



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Child abuse rates rise during school closures - positive parenting encouraged during COVID-19

University of Cape Town (UCT) researchers have partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNICEF) to encourage constructive parenting during COVID-19 – they have released [resources for parents](#) during a time where countries across the world including South Africa go under lockdown.

COVID-19 is changing family life. But times of hardship can also allow for creative opportunity: to build stronger relationships with children and adolescents.

With [1.37 billion children now out of school](#) – nearly 80% of all enrolled children in the world – parents and carers across the globe are rapidly coming to terms with the challenges of parenting in the time of COVID-19. Parenting is made harder by uncertainty, stress and economic hardship.

This has serious implications. Evidence shows that violence and vulnerability increase for children during periods of school closures associated with health emergencies.

Professor Catherine Ward from UCT's Department of Psychology says: "Rates of reported child abuse rise during school closures. Parents and children are living with increased stress, media hype, and fear, all challenging our capacity for tolerance and long-term thinking. For many, the economic impact of the crisis increases parenting stress, abuse, and violence against children."

[Parenting for Lifelong Health](#) and the United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) [Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents \(Accelerate\) Hub](#) have produced a set of [six one-page tips](#) for parents.

Parenting for Lifelong Health is a suite of culturally adaptable, not-for-profit and well-tested parenting programmes for strengthening parent-child relationships and promoting child wellbeing. Developed by researchers from UCT, Stellenbosch

University and institutions in the United Kingdom with the WHO, UNICEF and community-based organisations, the programmes are designed to be offered on a large scale in low-resource settings.

“Keeping your usual rules and routines in your household is especially important for children right now: it will help them feel safe,” says Professor Ward. “It’ll help the grown-ups too, we all need to know where we stand, and normal routines are a big help with that.”

The UKRI GCRF Accelerate Hub is led by an interdisciplinary team at Oxford University and UCT, with partners worldwide. It aims to discover the combinations of services that can most efficiently and cost-effectively help adolescents achieve their potential across multiple life domains: health, education and safety.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Nombuso Shabalala

Head: Media Liaison
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 4190
Cell: (076) 473 5882
Email: nombuso.shabalala@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za