

Talking with children & young people about coronavirus/COVID-19

In light of the current and developing situation and media coverage, it is likely that some children and young people may be concerned and anxious. This is reasonable, as it is probable that they have never experienced something like this before and do not have the experience to know what may happen.

Adults who work with children and young people can play an important role in maintaining a secure and familiar environment for them where they can share their questions and worries.

Whole-setting considerations

- Maintain normal routines as far as is possible. Routines and familiar experiences are very reassuring.
- Be aware that some children and young people may be more irritable, emotionally volatile or distracted than would usually be the case - and be prepared to allow them to talk and ask questions.
- Be aware that worries and concerns can show themselves in lots of different ways; for example, through play, through relationships with other etc.
- Provide opportunities for them to share their thoughts and to support each other.
- Provide a clear message that nobody should be bullied or ignored if they have been associated with the virus. Be alert to any signs of name calling, exclusion or bullying.

Talking to children and young people

Make the conversation appropriate to the age and development of the child or young person. For older and more mature young people it may be helpful to guide them to the official websites and reliable news sources and share these with them to inform discussions.

- Choose a good time for a discussion with the child when they are happy to talk and when you are not having to immediately rush onto other things.
- Ask them to share what they know already. You will then know where to start the conversation.
- If they share worries or fears – show them that you understand how they are feeling. Don't try to dismiss or minimise their fears.
- Keep to the facts and keep the conversation positive. Tell them that doctors and scientists are working on the treatments, that the risk of catching the virus is currently low and that for most people it is like having a cold.
- Don't be afraid of saying you don't know if there is a question that you don't know the answer to.
- Talk about what they can do to have some control, for example focusing on good handwashing, using tissues etc.
- Make it clear that they can talk further with you if they have more questions or need more reassurance – and check in with them after a while to see how things are going.
- Try to end the conversations with a comment, topic or activity that is calming and reassuring.

Useful links

For settings

Coronavirus and UK schools closures: Support and advice for schools and parents/carers from the British Psychological Society and Division of Child and Educational Psychology. This advice was produced in response to the UK Government's announcement of school closures as part of the response to Coronavirus. As the situation continues to develop, guidance may be updated as further details emerge:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Coronavirus%20and%20UK%20schools%20closures%20-%20support%20and%20advice.pdf>

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families is a children's mental health charity. They have a range of advice on their website, including advice for children, families, schools and colleges about how to support during periods of disruption: <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/anna-freud-learning-network/coronavirus/>

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General information for adults talking to children:

- <https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children/>
- <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-covid-19/>
- <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Talking to children with autism – advice for adults:

- <https://usevisualstrategies.com/autism-coronavirus-helping-students-understand/>

Stories and social stories to share with children:

- <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Childrens-story-about-coronavirus.pdf>
- [file:///C:/Users/cfcsepcw/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/Coronavirus%20Social%20Story%20%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/cfcsepcw/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/Coronavirus%20Social%20Story%20%20(1).pdf)
- <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf> - social story explaining coronavirus for children
- <https://theautismeducator.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf> - social story for younger children

For young people to access directly

- <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

- <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089>

Looking after your own mental health in relation to covid-19

- <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/blog/covid-19-and-anxiety-part2/>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51734855>

General guidance for supporting anxiety

Websites

Having good mental health helps us relax more, achieve more and enjoy our lives more. This NHS website offers advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families is a national children's mental health charity which offers advice for supporting mental health and wellbeing: <https://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/>

Support for mental health and wellbeing of children and young people: <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Information about supporting young people with anxiety: <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/anxiety-information/young-people-and-anxiety/>

Calm is a worldwide app for guided relaxation and mindfulness. They have created free access to support guided relaxation in response to the coronavirus situation https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=715072-free-mindfulness-resources-from-calm&utm_source=lists%2F51225-Ultimate-LoveLife-Makeover-Summit&simpleobject_id=su_eWE1de2opeEQMZhT61XBFMVm

Apps

Headspace (mindfulness app) have launched a free section called *Weathering the storm*. This includes meditation, sleep and movement exercises.

ThinkNinja - an app specifically designed to educate 11-18 year olds about mental health, emotional wellbeing and to provide skills young people can use to build resilience and stay well.

Smiling Mind – an app designed to support with meditation and mindfulness for children, families and schools. Their website (<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/>) provides lots of information and guidance and the app provides guided relaxation / mindfulness sessions. They also have a YouTube channel with lots of informative videos as well as guided meditation sessions also: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSP_8_QEFYdi0gY2F3CXfA