

Mental health and wellbeing for children

Information for parents and carers COVID-19

With recent news and media coverage about the Coronavirus (COVID-19), it is normal for children to feel scared and have lots of questions. As children look to the significant adults in their lives for guidance, you have an important role in helping them to understand what is happening and how to manage their reactions.

This factsheet provides some ideas on how parents and carers can help children cope during this time.

Communication is important

Talking with your child about coronavirus (COVID-19) can help your child understand and cope with what's going on. Allowing children to openly express their concerns, ask questions and get reliable information can actually reduce their worry and distress.

It is important to find the right time to have these tricky conversations. Make sure when they are ready to talk to you, you can find a quiet place away from distractions and you are able to give them your full attention.

To start the conversations, ask your child what they already know, what they want to learn more about and how they are feeling right now. Using a calm and reassuring voice, answer your child's questions as honestly as possible, using up to date with the facts from reliable sources. Speak using words that are age appropriate and correct any misunderstandings they may have with care and empathy.

Being open and honest about what you know and how you feel in this situation can also help your child feel less scared and anxious. Knowing you also feel concerned can be reassuring and help them understand their feelings are normal.

Listening to the media

Children can be easily distressed by hearing repeated stories on the news, especially if it is aimed at an adult audience. Try to monitor and limit how much your child is being exposed to television, radio and social media and encourage them to talk to you about what they are seeing and hearing.

Reinforce good hygiene practices

Good hygiene is an easy habit for children to adopt and will help them feel as though they're able to exert some control over their circumstances. Remind your child to:

- cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze (coughing into their elbow is a useful strategy);
- keep their hands clean by washing them regularly with soap and water; and
- avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.

Maintain a healthy routine

Routines are also an important part of a healthy lifestyle and this is especially true for children. It gives them security in knowing what to expect and when to expect it, and this can also help children cope in times of stress and uncertainty.

Maintain your usual family routines by eating healthy meals at regular set times. Encourage your child to go to bed at their usual time to ensure they get plenty of sleep. Get some sunshine and exercise during the day. Call or video conference with family and friends to keep in contact and stay socially connected.



Where to get reliable information

If you want to find reliable resources to keep yourself and your child up to date with what is happening with COVID-19, you can:

- call the National Coronavirus Health Information line on 1800 020 080
- visit the NSW Health COVID-19 website for the latest information and advice <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/covid-19-latest.aspx>
- contact the Early Childhood Education Directorate on 1800 619 113 or email ececd@det.nsw.edu.au
- visit the Emerging Mind's supporting children during the COVID-19 outbreak webpage at <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/supporting-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/>

Where to get help

If you are concerned about your child's wellbeing, you can:

- contact your child's school or care provider to discuss your concerns and seek advice
- talk to your General Practitioner or call your local Community Health Centre
- call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 or visit kidshelpline.com.au
- call headspace on 1800 650 890 or visit headspace.org.au
- visit Head to Health for digital mental health resources headtohealth.gov.au
- call Parent Line NSW on 1300 1300 52 or visit www.parentline.org.au
- call Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au

- call Beyond Blue's Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service on 1800 512 348 (24 hours/7 days)
- call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au

Local supports are also available

headspace

- Wagga Wagga centre - (02) 6923 3170
- Griffith centre - (02) 6962 3277

MPHN Central Access and Navigation Service 1800 931 603

Murrumbidgee AccessLine 1800 800 944