

Coping with coronavirus strategies for parents to support themselves and their children

In this booklet are some ideas for things you can do as parents to support both yourselves and children and young people at this time.

Recognise feelings as normal and understandable

1 Adults, children and young people may be feeling a variety of emotions in relation to coronavirus. Remember that these emotions are completely normal and understandable in the context of a situation that is very abnormal. Not all children and young people respond in the same way to stressful situations. Acknowledge that this is a difficult time for everyone and that it is normal to feel a range of emotions such as feeling sad, scared, frustrated or disappointed that they are not able to do the things they usually would.

Talk to children about their worries

Sometimes it may feel like we want to avoid talking about the situation in order to protect children, but even young children are able to pick up on what is happening around them and can fill in the gaps with their own explanations and misinterpretations, which can increase worry and anxiety. Help children by talking to them about what is going on and answering questions in a way that is age appropriate and that they understand. Talking gives the opportunity to explore worries or questions and to address these or find ways to manage worry. We would recommend the following resources with advice on talking to children about coronavirus:

- British Psychological Society – advice around how to talk to children about illness at different ages and developmental stages. To find this, Google '**BPS talking to children about illness**'.
- University of Reading and University of Oxford have tips on how to talk to children about coronavirus, including links to child friendly resources about coronavirus. The guide '**Supporting children and young people with worries about COVID-19**' can be accessed by Googling 'Psychology tools coronavirus', clicking the link to psychologytools.com and going to the 'useful handouts' section.

Try to create and maintain a “new normal” daily routine

3 Routines are important for both adults and children alike. Creating new routines or re-establishing previous routines will create a sense of predictability and can help children to feel safe. This may include trying to keep regular mealtimes and bedtimes and making time for learning, fun activities and time together.

Try and see this as a time to do things you normally wouldn't

Use the time to do jobs around the house, reading, watching movies, teaching your child a new skill, engaging in a new hobby, connecting with people you have lost touch with. Try to see the benefits in the situation and help children to do the same.

Find new ways to engage in activities

5 This goes for both parents and children. Think about ways that you can engage in your usual activities but possibly in a modified version. For example exercising using YouTube videos or going for walks in open spaces where you will be unlikely to come into close contact with others, exercising in the garden. Find ways for yourself and your children to keep in contact with friends and family, for example via telephone, Skype, Zoom or Facetime, playing online games together, reading stories or watching TV shows together on Skype.

Have boundaries around media exposure

6 Try to limit exposure to media coverage as this can increase worry and fear. Set boundaries, e.g. once a day, so that you can focus on more helpful things, and use trustworthy sources. Children may misinterpret what they see or hear so limit children's unsupervised exposure to the media and if appropriate watch or listen to things together so that you can discuss. Help support older children by thinking together about the impact of media on how they are feeling.

Look after yourself

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In order to take care of those around you, it is important to take care of yourself. Talk to others who you trust and can support you about how you are feeling. Keep healthy habits such as eating healthily, exercise and getting enough sleep. Try to get fresh air where possible and spend some time in nature, whether in the garden or going for a walk. Draw on strategies that you know have worked for you and your family in the past. This will also model to children how you deal with stressful situations.

Some people find breathing techniques or mindfulness helpful, use the links below to find out more about these techniques for adults and children:

- <https://www.headspace.com>
- <http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/for-children-and-young-people/relaxation-for-children.aspx>

Focus on behaviours within your control

Encourage children to focus on the behaviours that are in their control. This includes hand washing, not touching their face with unwashed hands, helping others who might need support.

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Ask for professional support

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If you find that anxiety or worry is persisting either for yourself or child, think about seeking professional support and speaking to your GP. If the worries relate to your child's health condition more generally, speak to your child's healthcare team who can help to think about the most helpful support at this time, which may include our psychology team.

We have produced a series of toolkits for adults and children on a variety of topics such as managing anxiety and sleep, which can be accessed through the below link:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

Condition-specific resources

If you have concerns about coronavirus specifically related to your child's health issues then you can contact their medical team or look at national health websites for specific conditions. The following websites may also be useful:

- Information from the NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health RCPCH: www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-resources-general-public

Child-friendly resources

The University of Exeter have produced a story developed to help explain coronavirus to children, aimed at 3 to 6 year olds. **To find this, Google 'Piperpotamus learns about Coronavirus'**

Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust have produced resources about coronavirus to look at with children, including easy read social stories. They have also developed a self-care kit for children, with ideas on managing during this time. **To find this, Google 'Sheffield NHS coronavirus resources for children and families'**

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have produced a short video for children explaining coronavirus. **To find this, search on YouTube for 'Belfast Coronavirus - Explained for Children'**

BBC Newsround have a coronavirus section on their website, featuring stories and videos giving facts and information, as well as tips on how to manage worry, exercise and schoolwork during self-isolation. Aimed at older school-aged children.

To find this, Google 'BBC Newsround Coronavirus: How did it start, what are the symptoms and other FAQs'