

Managing play at home that feels noisy or destructive



Children sometimes use play to:

- work through difficult emotions
- test how you will respond
- get a sense of satisfaction or control.

Your child is living through a very new experience which is confusing and frightening for adults, too.

Playing is a very important way for your child to understand – and come to terms with – what they are hearing, seeing and feeling. It can be hard to feel like choices have been taken away, or to have little way of knowing how long this situation is going to continue.

What might play look like when children have scary, confusing feelings?

Playing is one of the ways children adapt to change. The way they play may change – it may be loud and destructive, or quiet and calm. Here are some examples of playing that you might see:

- Being very noisy – for example, needing to shout, sing loudly, bash on drums, or hit things noisily.
- Taking frustration out on toys or objects – for example, punching pillows or throwing a teddy around.
- Destroying something they have made – for example, tearing up a picture or knocking down towers.
- Withdrawing into a small space – for example, a cardboard box, a space under the bed, a den made from sheets and pillows.
- Play-fighting and ‘rough and tumble’ play with you or their siblings.

Older children and teenagers may play like this, too. It is important that we remember that older children still need time and space to play.

How can I manage this kind of play at home?

It can help simply to know that this is your child learning to cope with a new situation. However, when you are cooped up at home it can also be difficult to handle.

- Speak to your neighbours if you are worried about how the sound of this kind of play affects them. Some people get a lot of joy when they hear children playing, but others may feel it disturbs their sleep or other activities. Some compromise and consideration might be needed on both sides.
- Find things for your child to play with that you don't mind getting torn or messed up – for example, old sheets, cardboard boxes and cushions.
- Get some play dough or other modelling clay for pummelling, squeezing and poking. If you have some spare flour and oil, you could make your own play dough.
- If your child is old enough, talk with them about when it's ok to make lots of noise and when they need to be quieter.
- Give your child something to make a lot of noise with – for example, dustbin lids, drumsticks or pots and pans. Let them make as much noise as they want for a set period of time – as much as you and neighbours can cope with – explaining that when the time is up they should pack things away.
- Let your child know that you understand they need to play. Tell them you want to help them play without causing unnecessary damage harm to themselves, your home and other people.



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.