

# How to talk to children about Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

A resource for parents

## Keep the following in mind when talking with children



- *Keep it simple and be honest*



- *Validate any concerns*



- *Allow children the space to talk further*



- *Manage your own big feelings*



## Keep it simple and be honest

- Children are often savvy enough to know when adults aren't being honest – they can sense our anxiety and hesitation.
- Children can get overwhelmed with lengthy explanations.
- Here is what you can say:
  - The Coronavirus is like a cold, so we act like we do to stop getting a cold.
  - We need to wash our hands with soap, especially after the bathroom or playing outside and before eating.
  - Try not to touch your face if you can, and cough or sneeze into your elbow.
  - If you do get sick, the Doctors will look after you and only some people get very sick.



## Validate any concerns

- We want children to feel the 4 S's:

Safe

Seen

Soothed

Secure

- You can promote that by:

Active  
Listening

Labelling  
their  
Feelings

Allowing  
them to ask  
questions

Validating  
their  
experiences

- When children feel seen and heard, they are more likely to feel safe and secure



## Allow children space to talk further

- Some children may need to talk further about their concerns.
- Let them know they can always ask more questions or re-open the conversation.
- Use the “**Name It to Tame It**” approach:
  - Help your child calm their emotional ‘right brain’ by talking about their concerns and telling their story. When your child expresses concerns about the virus, missing school, or getting behind in work, it is important that sharing these views is a positive experience. This way, they will know what coming to you and talking is a good thing!
  - Naming emotions can help build your child’s understanding of what they are going through.
- Avoid a “**dismiss and deny**” response:
  - This shows your child that you’re not interested in their feelings, or that you cannot handle their ‘big’ feelings.



## Manage your own big emotions

- As an adult, you set the emotional tone for your child.
- Your chaos or calm is contagious, especially for those you are most bonded with.
- Your child will notice if you are panicked, internalising chaos, or obsessive about the news. This will increase your child's anxiety and they will begin to focus more on things they cannot control.
- To combat this, try the following:

**Be Calm** Give your self time to process and manage your emotions

**Be Informed** Be aware of what is happening

**Be Concise** Only share information about things you and your child can control

“It’s great news that the doctors know how this virus gets spread. That means we know some things we can do to be healthy. What do you think we need to do be healthy?”

# Further mental health resources, strategies and support

# Coping strategies to consider when times are tough:

- Create a **routine** and plan your day around your routine.
- Do things that make you feel **safe**; **connect** to people who are helpful to your wellbeing.
- Do things you've done in the past to help manage challenge and stress; reflect on your own **coping strategies** and write them down, put them in a place you can access daily.
- Engage in activities that promote a sense of **calm** and feeling **grounded**; **mindfulness**, **meditation** or **breathing** exercises.
- Ensure you are getting enough **sleep** (9 hours), eating a good variety of **healthy foods** each day, plenty of **water** and aiming for at least 30 – 60 minutes of **exercise** a day.
- Find ways to **relax**, spend 10 minutes a day breathing slowly and calmly or use one of the breathing apps.
- Learn something new or get **creative**; check YouTube for more ideas. Watch or read something **uplifting**.
- Limit exposure to information from social media and the news. Source **positive news** pages and uplifting stories instead.
- Make a list of **activities** that you can do at home with your family or by yourself.
- Practice **gratitude** and write a list and draw 10 good things in your life and the world. Or you could start a journal and write down 3 things you are grateful each day.
- <sup>8</sup> • **Talk** to someone you trust if it all feels a bit too much.



# How your body tells you it's feeling anxious...

You may have:

Trouble catching your breath

A pounding heart

Tense or sore muscles

Dizziness, headaches

Feelings of tiredness or being very awake

Trouble sleeping

Trouble concentrating

Excessive sweating

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# What to do when you're anxious about a pandemic

Make sure you get your info from reputable sources like the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Limit access to media to prevent feeling overwhelmed

Focus on what you can control, e.g. practice good hygiene

Know it's normal and ok to be concerned

Give your thought patterns a 'reality check', e.g. if you get stuck in a 'thinking loop', think about something else, or reassure yourself

Remind yourself to be in the present moment (anxiety is often focused in the future on 'what ifs')

Seek support if needed

Look after yourself

Stay connected with family and friends

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# Resources

To support Covid-19  
discussions at home

# For primary school aged children

## ***Social Stories & Comics:***

- Coronavirus story':
- <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Childrens-story-about-coronavirus.pdf>
- 'Hello, my name is Coronavirus':
- <http://www.millfields.hackney.sch.uk/uploads/2019/Corona%20Virus%20Info%20for%20Young%20Children.pdf.pdf>
- 'Let's talk about Coronavirus':
- <https://shonainnespsychology.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Lets-talk-about-Coronavirus-.pdf>
- 'A comic exploring the new coronavirus':
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

# For primary school aged children

## *Handwashing*

- ***Handwashing:***
- Singalong with the Wiggles:
- <https://www.facebook.com/unicef/posts/10157942700399002>
- ‘Top 5 Handwashing videos for children’:
- <https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-top-5-handwashing-songs-children>





## For parents

- Beyond Blue factsheet:
- <https://www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians>
  
- Australian Psychological Society Factsheets:
- <https://www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians>

# Extra Help

If you or your child needs to speak to someone during these challenging times the services below are a great place to start. Alternatively, speak to your General Practitioner (GP) who will be able to help you make a plan to support your wellbeing.







Name	About	Phone	Online
 <p><b>Kids Help Line</b></p>	For anyone 25 or under - Kids Helpline is a free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.	1800 55 1800 24/7	Webchat 24/7 <a href="https://kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling">https://kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling</a>
 <p><b>Lifeline</b></p>	For all ages - 24-hour crisis support telephone service. Lifeline provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.	CALL: 13 11 14 24/7  TEXT: 0477 131114 6:00PM - Midnight	Crisis Support Chat 7:00PM – Midnight <a href="https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/online-services/crisis-chat">https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/online-services/crisis-chat</a>
 <p><b>Youth Beyond Blue</b></p>	Beyond Blue provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live.	1300 22 4636 24/7	Chat Online 3:00PM - Midnight <a href="https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/">https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/</a>
 <p><b>SANE Australia</b></p>	SANE Australia supports people living with complex mental health issues and the people that care about them	1800 187 263 10:00AM – 10:00PM	Webchat 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM <a href="https://www.sane.org/about-sane">https://www.sane.org/about-sane</a>

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Name	About	Phone	Online
 <p><b>Headspace</b></p>	<p>eheadsplace provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 - 25 and their families and friends.</p>	N/A	<p>Group Chat 24/7 1 on 1 Chat 9AM - 1AM <a href="https://headspace.org.au/eheadsplace/">https://headspace.org.au/eheadsplace/</a></p>
 <p><b>QLife</b></p>	<p>QLife provides anonymous and free LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talking about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships</p>	<p>1800 184 527 3PM - Midnight</p>	<p>Webchat 3PM – Midnight <a href="https://www qlife.org.au/resources/chat">https://www qlife.org.au/resources/chat</a></p>
<p><b>1800RESPECT</b></p> 	<p>Confidential information, counselling and support service, open 24 hours to support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse</p>	<p>1800 737 732 24/7 Interpreter: 13 14 50</p>	<p>Online Chat 24/7 <a href="https://chat.1800respect.org.au/#/welcome">https://chat.1800respect.org.au/#/welcome</a></p>
<p><b>Mental Health Line</b></p> 	<p>A mental health professional will answer your call about mental health concerns for you or someone you are concerned about, including children, teens, adults and older people</p>	<p>1800 011 511 24/7</p>	<p><a href="https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/Mental-Health-Line.aspx">https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/Mental-Health-Line.aspx</a></p>