



ADVICE FOR PARENTS

Looking after your own mental health

As well as thinking about the children or young people in your care, it is important to take care of your own mental health and wellbeing. Children and young people react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with a situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children and young people. Parents and caregivers can be more supportive to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Please see advice on how to [look after your mental health and wellbeing](#) during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak or visit [Every Mind Matters](#) for clear advice and actions to take care of your mental health and wellbeing.

Helping children and young people cope with stress

Here are some key points to consider about how you can support your child or young person:

Listen and acknowledge: Children and young people may respond to stress in different ways. Signs may be emotional (for example, they may be upset, distressed, anxious, angry or agitated), behavioural (for example, they may become more clingy or more withdrawn, they may wet the bed), or physical (for example, they may experience stomach aches). Look out for any changes in their behaviour.

Children and young people may feel less anxious if they are able to express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Children and young people who communicate differently to their peers may rely on you to interpret their feelings. Listen to them, acknowledge their concerns, and give them extra love and attention if they need it.

Provide clear information about the situation: All children and young people want to feel that their parents and caregivers can keep them safe. The best way to achieve this is by talking openly about what is happening and providing honest answers to any questions they have. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe, including any actions they can take to help, such as washing their hands regularly.

Use words and explanations that they can understand and make sure you use reliable sources of information such as the GOV.UK or NHS website – there is a lot of misleading information from other sources that will create stress for you and your family.

It will not always be possible to provide answers to all the questions children and young people may ask, or to allay all their concerns, so focus on listening and acknowledging their feelings to help them feel supported.

Be aware of your own reactions: Remember that children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how you respond to the situation is very important. It is important to manage your own emotions and remain calm,

listen to and acknowledge children and young people's concerns, speak kindly to them, and answer any questions they have honestly.

See further guidance on [how to look after your own mental wellbeing](#) during the outbreak.

Connect regularly: If it is necessary for you or your children to be in a different location to normal (for example, staying at home in different locations or hospitalisation) make sure you still have regular and frequent contact via the phone or video calls with them. Try to help your child understand what arrangements are being made for them and why in simple terms.

Create a new routine: Life is changing for all of us for a while. Routine gives children and young people an increased feeling of safety in the context of uncertainty, so think about how to develop a new routine – especially if they are not at school:

- make a plan for the day or week that includes time for learning, playing and relaxing
- if they have to stay home from school, ask teachers what you can do to support continued learning at home. Online educational resources and activities to support children's learning are available from the BBC
- children and young people need to ideally be active for 60 minutes a day, which can be more difficult when spending longer periods of time indoors. Plan time outside if you can do so safely or see [Change4Life](#) for some ideas for indoor games and activities
- don't forget that sleep is really important for mental and physical health so try to keep to existing bedtime routines
- it may be tempting to give them treats, such as sweets or chocolate, to compensate for being housebound, but this is not good for their health, especially as they will not be able to be to run around or be as active as they normally do - see [Change4Life](#) for ideas for healthy treats

Limit exposure to media and talk about what they have seen and heard: Children and young people, like adults, may become more distressed if they see repeated coverage of the outbreak in the media. A complete news blackout is also rarely helpful as they are likely to find out from other sources, such as online or through friends.

Try to avoid turning the television off or closing web pages when children or young people come into the room. This can pique their interest to find out what is going on – and their imagination can take over. Instead, consider limiting the amount of exposure you and your family get to troubling media coverage.

Young people will also hear things from friends and get information from social media. Talk to them about what is going on and ask them what they have heard about. Try to answer their questions and reassure them in an age-appropriate manner, avoiding too much detail.

How children and young people of different ages may react

All children and young people are different, but there are some common ways in which different age groups may react to a situation like the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Understanding these may help you to know how to support your family. The common

reactions to distress will fade over time for most children and young people, though could return if they see or hear reminders of what happened.

For infants to 2-year olds

Infants may become more easily distressed. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

For 3 to 6-year olds

Preschool and kindergarten children may return to behaviours they have outgrown. For example, toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents or caregivers. They may also have tantrums or difficulty sleeping.

For 7 to 10-year olds

Older children may feel sad, angry, or afraid. Peers may share false information, but parents or caregivers can correct the misinformation. Older children may focus on details of the situation and want to talk about it all the time, or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.

For preteens and teenagers

Some preteens and teenagers respond to worrying situations by acting out. This could include reckless driving, and alcohol or drug use. Others may become afraid to leave the home. They may cut back on how much time they connect with their friends. They can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their emotions may lead to increased arguing and even fighting with siblings, parents, caregivers or other adults. They may have concerns about how the school closures and exam cancellations will affect them.