

# Cardiff Educational Psychology Service: Advice for Parents during the Coronavirus Pandemic



The current COVID-19 outbreak has brought with it a lot of uncertainty. The constantly developing nature of the situation is understandably causing a lot of worry and anxiety for people. Feeling worried, stressed and anxious during uncertain times is normal, and we need to take care of our mental health, as well as our physical health. By acknowledging and learning to take care of our mental health, we can stay healthy and better equipped to cope with the challenges we will face during this unprecedented situation we're having to face.

## Looking after yourself

Remember, by looking after our own mental health, we'll be best placed to look after our loved ones. Here are some ideas of how we can take care of our wellbeing during this time.

### KEEP LEARNING

Learning a new skill or honing an existing one gives us a sense of purpose and achievement. Whilst we're busy learning, we're less likely to experience anxious thoughts and worries. Social-distancing will bring new challenges, but it will give many of us the time to start a new hobby or learn about an area that we've always been interested in.

### TAKE NOTICE

Take a break from the news and social media and concentrate on what's happening in the here and now in your family. Notice and appreciate the small things. Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your wellbeing. There's lots of good mindfulness apps to try, but if that's not for you, just getting into something you enjoy (e.g. cooking, drawing, etc.) and really focusing on it can be just as good.

### BE ACTIVE

Try to make sure that you and your family get regular exercise every day. YouTube has lots of exercise videos for kids and adults. Get children involved in planning their own 'indoor PE'. If current government advice permits, try to get outside once a day either into your garden if you have one or in a place where there are few people. If you can't go out, open the windows for some fresh air and take some time to look at the world outside.

### CONNECT

Social connection is one of the most important ways we can look after our mental wellbeing. Social distancing is going to make that trickier, but we're lucky enough to have technology to help us out. Think physical distancing, but social connections. If you can, try to have phone calls or even video calls. Arrange to Facetime/Skype a friend for coffee, phone relatives more often than usual. Whilst it can be helpful to share worries, try to find other things to talk about too.

### GIVE

Giving back to our community helps people to feel valuable and makes us happier. While we can't contribute to our community in our usual way, many people will still find ways to give back. Lots of community groups are setting up schemes that aim to help vulnerable people at this difficult time. Check out local social media for ideas to get involved. If you're not in a position to offer practical support, offer mutual support to friends and family by checking in with them regularly.

## Advice from the BPS: Talking to children about Coronavirus

**It is good to talk:** Children will have heard about Coronavirus and likely noticed changes around them (such as people wearing face masks). It is important they feel comfortable talking to you about Coronavirus as you will be the best source of information and reassurance for them. It's also likely they will talk to their friends or other children, which can involve imagination and misinformation. So having the chance to check-in with you is even more helpful.

**Be truthful but remember your child's age:** It is better for children to take an honest and accurate approach – give them factual information, but adjust the amount and detail to fit their age. For example, you might say 'we don't yet have a vaccination for Coronavirus, but doctors are working very hard on it' or 'a lot of people might get sick, but normally it is like a cold or flu and they get better'. Younger children might understand a cartoon or picture better. We also recommend that adults watch news programmes and then filter this information to their child in a developmentally appropriate way.

**Allow children to ask questions:** It is natural that children will have questions, and likely worries, about Coronavirus. Giving them the space to ask these questions and have answers is a good way to alleviate anxiety. Again, try to be honest in your responses – it is ok to say you don't know. At the moment, there are questions we don't have answers to about Coronavirus – you can explain this to your child and add in information about what people are doing to try to answer these questions. Maybe your child has an idea too – let them tell you or draw them.

**Try to manage your own worries:** Uncertainty can make all of us feel anxious or worried. Identify other adults you can talk to about your own worries and questions. What things usually help to make you feel a bit calmer? If you are at home, music, breathing and relaxation techniques, distraction (such as watching something funny), and time with family members or pets can all help. Talk to your children when you feel calm – it will reassure them.

**Give practical guidance:** Remind your child of the most important things they can do to stay healthy – washing their hands and the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' advice for coughs and sneezes. Help your child practise and increase their motivation for keeping going (maybe thinking of a song they want to sing while washing their hands).

See the end of this document for an understanding of how to talk to children about illness according to their developmental stages.



### Resources

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)  
Child Mind Institute Inc. <https://childmind.org>

# Talking to children about Coronavirus

Lots of people are feeling worried about Coronavirus. It is normal to feel like that. Remember most people who get coronavirus will get better. Our bodies will fight the virus off.

## **What is Coronavirus (Covid -19)?**

Coronavirus is similar to colds and flu. For most people it is a mild illness which causes them to cough and to have a fever. Having a fever means that you can feel very hot and sweaty one minute and then very cold and shivery the next minute. It might not be as easy to breathe as normal.



## **How do people get Coronavirus?**

Coronavirus likes to travel from person to person. It is transferred when an ill person is near to a healthy person. If an ill person touches a hard surface (tap, sink, door handle) the virus can stay there for a while and the next person who touches that surface can catch the virus. That's why it's so important to keep surfaces clean.



## **How can we fight Coronavirus?**

The best way to reduce your chance of getting coronavirus is to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (you can count 20 seconds by counting elephants 1 elephant, 2 elephants etc.).

You can also clean your hands using hand sanitizer and letting it dry on our hands for 10 seconds.

To stop the virus spreading it helps if people don't get together in big groups.

Lots of adults might be working at home at the moment rather than going to work so that they don't mix with lots of people.

You might not be going out to your favourite places so often and some of the clubs you go to might be closed for a while.



## **What will happen if I get Coronavirus?**

If you or someone in your family gets coronavirus you will all have to stay in your house for two weeks (self-isolate).

You might get some of the symptoms that we described earlier (coughing, fever, shortness of breath) and you might need to take some medicine to make you feel better. Most people don't need to see a doctor.

## **What will happen next?**

Lots of clever scientists are working very hard to find a vaccine. A vaccine is medicine that people can take that stops them from getting the virus.

## Tips for parents

- Talk to children about what they know or have heard about the virus. This will make you aware of any false information that they may have picked up on and give you the chance to reassure them.
- Think about where you get your information from, not everything online and social media is correct, so check with trusted sources such as the NHS or BBC.
- Remember that everyone reacts different to different situations. Some children may feel worried or even anxious, reassuring them, keeping them occupied and giving them the chance to talk can all help.
- Children will respond to adults, so if you are showing anxiety they are likely to pick up on it. Try and stay calm and positive. Let children know that there are people working hard on a solution to this situation
- Keeping to a daily routine at home will help children to feel safe and secure. Plan nice things together such as playing games and creative activities so that there is a balance between screen time and family time.
- Look after yourself and give yourself some 'me' time.

## Children and Young People's FAQs (and how to answer them).

### Why are my friends not in school?

- Some people are having to self-isolate. This means that they are having to stay safe indoors with families. They will be safe with their families.

### Where are my friends?

- They are at home with their families and they are stopping from the virus being spread. By not being with other people we can stop the virus from being spread.

### Am I likely to get the coronavirus?

- All individuals including children are able to get the coronavirus. However, a lot more adults than children are getting the virus and children that have received the virus are ok.

### What will happen with teachers?

- Teachers will also be self-isolating with their families. They are trying to keep safe just like you and stop the virus from being spread.

### When will I go back to school?

- We do not know right now when you will go back to school but the teachers will tell me when the schools will re-open and I will tell you.

### What can I do to help?

- As long as you keep washing your hands that will help stop you from getting the virus and that will be helpful.

### Are people dying?

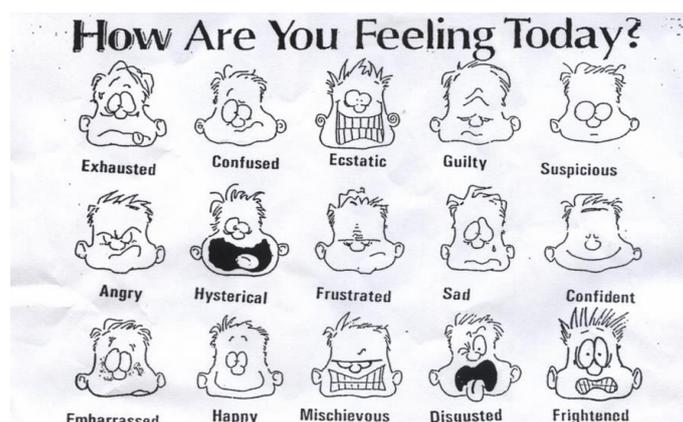
- Some people are dying but this is more very older people and people that are struggling with other health issues.

### What will happen with my grades and education?

- This is not something we can answer right now but when we do know you will be informed. The Government will be the ones that will have this information in the future.

### Remember to follow up

**Remind** your children that they can talk to you, whatever they are feeling.



## Some practical strategies for managing anxiety and worries around the viral outbreak

### 30 SELF-CARE TIPS

WWW.KINDNESSMATTERS.CO.UK

1. Read a book
2. Eat well
3. Exercise
4. Meditate
5. Journal
6. Affirmations
7. Walk-in nature
8. Eat a healthy meal
9. Take a long bath
10. Light candles
11. Retail therapy
12. Practice gratitude
13. Have a digital detox
14. Drink lots of water
15. Compliment yourself
16. Get enough sleep
17. Put your needs first
18. Volunteer
19. Have a duvet day
20. Listen to upbeat music
21. Read inspirational quotes
22. Watch funny videos
23. Treat yourself to comfort food
24. Try something new
25. Take up a new hobby
26. Ask for a hug
27. Select friends that lift you up
28. Spend time with your best friend
29. Buy fresh flowers
30. Take a class



### Mindfulness Exercises

**Focus Breathing** is a quick and easy mindfulness technique.

- It can help you calm your mind, relax and focus your attention to whatever it is you're doing right now... and enjoy the moment!
- This is a great technique to build into your everyday life to connect with your breathing, your mind and your body... and you'll feel great afterwards!

#### Focus Breathing – A beginner's Guide....

1. Make sure you are comfortable, either sitting or standing in a quiet place if possible.
2. Close your eyes and take some slow deep breaths through your nose.
3. Concentrate on your breath flowing in and out of your body.
4. Notice how it is cooler when you breathe in and warmer when you breathe out.
5. Continue until you feel calm and relaxed.

(Apps including headspace and Calm can help with this too).

## Sources of support for Parents

### General

#### – Samaritans

Call 116 123

<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>

#### – Mind

Mind has an excellent page providing [generic advice for everyone about maintaining wellbeing](#). The page has two distinct sections:

Plan for staying at home or indoors

Taking care of our mental health and wellbeing

### Parenting pressures

- **Family Action** - The FamilyLine service supports people who are dealing with family pressures in a new and innovative way by using a network of volunteers from across the country to support family members over the age of 18 through telephone calls, email, web chat and text message.

Telephone: 0808 802 6666

Text message: 07537 404 282

<https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/familyline/>

- **Family Lives (previously Parentline)** - Family Lives offers a confidential and free helpline service for families in England and Wales (previously known as Parentline). for emotional support, information, advice and guidance on any aspect of parenting and family life. The helpline service is open 9am – 9pm, Monday to Friday and 10am – 3pm Saturday and Sunday.

Call: 0808 800 2222

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/how-we-can-help/confidential-helpline/>

- **Gingerbread** - One Parent Families/Gingerbread is the leading national charity working to help lone parents and their children.

Single Parent Helpline: 0808 802 0925

[gingerbread.org.uk](http://gingerbread.org.uk)

- **Grandparents Plus** - Grandparents Plus is the only national charity (England and Wales) dedicated to supporting kinship carers - grandparents and other relatives raising children who aren't able to live with their parents.

Call: 0300 123 7015

[grandparentsplus.org.uk](http://grandparentsplus.org.uk)

### Information about coronavirus for parents, carers and professionals

#### – UK Government

In the first instance, [the UK Government Covid-19 pages](#) are frequently and rapidly updated with advice and guidance in line with advice from Public Health England. There is specific [guidance for educational settings](#) and [guidance for employers, employees and businesses](#).

#### – World Health Organisation: Covid-19 and Mental Health

The WHO has recently published [considerations to support mental health and wellbeing during the](#)

[Coronavirus outbreak](#). This guidance has specific recommendations for health care workers, caretakers of children, caretakers of older adults and people in isolation.

– **Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) advice**

Earlier this week the [DECP released advice on talking to children about coronavirus](#). There are five simple tips focusing on honesty, openness and validating children's emotions.

– **National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)**

The NASP is a professional body for school psychologists in the USA. They have released [a parent guide for talking to children about coronavirus](#). It's lengthy, but comprehensive.

## Advice from the BPS: Talking to children about illness

**Adults have a key role** in helping children understand what is going on, providing information and reassurance, limiting media overload for children, and being aware of how their own reactions might impact on children. Much of the information that children hear about Covid-19 is intended for adults. However, children are not little adults and their understanding depends on their developmental stage. This means that we need to talk to children about what is happening at a level that is developmentally right for them. **Here is the BPS' short guide outlines children's understanding at different developmental stages.**

	Important to understand	What they might do or say	What you can do to help
<b>Aged 0-3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– They will struggle to understand things that they can't see and touch, so understanding what illness means will be difficult unless they can see it (such as someone sneezing).</li> <li>– Schools are still responsible for the education of their children and young people.</li> <li>– Reassure parents that during the time that children are away, they will have access to learning materials as appropriate. Many schools use online learning platforms already and it may be necessary to provide more detailed information to parents about how to access and use these services.</li> <li>– They will not understand what causes illness, especially things that go on inside our body.</li> <li>– They are focused on what is going on right now and have little understanding of the future and of time.</li> <li>– Their basic needs will be around food, sleep, play, and closeness. Interruptions to these things will have the biggest impact on their emotions and behaviour.</li> <li>– They will base their understanding on what has happened to them before, and think it will happen again</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Get easily confused or misunderstand things they hear people say.</li> <li>– Show their distress at change in routine through: being more clingy, changes to their toileting, eating or sleeping habits.</li> <li>– Say things that seem to not make sense to us as adults.</li> <li>– Not understand why adults are scared, worried or sad.</li> <li>– Carry on with playing even when things around them may be difficult (e.g. if a loved one is unwell).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Don't use complicated explanations. Stick to short sentences and focus on the here and now – what you are doing today and tomorrow.</li> <li>– Be honest but don't add lots of detail.</li> <li>– Focus on structure and routine – keeping things as normal as possible.</li> <li>– Spend time playing with your child – try to make sure you limit your time on devices.</li> <li>– Use play with dolls and stories to explain situations or concepts that it is important for the child to understand.</li> <li>– Where you have to make a change to a routine, keep explanations honest but brief (e.g. Mummy is working from home. This means she will be in the house with you lots instead of going into the office).</li> <li>– Limit background conversations and news that the child can hear.</li> </ul>

	<b>Important to understand</b>	<b>What they might do or say</b>	<b>What you can do to help</b>
<b>Aged 4-7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Children are focused on their immediate environment – what is going on around them, what is happening next and soon, and how they feel right now.</li> <li>– They will struggle to understand concepts that they cannot picture in their mind.</li> <li>– Complicated things like illnesses they can't see may be difficult to understand.</li> <li>– They will understand illness in terms of simple symptoms, like a cough or runny nose.</li> <li>– They will struggle to separate out that symptoms of illness may be different – such as the idea that some coughs are OK, and others are more serious.</li> <li>– They will be starting to understand that you can catch some illnesses but they may get confused about this and think you can catch all illnesses.</li> <li>– They will know that some behaviours can help keep you healthy, like washing your hands, however they might get confused and think it will definitely stop you getting ill.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Children may increase behaviours they think will keep them healthy that they have heard adults talking about before e.g. saying they want to eat healthily or exercise to be healthy and fit.</li> <li>– Children are exposed to stories and fairy tales at this age and you might hear them playing out illness-related stories with their toys – some of the things they do may be confusing or not accurate.</li> <li>– Children may 'fill in the blanks' with their imagination or seemingly illogical or inaccurate explanations – you may wonder, 'where did they get that from?'</li> <li>– Children may blame themselves or think something was their fault (e.g. grandma is ill because I did not wash my hands).</li> <li>– Carry on with playing even when things around them may be difficult (e.g. if a loved one is unwell).</li> <li>– They may ask a lot of questions repeatedly as they try to make sense of information they have heard with their limited understanding of illness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Use play and stories to shape a child's understanding, where necessary and appropriate.</li> <li>– Characters in the story can be used to correct misunderstandings.</li> <li>– Make sure that the child understands cause and effect (e.g. washing hands will help stop germs spreading rather than will stop).</li> <li>– Answers do not need to be increasingly complex – if you have said enough to your child, repeat the information you have given consistently. If you are not sure or don't know, say so instead of making something up!</li> <li>– Help your child label and name their emotions by labelling and naming yours.</li> </ul>

	Important to understand	What they might do or say	What you can do to help
<b>Aged 7-12</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Children can now see themselves as different to others and understand that other people have different needs and perspectives.</li> <li>– Children still think about things from their own perspective so will be influenced mainly by that.</li> <li>– They have an understanding that illness can be lots of different symptoms, and that lots of things go on inside their body which they can't see.</li> <li>– They understand that medicines and following doctor's advice can help them get better but still need a lot of help and prompting to follow advice.</li> <li>– They are more able to understand concepts of time and permanence, and will understand that death happens to everyone and is permanent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Not wanting to voice concerns for fear of upsetting parents, friends or others.</li> <li>– Difficulty verbalising distress – they may not know why they feel worried or stressed.</li> <li>– They are more likely to experience stress as physical symptoms, like a headache, a stomach ache or wanting more physical contact.</li> <li>– They will ask more questions about the impact on other people or on wider changes to life than younger children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Encourage emotional expression through drawing, stories, questions – a feelings box where children can write down their questions and thoughts and discuss them with an adult can be helpful.</li> <li>– Normalise different feelings appropriately and talk about what you are doing to help with your worries or feelings.</li> <li>– Make sure your child is active (provided they are well) – this gets rid of some of the chemicals in the body which are released when we are anxious and will help with physical symptoms of stress.</li> <li>– Make sure children don't take on adult roles in a desire to help others.</li> <li>– Ensure explanations are accurate and explain differences between conditions – e.g. children may have heard that having a cough might be worrying, and they will need to understand that not all coughs are worrying.</li> </ul>

	<b>Important to understand</b>	<b>What they might do or say</b>	<b>What you can do to help</b>
<b>Aged 13 +</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– At this age, children have a good understanding of time, they can imagine the future and lots of possibilities. As a result, their imagination may mean they are able to worry more about things that haven't happened or might not happen.</li> <li>– Teenagers can understand the different causes of illness, that illnesses can be very different and can understand the role of stress and worry on the body.</li> <li>– Teenagers are still mainly influenced by their friends – so even though they can understand a lot of information about illness, what their friends are doing and saying may impact on how they behave.</li> <li>– Teenagers are developing their own identity and a sense of who they are in the world.</li> <li>– They are likely to look at their own sources of information and parents become less defining in how they think about information and how they behave.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– They might ask less questions of parents, and turn to other sources of information such as social media, their friends and news outlets.</li> <li>– They might take advice from friends or other social influences on how to behave and act and be conscious of not wanting to act differently.</li> <li>– There might be increased awareness of how illness and health behaviour fits with what is important to them.</li> <li>– They might be more concerned with social, moral and emotional aspects of illness and how illness is having a broader impact. This might lead to more distress and sadness than in younger children.</li> <li>– They might want to find ways of helping others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Continue to offer space for support, affection and discussion.</li> <li>– Ask open questions such as, 'What did you think of the news that...?'</li> <li>– Provide them with information from reputable sources 'I came across this today, what do you think of it?'</li> <li>– Support social opportunities and discussion with peers.</li> <li>– Offer choice and promote independence within the context of what is possible and appropriate – if a teenager can't go out, giving more choice about activity within the home can be helpful.</li> <li>– Suggest ways of helping others that are safe and appropriate.</li> <li>– Offer reframes about worries – how can the young person think differently about the situation which helps them find a positive in the situation?</li> </ul>