

Playing that involves difficult themes such as loss, illness and death



Children get lots of good things from play – like fun, relaxation, excitement and companionship. Play is also an important way for children to develop their ability to cope when things are difficult, scary or confusing.

Adults sometimes find it painful to see or hear children playing when it involves themes like loss, death, illness and loneliness. You might find it brings difficult emotions to the surface for you. Or you might feel it's disrespectful.

It is natural to want to distract and protect your child if their play involves difficult themes. It might help to remember that children still need and want to play during this coronavirus pandemic.

This kind of play can help your child to:

- come to terms with a difficult situation
- manage their emotions
- feel that things are under control
- ask any questions they may have
- build up their ability to cope with other challenging things they'll face in life.

Examples of playing at home that involves difficult themes

- Acting out scenes your child has seen or heard at home, on TV or the internet – for example, hospital wards, funerals, people in distress, people helping each other, politicians making announcements.
- Re-enacting events and changing the outcome – for example, playing that someone starts to recover from an illness.
- Playing at finding solutions to big problems – for example, involving superheroes with names linked to the virus.
- Creating make-believe characters representing things like the virus, scientists or death.
- Explaining what is happening to a teddy bear, doll or sibling, or telling them off for not following new rules.
- Acting out their feelings – such as anger, fear or loneliness – and making it funny, exaggerated or exciting.
- Acting the death or funeral of a loved one to make it feel real.

Playing helps your child let feelings out – instead of holding them inside

Although these types of play may feel upsetting, it may help to remember why your child is playing this way. These types of play create opportunities for you to:

- understand more about how your child is feeling and coping
- spot if they have misunderstood anything – for example how the virus is spread, how long the pandemic will last
- provide lots of reassurance
- share with them rituals and traditions from your background, faith or heritage. These might relate to things like caring for people, funeral rites, celebration of life
- give them age-appropriate information to help them understand better.

Our feelings can influence how we respond to children's play. Your child's play might make you feel uncomfortable, but it can be important for them to play like this.



STAY
EMOTIONALLY
HEALTHY



STAY
PHYSICALLY
ACTIVE



RELAX AND
FORGET ABOUT
WORRIES



MAKE SENSE OF
NEW EXPERIENCES
AND CHANGES
IN THE WORLD



COPE WITH FEELINGS
THAT ARE DIFFICULT
OR FRIGHTENING

The *IPA play in crisis* series is designed to offer straightforward advice and suggestions to help you and your child keep playing through the coronavirus pandemic.