

Advice for helping children, young people and their families manage their anxiety about COVID-19

There is a great deal of information, coverage and opinion circulating about COVID-19. This document aims to provide advice, information and a list of trustworthy, reliable links for supporting children, young people and their families during this time.

The document is split into three parts:

- Information specifically for children and young people relating to COVID-19
- Advice for speaking to children, young people and families who may experience additional worry due to a range of different circumstances they may be in and situations they may be facing
- Looking after the adults who care for children.

Supporting Children and Young People to understand COVID 19

It is natural that children and young people will be hearing a lot about COVID 19 and normal life will be disrupted over the next few months for all of us. The extensive media coverage provides helpful information, but this can also be overwhelming and children and young people will understandably worry about themselves, family members and friends.

Parents and other family members can be very helpful when children and young people become anxious and there are some reliable resources which can help adults support them. **Good information is key and avoiding scare stories on social media is really important at this time.**

This disruption to our normal lives provides children and young people with an opportunity to help other people in their community, which may distract them from worrying about themselves. They could find out the phone numbers of vulnerable people living near them, keep in touch with them on a regular basis and see if they can assist with tasks like shopping, putting out the bins, getting books from the library etc. We can hope that some good will come out of these challenging times.

The following is provided by the World Health Organisation:

General population

1. *COVID-19 has and is likely to affect people from many countries, in many geographical locations. Don't attach it to any ethnicity or nationality. Be empathetic to those who got affected, in and from any country, those with the disease have not done anything wrong.*

2. *Don't - refer to people with the disease as "COVID-19 cases", "victims" "COVID-19 families" or the "diseased". They are "people who have COVID-19", "people who are being treated for COVID-19", "people who are recovering from COVID-19" and after recovering from COVID-19 their life will go on with their jobs, families and loved ones.*
3. *Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that cause you to feel anxious or distressed; seek information mainly to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and loved ones. Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about an outbreak can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts. Gather information at regular intervals, from WHO website and local health authorities platforms, in order to help you distinguish facts from rumours.*
4. *Protect yourself and be supportive to others. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit the person receiving support as well as the helper.*

For caretakers of children:

1. *Help children find positive ways to express disturbing feelings such as fear and sadness. Every child has his/her own way to express emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as playing, and drawing can facilitate this process. Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their disturbing feelings in a safe and supportive environment.*
2. *Keep children close to their parents and family, if considered safe for the child, and avoid separating children and their caregivers as much as possible. If a child needs to be separated from his/her primary caregiver, ensure that appropriate alternative care is and that a social worker, or equivalent, will regularly follow up on the child. Further, ensure that during periods of separation, regular contact with parents and caregivers is maintained, such as twice-daily scheduled phone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication (e.g., social media depending on the age of the child).*
3. *Maintain familiar routines in daily life as much as possible, especially if children are confined to home. Provide engaging age appropriate activities for children. As much as possible, encourage children to continue to play and socialize with others, even if only within the family when advised to restrict social contact.*
4. *During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents. Discuss the COVID-19 with your children in honest and age-appropriate information. If your children have concerns, addressing those together may ease their anxiety. Children will observe adults' behaviours and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during difficult times.*

Young Scot COVID-19 Website:

A website dedicated to information and support relating to COVID 19. This will be continually updated and links added to trustworthy information

<https://young.scot/campaigns/national/coronavirus>

It may also be helpful to access information together from an age appropriate news source:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51204456>

In addition, this clip looks at: If you are upset by the news, it's important to know that you are not the only one and it's OK to have those feelings.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/13865002>

Some helpful advice about talking to your child about COVID 19

Talking to your child about COVID 19

<https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/guidance-advice/talking-to-children-about-coronavirus>

How to talk to your child about coronavirus (COVID19)

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

Information about managing children and young people's anxiety

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/anxiety-disorders-in-children>

Information about anxiety in children and young people

<https://www.handsonscotland.co.uk/anxiety>

Information about maintaining good sleep

<https://www.sleepscotland.org/support/gateway-to-good-sleep/how-to-get-a-good-nights-sleep/>

Advice for supporting children, young people and their families who may experience additional worry at this time

Some children and young people may already have difficulties with their mental health and are already receiving treatment from services. They may become extremely anxious about COVID-19 and may develop new or more severe anxiety symptoms e.g. feel the need to wash their hands compulsively, struggle to get to sleep or experience panic symptoms. It is really important that they are helped to use any coping strategies they may have already developed through work with counsellors, clinicians or others who support them like relaxation exercises, distraction or use of a worry box etc. If they are taking prescribed medicine, it is important that they continue to take this regularly as prescribed and that repeat prescriptions are arranged well in advance. If they are attending Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or another support service, the clinicians or professionals they see may arrange to speak to them over the telephone or through a secure conference call instead of bringing them into clinics. If their usual clinician is on leave or is deployed to another service, there may be arrangements for cover from other people in the service. Parents or carers who are worried about their child's mental health should contact their clinic directly for advice, rather than presenting with their child to an A and E department.

Supporting Children and Young People with Autism, Neurodevelopmental disorders and/or Learning Disability

Some children or young people will find the raised anxiety levels at home, school or in their community hard to manage and if schools are closed, this will place particular pressure on their families. It is important that they are given clear information about COVID 19 in an accessible way which emphasises that although any of us may become ill, they are not expected to become very sick and they might not even notice that they have the infection. Parents and carers will know best what helps their children when they are worried and trying to keep them busy and active as much as possible is best. Relaxation and self soothing strategies are useful and trying to make the change in routine and the need for frequent hand washing fun might be difficult but can bring down anxiety levels.

Easy read information about COVID 19:

<https://www.enable.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19-ES15-Coronavirus-Easy-Read-1.pdf>

Hand washing tips for people with sensory difficulties

<https://www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/News/8821506>

Supporting your child with learning disability at home

<https://www.camhsnorthderbyshire.nhs.uk/selfisolating-for-learning-disabled-young-people>

Supporting children and young people who are looked after

Children and young people who are looked after may be facing particular difficulties. It is important that any decisions which are made relating to a child or young persons support, placement or circumstances, is explained to them clearly and the rationale set out. "COVID 19" alone cannot be used as an explanation for a change in arrangements; detail around why should be provided (for example, if their usual social worker or support worker has to work elsewhere, or is absent, or if family contact arrangements change). Stability and continuity in arrangements should be the priority, where safe and possible, but where this is not possible time should be taken to calmly explain why.

Supporting children and young people who don't feel safe at home

Children and young people and their families who are experiencing abuse may be affected by the impact of COVID 19. Self-isolation will impact on the accessibility of local support services and could increase the risk of abuse in the home. In cases of domestic abuse, organisations should seek to support the non-abusing parent as best they can in order to keep children safe. Make people aware that national helplines are still in operation and children can access these is very important.

The Hide Out (an online space created by Women's Aid, which helps children and young people understand domestic abuse, and how to take action if it's happening to them.

<https://thehideout.org.uk/>

Those experiencing abuse and professionals can download the Bright Sky app to Android and Apple mobile phones. It provides information on support for those experiencing domestic abuse and for concerned friends and family members. It includes a journal which can safely store incidents of abuse recorded. The app is available in English, Urdu, Punjabi and Polish

<https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline is available 24/7 on 0800 027 1234, webchat is available at www.sdafmh.org.uk and can be emailed at helpline@sdafmh.org.uk. For advice, professionals can call Scottish Women's Aid on 0131 226 6606, <https://womensaid.scot/>

Looking after the adults

This is a difficult time for parents and carers, and we all need to look after ourselves and each other. Accessing trustworthy sources of information is important in understating COVID-19 to know what actions you can take to protect yourself and others. It will also allow you to confidently share accurate information with your child. Taking steps to look after your mental health are good for you, your family and those you look after. Taking time out from work and the media coverage will be a positive way to manage anxiety. Getting outdoors into green spaces is a therapeutic for people of all ages.

A list of trustworthy sources of information for adults to read and learn about COVID 19

Scottish Government COVID 19 information for older children and adults
<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Guide for older children and adults who may wish to access more information about COVID 19
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus>

Advice and Guidance from WHO on COVID 19:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
<https://www.epi-win.com/>

Some links to help look after your mental health

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

<http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/>