your care, or about the hospital equipment).

4 PATIENCE

- The child has the right to be angry and annoyed, not to understand the situation, to be confused. Try to be **patient**.

5 CARING

- **Take care** of their emotions – help them name these emotions (for example by naming yours).



6 EMOTIONS

- Give the child space to **express their emotions**, including fear and anger.

7 DELEGATION

- If you can't support your child right now, make sure **someone can do this for you**. Tell the child that you are sorry that you can't give them what they need right now, but you care about their feelings and therefore you want them to consult the person who will be available to them instead of you.

8 YOU

- Don't forget **about yourself** and your mental health.



Preschoolers

- At the preschool age, children tend to **connect** things happening around them with their **own actions** even when there is **no** connection at all. The child may therefore fear that the parent has started spending more time at work because they don't love the child anymore or because the child misbehaved. In such situation, it is important to **explain** to the child what is really going on.



„You think that I am not at home these days because you misbehaved? That's not the case. I have to take care of sick people, and there are more of them now, so I must stay at work longer.“

- The child **can't name the emotions** they are experiencing very well yet. They may start **somatizing** and may have a stomach ache or headache. To prevent this, **help them name** the emotions.

„You are afraid that I can also get infected in the hospital, aren't you? That's why you have a stomach ache. Every time you are worried about something, tell me about it.“

- You can also help them by **naming your own emotions**.

„I am also afraid that I could get infected in the hospital. But you know that we are all using protective equipment and we wash our hands. We do everything we can to stay healthy.“

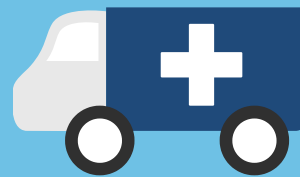


- **Inform** the child **honestly** about the situation.

„Unfortunately it could happen that I get infected at work. But all of us do everything we can to prevent it. I promise that if anything happens to me, I will tell you, all right?“

- **Don't withhold information**. The child may not know what exactly is happening around them, but they definitely do know that **something** is happening. You can find the information on how to talk to them [here](#).
- Their thinking is strongly connected to **imagination**. If they can imagine things, it may help you explain them. You can **play a game** and **demonstrate** to the child how you are taking care of patients or what protective equipment you are using. Don't be afraid to call yourself and your coworkers **superheroes** – they are very popular among children these days.

School children



- They understand **specific** things but still have issues with abstract concepts.
- Especially younger school children may have **issues with expressing** their **emotions**. Their experience may result in **somatizing** – for example stomach ache or headache. Help them **name** their emotions.

„You are afraid that I may get infected in the hospital, aren't you?"

- You can also help them by **naming your own emotions**.

„I am also afraid that I could get infected in the hospital. But you know that we are all using protective equipment and we wash our hands. We do everything we can to stay healthy."

- The child begins to be able to see the **perspective** of other people. They can therefore see the situation at least partly from your point of view.

„I know that you are worried about me when I go to the hospital, and you would prefer me to stay home. But there are many sick people in the hospital and I can help them. Just like the superheroes, you know? I save our patients. I take care of them so that they get better."

- They will **try to understand** the situation. **Answer** their questions patiently and try to show your **understanding**.

„I am often really tired these days so I don't want to play anymore today. I am sorry that I can't do things with you as much as you would like. But we can do (...) on the weekend, is that all right with you?"

- If you are unable to spend time with your child and give them emotional support, contact **someone else** who could spend time with the child and could stand in for you temporarily. Above all, it is important for this person **to be there** for the child and **hear them out** when they need it. [Here](#) they can find the information about how to talk to the child.

„I am sorry that I can't spend all the time you'd like me to with you, but I would really like you to enjoy the weekend. Your aunt agreed that you can stay with her over the weekend. She will certainly think of something nice you can do together. If something troubles you, be sure to tell her. I believe she will understand."

- Your goal should **not** be for the child to **understand** everything and **agree** with it. They have a **right to be angry** with their parents (or with the disease, or with the people who keep their parent at work).

Teenagers



- Although it may **appear** that they are **not affected** by the current situation, the **opposite** may be true.
- They gather information from different sources. **Hoaxes** and **fake news** may be easily spreading among teenagers, you should therefore invite them **to discuss** the information and offer reliable resources. You can inform them about the situation at your workplace:

„So far, we have enough protective equipment, so there is not much chance that we get infected.“

„We don't have too much protective equipment so far, but we do everything we can to protect ourselves.“

- Don't be afraid to **express** your **emotions** in front of the teenager but **don't overwhelm them** too much. The teenager should not become your shoulder to cry on.

„The situation is difficult for me too. I am also afraid that I can get infected.“

„I am angry and irritated because things are really hard for me at work.“

„I am often tired these days. I am sorry that I can't be there for you right now.“

- Communicate honestly about what could help you, but be careful **not to overburden** the teenager.

„It would really help me if you wiped the floor today.“

- If the teenager helps you at home, **thank them**.

„Thank you that you cleaned up today, it really made me happy.“



FRONT LINE PROFESSIONALS

How can you help yourself and each other?

You are undoubtedly going through a lot right now. Maybe you find yourself in a situation in which you are unable to process your emotions and problems, and you need to focus on surviving day to day. Below, you can find tips to help you better cope with the situation.

FOCUS ON TODAY

Focus on today's shift, today's patients, situations you are handling right now. Go **step by step**, set up **small goals**. Don't forget that you can only influence your part in whatever is happening. It is not reasonable to assess yourself and your job by the overall result, but by **what you did**. Ask yourself: "Did I do the best I could in the moment?" Yes? Great, you are doing amazing! No? Can you learn something from this for handling similar situations in the future? Spare a moment to think through what you could do differently in a similar situation in the future. Use this knowledge next time.



FOCUS ON YOURSELF, AT LEAST FOR A MOMENT

If at all possible during some less demanding activity, try to focus **your attention on yourself** for a moment, even though it may be hard among all the commotion. A **couple of seconds** is enough, but do it **several times a day**. **Create a space to calm down**, focus, and look at the situation from a distance. Calm down, take a few deep breaths and, for a few seconds, let your whole being be filled with something fulfilling and good – it is up to you whether this will be the belief in God, goodness, realizing the greater purpose of your work, remembering your loved ones, imagining a pleasant place, or feeling an abstract energy and power.



HELP EACH OTHER WITH YOUR COWORKERS

Not only at work, but also on a human level. Your coworkers are probably having similar feelings you are. **Don't be afraid to talk about it with them**. Don't speak only about business matters, but also about the way you are experiencing the new situation and dealing with it.



DON' LET THE PROBLEMS OF OTHERS OVERWHELM YOU

Sharing your worries should above all be helpful. Don't be afraid to tell your coworker that you can **talk about it later** when you are better rested and able to listen to them; you can also **refer them to the help** of a psychologist trained for such cases.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF



Right now, you may not be able to take care of your emotions and process them properly. Even so, you should **not forget about your needs**, although it may be difficult. Try to think about who you can confide in about things that happened during your shift once the shift is over. **Don't be afraid to talk about the things that trouble you.**

ASK FOR HELP

People realize that you work for all of us. When you need something, **tell that** to your supervisors, to the coordinators of outside help, to your relatives, friends etc. **Ask them** to try to get what you need, be it equipment, food or drinks. **Use the help of volunteers** as well. You can find specific links below.



WHEN THINGS ARE OVERWHELMING

You may be feeling many different emotions, and it can really become too much for one person. Some may cope with the situation better while others may have more issues – this is normal. Try to **reduce the amount of information** about COVID-19 which isn't absolutely necessary for you. You will then be able to better concentrate on your job or the rest which you really need. Speak with your family and with your children. Sometimes, this may not be enough or can even become draining. If you feel that you would benefit from **professional help**, you can use a local helpline.



BE GRATEFUL

To everyone and everything you can. **Including yourself**, because you are still fighting, even though your fight may not always be perfect or victorious. **Be proud** of yourselves. You have a good reason for that – you are **protecting** the lives of others. Your job has is **meaningful**. Try to remember this in times of need.



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How can others help you?

Don't be afraid to **let others help you**. Everywhere in the Czech Republic (and in other countries as well), there are many **volunteers** who are looking forward to be useful - maybe even to you personally. They can help you for example with babysitting. They can study with your children and help them with homework or entertain them in other ways. If you are afraid of the volunteers visiting your home, they can do this remotely over the internet or phone. They can also do your shopping, walk your dog, help you with housework or sew facemasks which are still badly needed.

You are helping us (thank you for that!) so we will be happy to help you. **WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER!**

Here you can find **some links for volunteer organizations** in the Czech Republic in English:

- **Masaryk University** has over 4,000 volunteers throughout the country. They will be happy to help you with shopping, childcare or facemasks, but don't be afraid to ask for other things as well.

<https://munipomaha.cz/en/i-need-help>

- If you need **facemasks** for yourself or your coworkers in the Brno region, don't hesitate to contact volunteers through this website:

<https://www.sijemerousky.cz/en>

If you are not located in the Czech Republic, we recommend looking up **local volunteers**.

<https://psych.fss.muni.cz/en/coronavirus>

M U N I Department
of Psychology
F S S

This leaflet was created by postgraduate students as part of the curriculum at the **Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University**, under the supervision of **Zuzana Masopustová, Ph.D.**, and it is meant to be widely distributed free of charge.

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