



香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong



Faculty of Education
and Human Development
教育及人類發展學院

Tips on Promoting the Positive Well-Being of Kindergarten Teachers



Centre for Child and
Family Science
兒童與家庭科學中心



Preface



Due to the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19), face-to-face classes have been suspended in Hong Kong. This is challenging for teachers, parents, and children. In particular, for many kindergarten teachers, the suspension of in-person classes has made them unable to interact with the children and observe their behavior. Instead, teachers have to design home learning activities for the children and communicate closely with parents to track the children's performance and learning at home.

To mitigate the impact of the epidemic and relieve the anxiety of kindergarten teachers, this leaflet introduces some effective strategies for promoting their well-being. Importantly, each strategy is supported by theories and empirical evidence in psychology. These strategies can promote the positive well-being of teachers and equip them better to deal with upcoming challenges. These strategies are underpinned by the following principles:

1. Maintaining close **communication with parents**. Such communication should be two-way, involving attentive and active listening and the minimal use of jargon. In doing so, teachers can better understand how the children are learning at home, thus enabling closer cooperation between home and school.
2. Maintaining effective **communication with colleagues**, enabling them to support each other through any challenges.
3. Designing **activities for learning at home**, such as play-based activities, nursery rhymes, songs, and stories. Parents can also be clearly instructed on how to use materials that can be easily prepared at home, and be encouraged to participate in learning activities with their children.
4. **Relieving stress**. Stress can be relieved through techniques such as reserving private time, regulating brain activity, and expressing gratitude to improve the mood of teachers.

This leaflet is produced by the project team **EASP**: Early Advancement in Social-Emotional Health and Positivity from the Centre for Child and Family Science of The Education University of Hong Kong. Funded by the Faculty of Education and Human Development, this project aims to strengthen teachers' and parents' skills in self-management and in coping with children's emotions through the provision of evidence-based training courses and mobile apps. Furthermore, this project aims to support children's positive learning and foster their physical and psychological development through home-school-community collaboration.



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1. Teacher–parent communication

For teachers during this critical period, discussions with parents about their child's behavior and learning performance are crucial. At present, teachers and parents mainly communicate through voice or text media, such as phone calls, video calls, and emails. Robust home-school cooperation helps promote child development in different aspects and improve behavioral and academic performance. Moreover, communication with parents helps teachers track the effectiveness of the home activities, allowing them to better support children's learning at home. There are 3 effective strategies for teacher-parent communication.



(1) Two-way communication is necessary for home–school cooperation (Kuusimäki et al., 2019). During this period, teachers are unable to observe the children in person and must instead rely on assigned home activities to review the children's learning progress. Therefore, to facilitate two-way communication, teachers should take the initiative to contact parents about how the child is doing.

(2) Attentive and active listening should also be practiced by teachers when communicating with parents. This helps teachers better absorb what parents are saying and collect more information about the children's learning. Moreover, by providing more appropriate feedback, teachers can provide better support to parents, which improves the teacher–parent relationship (Lasky, 2000). The LAFF Don't CRY strategy (McNaughton et al., 2008; McNaughton & Vostal, 2010) recommends some dos and don'ts for effective communication.

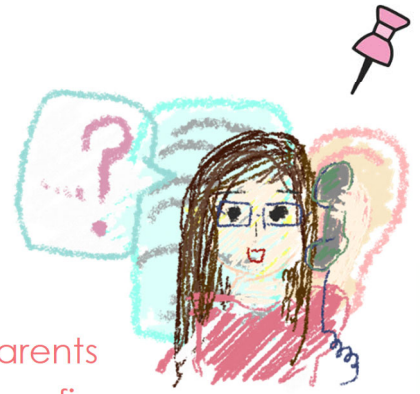
Dos (LAFF):

L: Listen, empathize, and communicate respect. Teachers can first listen to what the parent is sharing with them, acknowledge the parent's concerns and feelings, and thank them for sharing. For example, when parents are dissatisfied with their children's performance, teachers should listen attentively, demonstrate empathy toward the parent's concerns, and express appreciation to the parent for talking to the teacher.





A : Ask questions. By asking questions that are informed by careful listening, teachers can elicit helpful details from parents regarding the child. In doing so, the teacher better perceives the root causes of existing problems.



F : Focus on the issues. Teachers should take notes when parents are talking, and provide a recap of the conversation to confirm the children's problems. This helps parents and teachers focusing on the core issues and better formulate plans for solving existing problems.

F : Find a first step. After conversing with parents, teachers can consider the next steps to be taken for solving the problems discussed, and they can determine if additional information should be collected. Teachers can share any initial plans with parents or schedule a date for a follow-up meeting.

Don'ts (Don't CRY):

C : Criticize. When responding to a parent's concern, teachers should not criticize other parties as a means of empathy or to gain the parent's trust.

R : React hastily. Teachers should not respond hastily and make promises they cannot keep.

Y : Yakety-yak-yak. Do not interrupt the parents when they are talking or indulge in banter that distracts from the issue being discussed.

(3) Avoid jargon when communicating with parents (Lavoie, 2008). If jargon is necessary, teachers should explain its meaning to parents. Otherwise, parents may fail to grasp crucial information, resulting in poor communication.





2. Teacher–teacher communication

Research has demonstrated that collegial relationships among teachers are crucial, and make them more motivated (Brunetti, 2006). By contrast, poor relationships among teachers negatively affect the teacher's self-identification and teaching efficacy (Hong, 2012). Due to the suspension of classes during the pandemic, most teachers must work from home on rotation. They now rely on text or voice messages, emails, and online meetings to communicate with their colleagues; such communication can be improved through the following strategies (Roby, 2011; Schellenberg, 1996):

- Be aware of your tone of voice and maintain equanimity during conversations. For example, if you disagree with the other person, avoid raising your voice or getting too excited.
- Adequately prepare before discussions to communicate clearly.
- Communicate more with colleagues. When teachers better understand each other's ideas, a consensus is more likely to be reached.
- Take to achieve a consensus on objective principles.
- Teachers in charge can stimulate discussion among colleagues before integrating their ideas into a decision.





3. Designing learning activities

Principles of supporting children's learning at home



- During class suspension children have to learn at home, and be supervised or helped by their parents in the process. Teachers should provide clear, simple instructions and learning materials to parents through different means (e.g. emails, school website), so that parents can prepare before each activity and better support the children. Teachers should also maintain close communication with the parents (see section **1. Teacher-parent communication** of this booklet), so as to understand the children's learning progress and effectiveness of individual activities, provide feedback to the parents, and adjust the learning contents where appropriate.
- Teachers should adopt diversified modes of learning, for example, provide real-life, sensory, and interesting learning experiences that encourage children's exploration and learning (Education Bureau, 2017a).
- The Education Bureau (Education Bureau, 2020) advises that real-time online teaching is not recommended for children at kindergarten level. Also, to protect children's eyes and health, teachers and parents should ensure that children do not have excessive screen time. If necessary, teachers may go online with the children for brief communication, but not for real-time learning.
- As per the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016), parents should develop a family media use plan that balances the health, education, and entertainment needs of each child and the entire family (please use the QR code on the right to create a personalized home media plan).



Strategies for designing home learning activities for children

- (1) Create play-based learning activities that allow children to study alone or with a parent. Play-based learning was noted to aid children's mastery of new skills (Wesiberg et al., 2013). Teachers can perform the following in their design of play-based activities.





- Add creative elements (Education Bureau, 2017b). For example, teachers can progressively introduce new rules to the usual games, allowing children to progressively master more complex rules while having fun when learning.
- Use dramatic play in learning activities, such as role-playing and simulated scenarios (Saracho, 2012). For example, children may role-play ordering food from a restaurant to learn how to hold daily conversations and acquire the appropriate vocabulary. Teacher can also add “accidents” depending on the scene to allow the children to exercise their imagination and practice being adaptable.
- Use learning materials that parents can easily prepare at home, such as paper boxes and plastic bottles. Furthermore, the game scenario should meet the general living conditions of the children in the class, and require as few resources from parents as possible.
- Because children have fewer opportunities to play with peers during the suspension period, teachers can design more games and learning activities that family members can participate in.



- (2) Use more nursery rhymes or songs. Rhyme and song can easily interest children and help them concentrate on learning. Furthermore, adding small movements to a physical game can enhance children's motor skills.



- (3) Use stories. Stories can not only satisfy children's curiosity for information about life events and the external world (Liao, 2012) but also increase their motivation to learn.

- (4) Visual aids. Teachers can use visual aids to remind children regarding the code of conduct in the classroom. Teachers can also use vivid colors to highlight learning content (for example, use vocabulary cards).



- (5) Teachers can encourage parents to ask children questions during the activities to stimulate thoughts, and try to respond. Parents may note down these questions and inform the teachers afterward.

- (6) Teachers can encourage parents to do stretching exercises, gymnastics, and other light activities at home with their children, such as playing with clay, drawing, and crafting, so as to take care of the children's physical and mental development.





4. Stress management



(1) Reserve private time for yourself



To ensure that the use of online communication devices for work is not excessive, teachers and parents should reach a consensus on how and when to communicate online (Palts & Kalmus, 2015). Furthermore, because most teachers are working from home during this period, work-life balance is crucial for them (Rao & Laskshmi, 2017). Teachers should, for example, avoid arranging work-related affairs on weekends and instead encourage engagement in leisure activities, such as reading, listening to music, or cooking.

(2) Regulate your cognitive rhythm (Pal et al., 2016)

Try to think "If this..., then that..." before doing something. For example, before talking to parents, you can stipulate that "If I am going to talk about a child's performance with the parent, then I will take a deep breath." You can then breathe deeply before starting the conversation. This simple step can slow down your cognitive rhythm and ensure a gentler pace of activities, so as to work more effectively.

(3) Express your gratitude

Gratitude refers to a state of constant thankfulness for positive events in one's life (Van Dusen et al., 2015). Research has shown that stress is reduced when the expression of gratitude is practiced as a daily exercise (Wood et al., 2008). Teachers can write down three to five things that are grateful for in a diary, or to share on social media. Things that one can be grateful for can be as simple as being able to talk to friends, watch a movie or eat one's favorite snacks. Regularly reviewing a gratitude diary can help a person relieve stress and cultivate a positive attitude toward life.





(4) If teachers encounter persistent emotional problems, they may seek support from the following resources.

- Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union-Teacher Decompression Hotline: 2780 7337
- Education Bureau- Teachers' Helpline: 2892 6600
- Praying Hearts Counselling Centre- Emotional Counselling hotline: 8101 2929
- Hok Yau Club (for parents and teachers): 2503 3399
- Caritas Family Crisis Support Centre Hotline: 18288
- The Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention: WeCare Fund
<https://csrcp.hku.hk/>
- Jockey Club Tour Heart Project
<https://www.egps.hk/>
- Jockey Club Mental Wellness Project for Women
<https://www.jcwow.org/language/en/>





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EASP Team:

Project Leader Professor CHUNG Kevin Kien Hoa (ECE / CCFS)
Co-Leaders Dr. CHAN King Chung Derwin (ECE)
 Dr. LAU Yi Hung Eva (ECE)

Members Dr. CHENG Wing Yi Rebecca (PS)
 Dr. DATU Jesus Alfonso Daep (SEC)
 Dr. FUNG Wing Kai (ECE)
 Mr. LAU Chin Wai Eugene (ECE)

Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. LI Xiaomin Nicky (CCFS)
Research Assistant Ms. SHAM Ming Wai Ginny (CCFS)
Advisor Mr. CHEUNG Yat Ming Ryan (CCFS)

Remarks: CCFS Centre for Child and Family Science
 ECE Department of Early Childhood Education
 PS Department of Psychology
 SEC Department of Special Education and Counselling

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