

Children actively want to understand and express themselves regarding the coronavirus

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To comprehend and process the social crisis and upheaval in everyday

life that have resulted from the corona pandemic, we need research and new perspectives.

Researchers of [early childhood education](#) at Åbo Akademi University, University of Helsinki, University of Gothenburg, Örebro University and Umeå University have studied how [children](#) attending day-care or preschool comprehended coronavirus at the time of its initial outbreak.

"Earlier research has shown that negative life experiences, such as pandemics, affect children's well-being in the short and long term, and children are especially vulnerable in crises. Thus, it is important to consider how the corona pandemic is being comprehended and expressed by children in their daily environment," explains Mia Heikkilä, Associate Professor in Early Childhood Education at Åbo Akademi University, who is leading the research team.

According to Heikkilä, children are active, participatory agents capable of contributing to the handling of a crisis with their ideas and actions, if they are given the opportunity to do so.

"It is vital to reinforce children's resilience, that is, their capacity to withstand adversities, both during and after a social crisis like the corona pandemic. Previously, it has been shown that supportive relations between adults and children, as well as children's opportunity to participate actively are significant in this respect. Here, early childhood education plays a key role," says Ann-Christin Furu, who works as a researcher at Åbo Akademi University, following a period at the University of Helsinki.

The present study was conducted as a questionnaire survey among personnel engaged in early childhood education in Finland and Sweden. The results show that children express themselves in multifaceted ways regarding the new, unfamiliar and often heavily changed daily life of the

children themselves and of their families, relatives and friends, as well as the day-care or preschool personnel.

Children's expression and participation regarding the outbreak of the corona virus are approached through four themes. The first theme concerns health, and it was found that children both have knowledge and wish to know more about the virus itself and how to protect oneself against it. The second theme deals with worry and concern about those close to the child, for example, friends, parents or elderly relatives. The third theme is about how to cope with the changed routines in [everyday life](#).

"The fourth theme relates to children's playing, creativity and humor as potential tools to cope with the situation. Children are playing, for example, 'corona tag' and 'being at hospital,' or they come up with corona-related drawings, rhymes or songs of their own," explains Furu.

"These expressions can provide the personnel, as well as the parents, with tools to understand what the children are dealing with in the corona situation. It may offer a way to observe one's own group of children, and to create situations where the children can express themselves with regard to the coronavirus," says Furu.

"The abundant material we received in a very short time revealed that children have numerous and multifaceted expressions and reflections regarding the corona pandemic. Adults should be aware of this and act accordingly. Also, there are many children who need support in coping with and understanding the situation. Early childhood education should assume a clear role in developing pedagogical approaches that allow room for the various expressions of children, and offer tools to support the children's ability to face challenging situations," says Mia Heikkilä.

More information: Mia Heikkilä et al, Barns deltagande i förskole-

och daghemskontext under inledningen av coronavirusets utbrott i Finland och Sverige, *BARN - Forskning om barn og barndom i Norden* (2020). [DOI: 10.5324/barn.v38i2.3703](https://doi.org/10.5324/barn.v38i2.3703)

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