

# How to demonstrate our love to young children during the coronavirus pandemic

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I am currently writing a book about developing a loving pedagogy and I have a whole chapter dedicated to the importance of touch which feels inappropriate now during the pandemic! I share how research tells us the importance of touch and how it contributes to our positive mental health and wellbeing. But what do we do now that we need to be more socially distant? How can we show that we love the children in our care?

Firstly and most importantly, children may feel very anxious about the many changes that have taken place in recent months and their setting is likely to look very different. Even though staff may themselves feel anxious about working, we need to ensure that the children feel welcomed and that things are as normal as possible. As the DfE guidance at time of writing doesn't specifically mention close contact and touch, we must do what we feel is appropriate and fits within our ethos, whilst protecting our children and staff as much as possible. Our risk assessments and information shared with parents and carers should be specific and explain things like how nappies will be changed, if we will allow children to sit on our laps for a story or how we will respond when their little one initiates a cuddle or falls over and hurts themselves.

We all love and feel loved in different ways (Chapman and Campbell, 2012) for example, some people feel loved if they are given a gift, whilst others feel loved if they are told in words. For others still, actions speak louder than words and they prefer to spend time with someone they love or do something for them. Some people will always want to hug those they love. It is important that we think about how our children feel loved so that we can still demonstrate our love during this pandemic.



I've made this for you!

We may need to think of alternatives to a hug or a cuddle that are more appropriate at the moment, for example offering a gentle squeeze to a shoulder or having a fun elbow bump together! However there may still be times with very young children when, within your bubble, you feel it is appropriate for close physical contact. At these times, ensure that you carefully follow your setting's policies and usual strict hygiene and hand washing principles. However, there are still many ways that we can demonstrate our love without necessarily getting too close. A loving pedagogy is about keeping children's best interests at heart and holding them in mind in addition to building positive relationships and secure attachments with them. So we can build nurture times into our routine when children can re-fuel emotionally and we can take a genuine interest in their lives, for example, by commenting on their tee-shirt or smile!



Create mini-me characters

I believe that love needs to be redefined within early childhood education to make the term more readily used and accepted. By kind and caring actions, holding children in mind and wanting the best for those in their care, early years practitioners are already demonstrating love on a daily basis. This pedagogy of love will demonstrate love's power in these children's lives and help them to grow into loving citizens of the future.



Writing notes to each other

[www.lindeneearlyyears.org](http://www.lindeneearlyyears.org)

## Top Tips

- ✓ Read stories and books which include love, such as *'While we can't hug'* by Eoin MacLaughlin and *'The Invisible String'* by Patrice Karst.
- ✓ Use positive, affirming and encouraging language, e.g. labelled praise and words that build self esteem.
- ✓ Listen to children, value their ideas and, whenever possible, act upon them.
- ✓ If your bubble can see another bubble of children, encourage socially distanced interaction such as waving, joining in with songs together, working on the same theme, playing instruments and even pulling funny faces at each other!
- ✓ Create mini-me photo people and give a set to each bubble so that they can still play with their friends.
- ✓ Take part in community initiatives, e.g. drawing a rainbow together and displaying it in your window.
- ✓ Play some music and dance together, copy each other's moves albeit from a distance!
- ✓ Create resources or plan activities with specific children in mind, reminding them they are special.
- ✓ Do something to help the children e.g. finding their shoes, or the specific block they were looking for.
- ✓ Give children appropriate 'gifts', e.g. a daisy or special stone in the outside area.
- ✓ Help children to understand the concept of love, talking about people who love them and how to act in loving and caring ways.
- ✓ Role model acting in a loving and caring way ourselves.
- ✓ Make pictures for other people.
- ✓ Create letters and cards for others and send them in the post.
- ✓ Video call members of staff and children who are still shielding or who have not yet returned to our settings.
- ✓ Lastly, **have fun together and enjoy each other's company!**

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