

Reassuring your children about the unknown

Information for parents during COVID-19



What this fact sheet covers:

- How to talk about the situation
- Strategies to reduce anxiety
- Tips to support wellbeing
- Seeking additional help

Introduction

It's not just adults worrying about COVID-19 and the day-to-day changes around the situation. As parents, it is important to listen to the questions coming from your children so you can offer clear and honest answers.

It's also OK to admit that you may not know the right answers rather than pretending to have the correct response.

Children will be picking up information from their peers, the media, and what they are observing in the outside world.

It is the role of parents to communicate openly with their children in a way that does not exacerbate any feelings of anxiety, and to tailor information to their kid's age and developmental stage so they can be sure it is understood.

Talking about COVID-19 with your children

- 1. Speak to them calmly and openly.** Don't shield them from everything but at the same time choose your words carefully. Saying that it is a 'pandemic never seen before in our lifetimes' does not help to calm your child.
- 2. Encourage them to ask questions.** Curiosity at this time is natural and it is a good sign if they are wanting to find out more.
- 3. Ask them what they know and what they are worried about.** Agree with them if you have the same concerns but also offer reassurance and set up a plan to help deal or cope with that worry.
- 4. Reassure them it's normal to be worried.** Both children and adults have worries about COVID-19 and most people are feeling concerned.
- 5. Provide reassurance that as young people, they are relatively safe.** Current data suggests that young people are less likely to catch the virus than others, and even if they do, they



are unlikely to get very sick or go to hospital.

6. Let them know that you will be available.

You will be there to talk to them about their worries whenever they would like to and if they think of questions after your chat, they can ask them anytime.

7. Identify other responsible adults in their life.

If you aren't there to field any questions they may have, it is reassuring for them to know they have other adults they can approach.

8. Get the right information. Choose one reputable website to get your information from (such as the Department of Health) and resist temptation to look at more sensational sources.

9. Let them know about family plans. Share what you are doing and plan to do to keep their family safe. Encourage regular safe contact with loved ones, e.g. video chat with grandparents.

Practical strategies to reduce COVID-19 related anxiety

Provide a sense of control by discussing and implementing practical steps your child can take to stay safe.

These may include:

- Regular handwashing for 20 seconds. They can sing 'Happy Birthday' through twice to get the right length of time.
- Cough and sneeze into elbows. For younger kids tell them to pretend to be elephants as they do it.
- Give them new chores so they feel able to help keep control. Things like cleaning areas at home each night or helping to prepare food will give them a feeling of responsibility.
- Limit unhelpful or excessive media exposure which can often increase anxiety.

General tips to support wellbeing

- Remaining active is very important for mental health and wellbeing. Many school sporting competitions have been postponed and substitute activities like going outside for walks or doing online exercise programs like yoga or zumba are great options
- Make sure you join in with their fun. It can be hard if you're not feeling well yourself or if you're having to make lots of decisions about changing your routine, but remember your child is looking to you to know how to behave. Show them there is still time for fun.
- Encourage communication with friends using virtual formats when face-to-face isn't an option.
- Develop a plan with your child about their schooling over the coming weeks. This will need to be done in collaboration with their schools, but it will be reassuring for them to know that there is a plan, even if it needs to be adapted at a later date.
- Help your child to get enough sleep. You can do this by limiting the use of screens late in the evening and encourage your child to start a wind down routine about an hour before they go to bed. This helps them prepare their body and mind for sleep.

Seeking additional support

If your child or teenager is experiencing anxiety that is very distressing to them or interfering with their ability to function, it is important to seek additional support. There are digital tools and helplines listed at the end of this fact sheet that you can recommend.

If you are struggling with anxiety yourself, you can find more information [here](#).

If you have significant concerns about your child and want some professional help, you can



get a referral to a psychologist or mental health professional through your GP.

It's best to contact your GP over the phone first and they will let you know how to proceed. Many psychologists are now offering their services using tele-health or online communications.

Helpful resources and online tools

Bite Back

biteback.org.au

Kids Helpline | 1800 55 1800

kidshelpline.com.au

Beyondblue | 1300 22 4636

beyondblue.org.au/get-support/national-help-lines-and-websites

eHeadspace

headspace.org.au/eheadspace

Brave online

brave-online.com

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