

# **Looking after children and young people during the coronavirus outbreak**

How a child or young person reacts to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak may depend on their age, past experiences or understanding of what's happening.

Some children and young people, including those with additional needs and disabilities, may find it difficult to deal with things.

For instance, some may worry about their health, their loved ones or have physical symptoms like stomach ache. Others may behave differently, getting more angry, distant or acting up in other ways.

Some children might react right away and some may show signs of difficulty later on. Other children might be coping fine, and some younger children may be enjoying more time with the family.

If you are a parent or carer, it's important you know how to look after the mental health of those you care for during this time. Here are 10 top tips to help you.

## **1. Listen to what your child says and how they're feeling**

Children and young people may respond to stress in different ways. They may be more emotional (upset, anxious or angry) or behave differently (clingy, withdrawn or wet the bed). They may also have physical symptoms, like stomach ache, and problems sleeping.

Children and young people can feel less anxious if they are able to express themselves in a safe and supportive environment.

Stay calm – kids often take their emotional cues from the adults in their lives, so how you respond is important.

Listen to and acknowledge their concerns, speak kindly to them and answer any questions they have honestly. Give them extra love and attention if they need it.

## **2. Be clear about what's happening**

Children and young people want to feel that those who care for them can keep them safe.

Explain what will help to keep them and those they love safe, such as washing their hands regularly. Do this by talking openly and giving honest answers to questions they have.

Use reliable sources of information, like the coronavirus advice on GOV.UK and NHS coronavirus advice – and explain things in words they understand.

If you cannot answer all their questions or stop them from worrying, focus on listening to their feelings. This will help them feel supported.

## **3. Limit news and conversation about coronavirus**

Children and young people, like adults, can become more worried by too much news on the coronavirus outbreak in the media and online.

But blocking all news rarely helps, as children are likely to find things out from their friends or online. Turning off the TV or closing websites when children come into the room may increase their interest, and their imagination, too much.

Cut down on the amount of coronavirus news and talk you and your family have. Try to stick to getting an update twice a day – it's enough to keep you informed but not overwhelmed.

You should talk to them about what's going on and ask them what they have heard.

## **4. Keep close and regular contact**

Try to keep your children close to you or those who care for them, as they will need that closer contact now. If you are not living with your children or must go away, for work or to hospital, keep regular contact by phone or video calls.

If the children are part of a family that is separated, it's important for them to be supported in their contact with parents and other family members – even when the adults do not always get on.

Help them understand any arrangements that have been or are being made for them. Use simple terms they understand so it's clear why these things are happening.

## **5. Create new routines**

Life has changed for all of us for a while. For most children and young people, certain routines like going to school have stopped. Routines make children and young people feel safer, so think about how to develop new routines that are interesting and fun.

Make a plan for the day or week that includes time for learning, playing and relaxing.

Ask teachers what you can do to support learning at home. Explore online educational resources and activities like BBC Bitesize. You could arrange a virtual play date with friends or visit an online museum or gallery.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>

## **6. Get active indoors**

Children and young people should be active for 60 minutes a day, which may be more difficult when we all have to stay indoors more. It's important to try to build activity into kids' daily routine.

Plan time outside, but only if you can do it safely, following the government advice on social distancing. There are lots of indoor games and activities for kids to play on the Change4Life website.

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities/indoor-activities>

## **7. Eat healthily and avoid too many treats**

We know it can be tempting to give sweets or chocolate to cheer your children up. But too many treats are not good for their health, especially if they're not as active as they normally are.

**Change4Life** has loads of healthier snack ideas – and making them together is also a great way to keep the kids busy.

<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/food-facts/healthier-snacks-for-kids/100-calorie-snacks>

## **8. Children and young people need good sleep**

Sleep is so important for mental and physical health for everyone.

Children and young people need good-quality sleep, so it's important to keep to existing bedtime routines.

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/sleep/>

## **9. Look after your own mental health and get support**

Remember to take care of your own mental health and wellbeing! You will give the best support to those you love if you can deal with things calmly and confidently.

You can be more supportive if you are better prepared to deal with any issues. There are things you can do, and support is available on looking after your mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak.

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/>

Look after your mental health and wellbeing

### **Further support**

If you're worried about how your child is coping, there's plenty of advice, help and support out there.

[Parents Helpline Enquiries](#), from Young Minds, offers advice about mental health in children and young people up to the age of 25. You can call the helpline on 0808 802 5544.

**Childline** offers a confidential telephone counselling service, so your child can speak to someone anonymously. They can:

call 0800 1111 any time, free of charge

have an [online chat with a counsellor](#)

check out the [Childline message boards](#)

**Shout** provides free, confidential support with trained crisis volunteers via text for anyone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK, or visit [Crisis Text Line](#) for more information.

**The Mix** offers a free, confidential telephone helpline and online service for young people. They can:

call 0808 808 4994 free of charge, from 11am to 11pm every day

access the [The Mix online community](#)

[email The Mix](#)