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Parenting in a time of COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is changing family life. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimates 1.38 billion children are out of school or child care, without access to group activities, team sports, or playgrounds. Parents and caregivers are attempting to work remotely or unable to work, while caring for children, with no clarity on how long the situation will last. For many people, just keeping children busy and safe at home is a daunting prospect. For those living in low-income and crowded households, these challenges are exacerbated.

This has serious implications. Evidence shows that violence and vulnerability increase for children during periods of school closures associated with health emergencies.¹ Rates of reported child abuse rise during school closures. Parents and children are living with increased stress, media hype, and fear, all challenging our capacity for tolerance and long-term thinking. For many, the economic impact of the crisis increases parenting stress, abuse, and violence against children.

But times of hardship can also allow for creative opportunity: to build stronger relationships with our children and adolescents. WHO, UNICEF, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, the United States Agency for International Development USAID, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Parenting for Lifelong Health, and the UK Research and Innovation Global Challenges Research Fund Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub are collaborating to provide open-access online parenting resources during COVID-19.

These resources focus on concrete tips to build positive relationships, divert and manage bad behaviour, and manage parenting stress. They are shared through social media, and they

are accessible on non-smartphones through the Internet of Good Things. A team of international volunteers are producing translations in 55 languages. Importantly, these parenting resources are based on robust evidence from randomised controlled trials in low-income and middle-income countries.²⁻⁴

COVID-19 is not the first virus to threaten humanity, and it will not be the last. We need to utilise effective strategies to strengthen families to respond, care, and protect a future for the world's children.⁵

We declare no competing interests.

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Published Online
March 25, 2020
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30736-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30736-4)

This online publication has been corrected. The corrected version first appeared at thelancet.com on April 9, 2020

For the Internet of Good Things see <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/IoGT>

For WHO's information on parenting in the time of COVID-19 see <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting>

For UNICEF's tips for parenting during the COVID-19 outbreak see <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips>

For Parenting for Lifelong Health's COVID-19 resources see <https://www.covid19parenting.com/>

For CDC's guidance for schools see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html>

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