

Looking after your children's mental health during the coronavirus outbreak



8 tips on what to tell your kids about coronavirus

As the number of new cases of coronavirus infection continue to rise the impact is now being felt in schools in Australia. It's therefore important for parents to be there for their children to ease any concerns they may have about the virus and how it could affect them. So here's some advice for parents to help them and their children stay informed.

1. Control during uncertainty

The new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 causes the disease COVID-19, which can be like a common cold but it can also have more serious complications. Signs of infection may include: fever, cough and shortness of breath.

One reason people experience anxiety during a pandemic is uncertainty about its impact. Research during the 2009 swine flu (H1N1) pandemic found those people who struggled with uncertainty were more likely to see the pandemic as threatening, and this can lead to increased levels of anxiety.

One way to provide our children with certainty in uncertain times is with facts, for example, telling them the evidence so far shows children are less likely to experience severe symptoms than older adults.

You can also help them gain a sense of control by giving them strategies to help prevent them catching the virus.

2. Practise good hygiene

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says we should channel our concern into good hygiene.

Encourage your children to wash their hands with soap and water frequently (particularly after going to the toilet, coming from a public place, and before and after eating).

Children should also use a tissue to sneeze into and put the tissue in the bin afterwards.

3. Be careful with the news and media

A quick scan of the news brings up headlines such as "Australia's coronavirus death rate could proportionally be worse than China's, expert warns". This report even includes a graph showing "How likely are you to die from Coronavirus?"

Exposing children to such reports can increase their fear and anxiety.

There is a clear and strong relationship between what children see as threatening information in the media and their level of fear.

So be careful with what news media your children are exposed to. Try to watch, listen or read it with them so you are there for any questions they may have.

4. Stay with the facts

When answering such questions, use information from the World Health Organisation and other trustworthy sources to inform yourself.

Filter some of the incorrect information around preventing COVID-19 (eating garlic, having hot baths) and inform your family with the correct information. Don't be someone who passes on incorrect information to your children or others.

5. Talk about your feelings

It's OK to feel worried. Talking about your feelings of stress can help you work through them.

If you try to push down feelings of stress this can have an impact on your health.

As parents you only have to listen and hear your child's concerns. You can't promise things will be safe or certain. But you can assure them that as a family you will work together to manage whatever comes up in the future and that you are there to listen to them.

6. Don't pass on your fear

Research from the 2009 Swine Flu pandemic showed children's fear of the disease was significantly related to their parents' fear of the disease.

This effect of parents passing on fear even exists when there is nothing to fear. Research showed if parents get negative information about something that is harmless, they are more likely to pass on those negative beliefs to their children and increase their level of fear.

So even if you feel stressed about COVID-19, you need to make sure you don't pass on this fear to your children. Show them you are calm. Don't be a carrier for fear.

7. Keep on living life

It is easy to get swept away with panic about the future and what may happen. But being future-focused only contributes to anxiety.

Help your child to focus on the now and what they are doing today. These things are in their control – work hard at school. Continue their routine and enjoy the moments.

8. Work together

This is not a time to be selfish, but to work together and support one another.

Be kind to others (don't steal their toilet paper) and encourage your children to be kind to others as well.

Being less self-focused helps to alleviate stress and give life more meaning and purpose.

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Beyond Blue recognises and understands the feelings of anxiety, distress and concern many people may be experiencing in relation to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and offers the following wellbeing advice.

- ☐ **Try to maintain perspective**
- ☐ **Find a healthy balance in relation to media coverage**
- ☐ **Have conversations with children and young people**
- ☐ **Try to maintain a practical and calm approach**
- ☐ **Try not to make assumptions**
- ☐ **Access good quality information**

It's important to get accurate information from credible sources such as those listed below. This will also help you maintain perspective and feel more in control.

- **World Health Organization – coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak**
- ☐ **Australian Government coronavirus (COVID-19) health alert**
- **smartraveller.gov.au – travel information for Australian citizens**

☐ **Seek support**

Beyond Blue has fact sheets about [anxiety](#) and offers other practical advice and resources at [beyondblue.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au).

The [Beyond Blue Support Service](#) offers short term counselling and referrals by phone and webchat on 1300 22 4636.

Websites to assist adult wellbeing:



<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>



au.reachout.com

Websites and apps to assist with children's wellbeing:



www.smilingmind.com.au



www.kidshelpline.com.au

Younger students



Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame. Breathe, Think, Do With Sesame by Sesame Street **teaches children to keep calm and carry on by introducing kids to three possible strategies for working through problems.** This app touches on familiar emotional challenges such as problem-solving, self-control, planning, and time on task.

FREE

www.sesamestreet.org/challenges



Other Available Supports

Schools make a number of staff available to provide extra support to students who may be anxious and to provide information and advice to parents and carers. If you are concerned about your child’s wellbeing, you can contact their school to ask what additional support might be available.

Support is also available through a number of Queensland Government agencies and community organisations. Parents and carers can:

- ☐ call 13Health (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
- review headspace’s tips for a healthy headspace for friends and family, or contact headspace for professional support
- contact Lifeline Australia’s telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 for information, referral and advice
- ☐ For the latest advice, information and resources, go to **www.health.gov.au**
- ☐ Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on **1800 020 080**. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- ☐ Obtain help and information from the local General Practitioner or Community Health Centre.