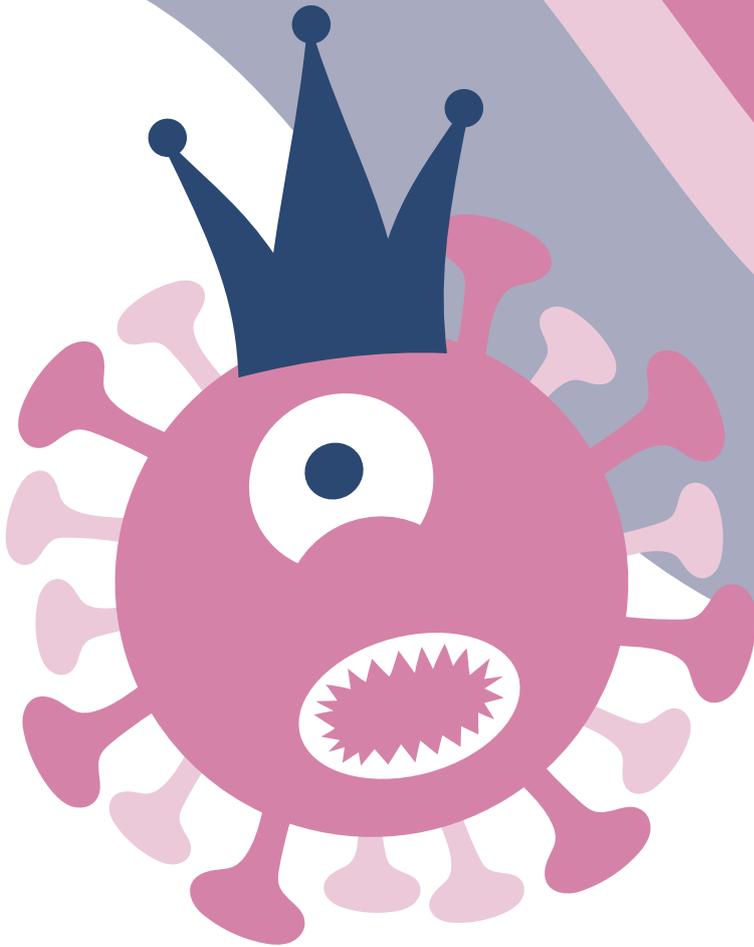


It's ok to worry about going back to school

A resource pack **for parents** to help prepare their children for going back to school





This pack was created by
the Early Intervention team
in Child and Adolescent
Mental Health Service
(CAMHS) in NHS Grampian

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Part 1:

How this pack can help

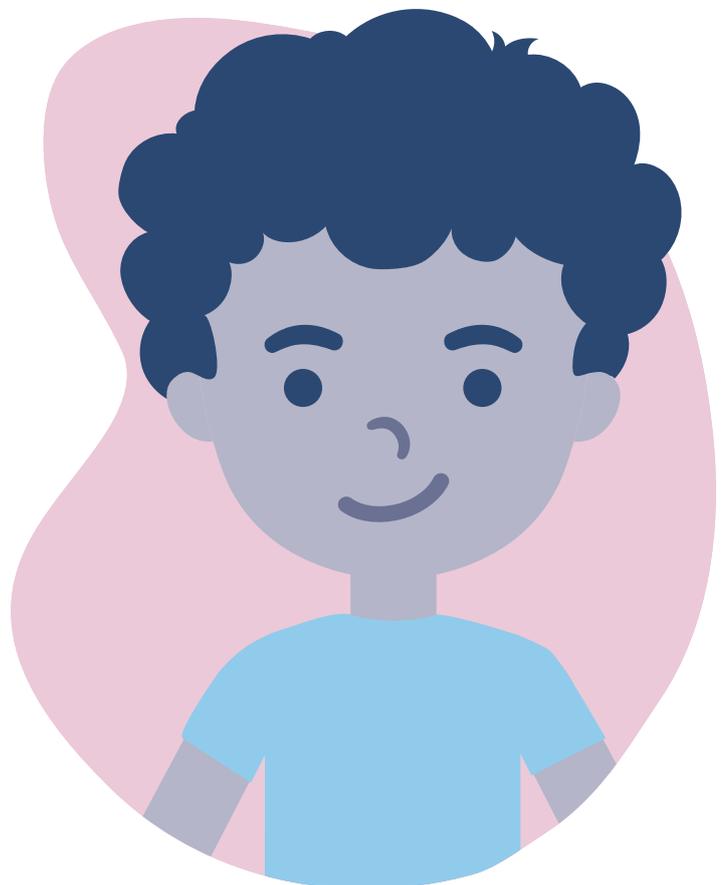
How this pack can help

During the COVID-19 pandemic we have and continue to face unique challenges as individuals, families and communities. However, as well as difficulties, lockdown may also have brought many positives, such as increased family time and space for personal reflections. Maintaining these benefits and new traditions can be helpful when moving into another phase.

As we know, based on current guidance from Scottish Government, this new phase means that schools will be reopening alongside other changes to lockdown restrictions. Schools and our lifestyles may be different to how they were before lockdown.

Given this, we have created this pack to support you to prepare your children and yourselves for the transition back to school, including:

- + How you can talk to your children about the upcoming changes
- + Practical tips on preparing your children before school starts
- + Ideas on coping with adjustment difficulties when back to school
- + Additional resources



Part 2:

Possible changes at school

Possible changes at school

We know that your child's school may look different to what you have become accustomed to, and learning may feel different after months of home-schooling. Your children may go back to school full-time or on a "blended-learning" model, combining in-school and at-home learning. The decision will vary depending on what is known about the virus in your area and on your children's school.

Other changes that might be introduced at school include:

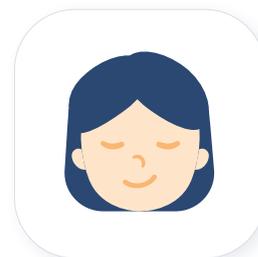
- + Physical distancing
- + Encouraged handwashing
- + More frequent cleaning in school
- + Routes and signs to follow at school
- + Changes in seating positions
- + Changes in arrival, departure and break times
- + Increased outdoor learning



Arrangements are likely to differ between schools

Your children's school teachers should be in contact with more information about these.

Changes unrelated to COVID-19 may occur with starting a new school year, such as different teachers or school curriculum. For some children this means transition to primary or secondary school. These changes and transitions can also cause some worries. You can use this pack and other recommended resources to support your children's adjustment to returning to school. Speak to your children's teachers about any supports they may have in place at school.



Stay at home guidance continues to apply if your children or anyone else from your household have symptoms or confirmed COVID-19

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/>

Possible concerns for parents

There will be unique challenges for every family depending on jobs, health and childcare arrangements. Stay kind to yourself and patient with things that are out of your control. Possible challenges or concerns you might have as a parent are listed below.

Returning to work and childcare

These may introduce challenges for some parents balancing jobs and childcare on days that children might be learning from home. Check Parent's Club for tips on children's home learning and their FAQ page for governmental updates on reopening schools and childcare centres (see Additional Resources).



Concerns about your child's return to school

You might be worried about your children's health when they return to school. The decision to reopen schools is based on available scientific evidence and there will be measures put in place to ensure your children's wellbeing (you can find more information in Additional Resources).

You might also wonder about the **benefits of returning to school in the current climate**. Beyond academics, learning at school can help a child's development of social, cognitive and problem-solving skills. Current guidance encourages families to send their children to school and promotes a focus on children's wellbeing. Talk to your children's school if you are worried about your children going back.

Let the school staff know if your children underwent a serious illness or bereavement.

Talk to school staff if your children have additional support needs. See our resource pack for parents helping neurodiverse children with the transition to school (Additional Resources).

Talking about going back to school

Talking to children about new changes can help them accept and cope with upcoming challenges. Here are some pointers for having helpful conversations with your children.

Explain what will be different and what will stay the same

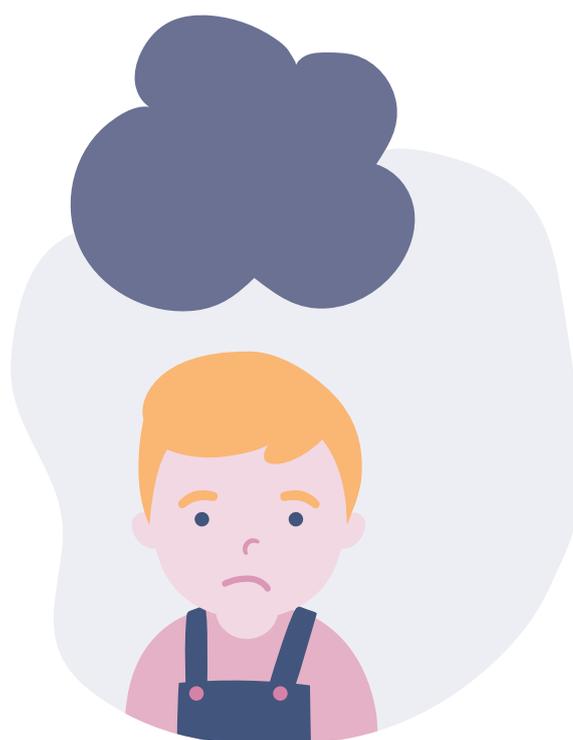
Talking about what your children can expect when they return to school can relieve some anticipation anxiety about the novel situation and can provide comfort in uncertain times. Remind your children that you and their teachers are still there for support. Your children can write down a list of the changes based on the information you receive from school (see page 10).

Highlight the positives

You can explain that this transition will be new for everyone - children, teachers and families - and we are all going through this together. You can emphasise that your children remain superheroes by following school rules to control the virus. Talk about the positive aspects of going back to school, whatever these are for your children (e.g. seeing their friends again; more time spent outdoors).

Ask about their worries and feelings

Let your children know that having worries or other feelings is ok and that you are there to listen. For **worries about the virus**, you can explain that it is now safe to go back to school and lots of things are being done to keep everyone healthy (see packs “It’s ok to worry about coronavirus” in Additional Resources). For **worries about the future or schoolwork**, you can encourage your children to focus on things they value doing in the present (see page 11) and help them solve problems that are within their control (See page 12).



Preparing to go back to school

There are also practical things you can do to help you and your children feel more prepared and in control when going back to school. You can choose from the list below ideas that might be applicable to your family.

Practicing the school route

Visiting school as a part of your daily walk or drive can help you and your children get into a school-time mindset. If there are changes to pick-up and drop-off points or new arrangements for transport it might be helpful to practice these before schools reopen.

Getting ready for the school day

This could involve trying out the school uniform and writing down the school schedule. Children will likely not be able to share school equipment or food. You can discuss with their teachers what will be provided at school and what can be brought from home and help your children prepare these.

Planning for things in advance and sharing responsibilities with other family members can also make tasks more manageable. This may include scheduling tasks for different times of the day depending on how busy these time periods are (e.g. getting clothes ready the night before).

Getting back to a school routine

You may not have followed your usual routine during lockdown and **that is ok.** To help your children readjust, you can get them back into their school routine by gradually shifting their sleep, meal and/or break times to desired times. Praise or tokens towards a reward can help your children to keep motivated.

Keeping your children in a routine as much as possible can give them a sense of structure and predictability. Try to follow a consistent routine if your children are learning from home. You can add more activities to their routines including things that they can do according to current government guidance (e.g. shopping together; social activities with another household). Check our other resource packs for tips on making a routine (Additional Resources).

Praise and positive talk

At any stage, praising your children for behaviours you wish to see builds children's self-esteem and encourages more of these positive behaviours. You can also talk about their strengths and things that they are already good at doing.



Guidance compass

Name:

Class:

Teachers:

I'll be at school on these days:

Start time:

Breaks:

Home time:

Things that will stay the same

(e.g. somebody I know at school; having breaks)

.....

.....

Rules I need to follow at school to be safe

(e.g. handwashing hygiene; physical distancing)

.....

.....

.....

.....

How others will keep me healthy at school

(e.g. keep places clean; explain changes)

.....

.....

.....

.....

Things that will be different at school

(e.g. changes to physical spaces; class number)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

People I can ask for help and support:

.....

.....

Things that matter to me

You can choose to focus on things that are important to you and you enjoy doing in the present.

Try to do more of these and let go of things that are not helping or are not within your control.



Things that make me feel good

(e.g. spending time with a friend; walk; game)

.....

.....

.....

.....



List of things that are important to me

(e.g. being a good friend; animals; art)

.....

.....

.....

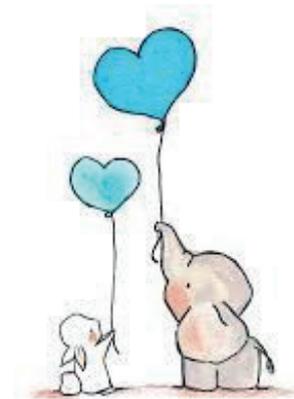
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Things I choose to let go of

(e.g. worry about not being good enough)

.....

.....

.....

.....

My problem-solving worksheet

If you identify a problem that can be solved by you or with the help of others, try to follow the steps below to decide on the best possible solution.

Identify the problem

(e.g. I'm worried I will do something wrong)

.....

.....

.....

List of all possible solutions

(e.g. asking for help if I am unsure)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Chosen solution

.....

.....

Weigh up your solutions and choose the best one on balance.

Pros:

Cons:



Practicing my chosen solution

When I am going to practice:

.....

.....

If things get difficult, I can use these strategies to help:

.....

.....

.....

How did it go?

.....

.....

.....

Part 3:

When schools reopen

When schools reopen

Adjustment difficulties can be expected from everyone facing this novel transition. Children may begin to feel more at ease about the changes with time and preparation. Some children might continue to struggle with going to school and in other areas of their life, such as family and community activities.

Here are some suggestions that might help

Maintain the gains

There might be things that your family valued from the time spent in lockdown. Perhaps you established a new family tradition, enjoyed your walks together or connected to other family members and friends. Try to continue with some of the things your family has enjoyed.

Adjusting to the changes

Turning some of the changes into fun things your children can do can help with their adaptation to the current situation. For example, you can think with your children of fun socially distant greetings and games they can do with their friends or turn following school measures into a live video game.

ALTERNATIVES TO HANDSHAKES, HUGS, HIGH FIVES AND HONGI



THE WAVE



THE HAND ON HEART



NAMASTE



NZSL: HOW ARE YOU?



THE 'EAST COAST WAVE'



THE 'WHAT A WORLD EH?'

Noticing emotional or behavioural signs

Children may express their feelings through their behaviour as well as their words. Anxious feelings may occur when dealing with difficult situations and in response to worries. Below are some examples of anxiety signs. Every child is different - try to spot how anxious feelings and frustrations present in your children.

You can support your child to understand their feelings and measure their intensity, using the worksheet on page 16. Try to help your children notice when their feelings change with time.

Physiological signs

- + Sore tummies
- + Headaches
- + Shaky
- + Looking flushed
- + Tightness sensations in chest, throat

Behavioural signs

- + Difficulty sleeping
- + Appetite changes
- + Seeking reassurance
- + Avoiding situations, people, activities
- + Defiant or angry behaviours
- + Restlessness

Emotional signs

- + Tearfulness
- + Fearfulness
- + Irritability
- + Worrying

Pre-plan for challenges

Having a plan for tricky situations can increase your children's confidence and can give a sense of direction. Talk about things that have helped them in difficult situations before and how they can apply these strategies to new challenges.

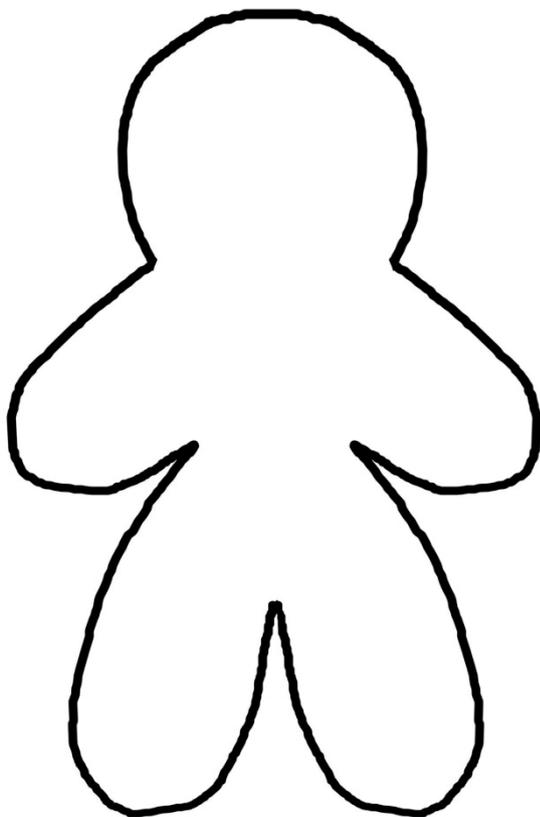
You may wish to explore and practice new coping strategies with your children (see Additional Resources for ideas). You can help them create coping cards (pages 17-18) to put in a coping booklet or to scatter on places they can see them.



What I am feeling

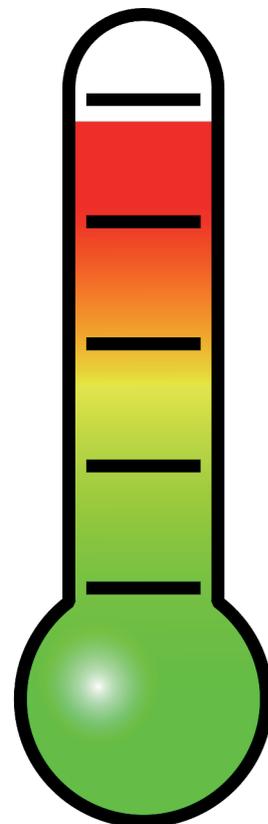
Feelings in my body

This is how my body feels, when I am feeling (*feeling*)



My (*feeling*) Thermometer

Point to how much of this am I feeling right now.



Examples of things **you** might be feeling in your body:

I am tense. **My heart rate is fast.**

My palms feel clammy and sweaty. **My chest feels tight.**

I have a stomach pain or sore head.

My coping cards

When I feel

.....

I can...

talk about it



When I feel

.....

I can...

draw my feeling



When I feel

.....

I can...

practice a hobby



When I feel

.....

I can...

listen to music



When I feel

.....

I can...

get moving



When I feel

.....

I can...

take slow, deep breaths



My coping cards

Make your own – fill in the cards and draw pictures

When I feel

.....

I can...

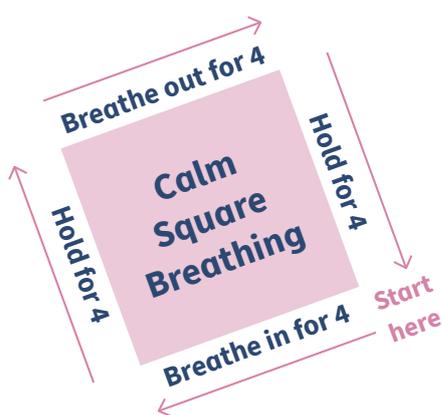
Coping with emotional difficulties

Coping with emotional difficulties

Relaxation strategies can be used to bring anxious feelings down.

Relaxation skills

These include quick strategies to manage anxious feelings that your child can do anywhere (e.g. breathing, mind distraction) and relaxation activities that can take a bit longer (e.g. soothing bath). See our packs in the series “It’s okay to worry about coronavirus” in Additional Resources for ideas. It can be helpful to build in time for relaxation daily and to practice relaxation skills when your children are calm at first.



Naming emotions

Some children may struggle to identify and verbalise their emotions and naming the emotion for them can help them process it.

Coping with behavioural difficulties

There are many reasons that may underlie children’s behaviours, including anxious feelings and environmental changes. Try to identify what is behind the behaviour and respond in a calm, consistent manner (see Additional Resources for our Parenting support pack). Remind yourself that you are doing your best and every change takes time and practice.

Coping with avoidance

Some children might cope with anxious feelings by avoiding situations. This can reduce anxiety short-term but is not a helpful long-term solution. You can allow your children to have little wins by facing small challenges, using new skills for difficult feelings and rewards for successful coping. Try to plan for difficult situations (e.g. getting ready for school in the morning) and what strategies your children can use to overcome these.



I can see waiting made you angry. Let’s take 5 breaths together and see who can breathe deeper.

Coping with emotional difficulties

Worries about separating

Some children might struggle to separate from their parents because of worries about their safety. Assure your children that everyone will be safe, explain when you will return and what nice thing you can do together after. Practicing a quick goodbye ritual and smaller separation episodes (e.g. mum going to the shop) can help.

Reassurance seeking

Too much reassurance about separation or other worries can get your child stuck in a worry cycle. Try to reassure your children once and then move on. Support your children to use other coping strategies instead (e.g. breathing exercises, distraction).

Family problem solving

For managing problems at home, you can also use the problem-solving worksheet together as a team to work out the best and most balanced solution for the family (see page 12).

Celebrate success

Highlighting strengths and rewarding yourself and your children for successful coping are very important. This may include praise and pre-determined rewards for successful facing of challenges and progress towards set goals.

If you feel like you or your children are struggling to cope and need more support, please seek further assistance. You can find contact numbers for relevant supports listed in Additional resources.



Part 4:

Looking after yourself as a parent

Looking after yourself as a parent

Finding time to recharge and staying kind to yourself are important for your wellbeing and for helping your children. This can also set a good example for your children to cope in a positive way.

Self-compassion

You might have been required to juggle childcare, work and home-schooling demands while trying to understand the pandemic situation yourself. Acknowledge your feelings and try to treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.

Focus on the present

Try to forgive the past that cannot be changed and let go of worries for things that are beyond your control. Focus on the things that you value and what you can do in your “here and now”. Listing things that you are grateful for can also positively shift your perspective.

Stay connected

Try to schedule time to connect to people who make you feel good and look for support if you feel like you are struggling (see Additional Resources).

Make your own coping cards

You can create a coping list that can remind you of your own helpful strategies when things get difficult.

Self-care and self-rewards

Taking time for a brisk walk outside, chat with a friend or a soothing bath can recharge your energy that you can give out to your loved ones. Try to find time to do things that make you feel good: a little goes a long way.

Part 5:

Additional resources

Additional resources

Further resources in this series include

<https://www.camhsgrampian.org/covid>

<https://www.camhsgrampian.org/podcast>

NHS Grampian CAMHS Adjustment and Returning to School Live Webinar

Back to School Social Story about going back to school after the coronavirus lockdown

Resource packs to support children's going back to school after the coronavirus lockdown: Edition for Teens, Edition for Parents with Neurodiverse children

Resource packs to help manage difficult feelings about coronavirus: Edition for children under 12 years old, Edition for Teens, Edition for Parents

Resource pack for parents with children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) to help with COVID-19 related changes

Resource pack for young people with a learning disability who are worried about COVID-19

Resource pack for support with parenting during COVID-19

Podcasts on a range of topics for supporting children's mental wellbeing and parenting during COVID-19

Governmental guidance

Governmental report on science regarding reopening schools

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-schools-early-learning-and-childcare-settings---scientific-evidence/>

Reopening school guide for local authorities and schools

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-re-opening-schools-guide/pages/key-principles/#scientific%20and%20medical>

COVID-19 strategic framework for reopening schools

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/excellent-equity-during-covid-19-pandemic-strategic-framework-reopening-schools-early-learning-childcare-provision-scotland/pages/6/>

Anna Freud Centre, Mentally Healthy Schools

Resource toolkits to support children's mental health and wellbeing during uncertain times, including coping with returning to school.

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/>

Parent Club

Set up by the Scottish Government, provides tried tips to parents on a wide range of topics, including family coping during COVID-19:

<https://www.parentclub.scot/>

Their FAQ page is continuously updated with information on reopening schools in Scotland:

<https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/reopening-schools-faqs>

Governmental guidance

Family Lives

A charity that provide professional, non-judgmental support and advice for parents.

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Children 1st

Scotland's National Children's Charity that includes practical advice and support in difficult times. It offers telephone support line for parents:

<https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/>

The Spark

Specialise in online and telephone counselling services for couples, individuals, youths and families.

<https://www.thespark.org.uk/>
Phone: 0808 802 2088

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) resources

Links to downloadable resources, apps and websites for mental health support.

<https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/coronavirus>

Grampian Coronavirus Assistance Hub

A focal point for information and assistance for anyone affected by coronavirus anywhere in Grampian.

<https://www.gcah.org.uk/>
Phone: 0808 916 3384

Getselfhelp

An extensive list of worksheets and self-help materials for coping with a variety of mental health difficulties, such as 'dealing with negative emotions', 'help for anxiety – now!' and 'if you're feeling distressed right now'.

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>



If you feel like your children's difficulties are significant and you or they are struggling to cope, please contact:

Samaritans: 116 123
www.samaritans.org

Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87
<https://breathingspace.scot>

NHS 24: 111
<https://www.nhs24.scot>

Your local GP

This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on **0131 656 3200** or email **altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk** to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.



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