

## **Advice relating to Coronavirus/Covid-19 for children, young people and families**

In the current climate, where a global pandemic is taking up most of the media conversation, it can be even more difficult to manage anxiety. Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new virus that is impacting everyone's lives.

These are confusing, stressful times for all of us. As the coronavirus pandemic affects numerous areas of our lives, it also impacts each person in different ways. We are all feeling uncertain about what could happen in the coming weeks, as we hope to slow the spread of this pandemic. Feelings of anxiety and uncertainty are completely normal during times like this.

We wanted to provide you with some information and resources to help you deal with this difficult time.

### **Recommendations for things that we can do:**

- **Follow the guidance** – Follow NHS and Government guidance from their websites directly.
- **Take media breaks** - Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.

We all want to keep up to date, but when we are anxious the need to check and read the latest updates can become compulsive, feeding the anxiety. Try having a news detox, or allocating yourself a time limit for reading or watching news. If you're really worried about missing something crucial, you can always tell friends and family to contact you in the event of an emergency situation in order to keep you informed. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

- **Take time to talk about what is happening with children/young people-** Take time to talk with your child/young person about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts from reputable sources (Government/NHS) about COVID-19 in a way that your child or young person can understand.

There is a social story (free), easy read coronavirus information (free), a comic (free) and an e-book (to purchase) available via the resources section below if you think these would help for your child. Young Mind have a webpage about starting conversations with your child:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/starting-a-conversation-with-your-child/starting-the-conversation/>

- **Allocate a daily 'worry time'** – In an attempt to keep worries in check allocate a small amount of time e.g. half an hour for 'family worry time' at the same time each day. Write lists, scribble on post-its or make notes on your phone and then discuss them together, sort any worries that can be sorted out and then rip up/bin/delete your lists go and do something else.
- **Reassurance** - Let your child/young person know it is ok if they feel upset and worried. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.

Seeking reassurance can make us feel calmer for a little while but this is usually temporary. Our brains create a feedback cycle where we can then become increasingly reliant on reassurance, which only serves to reinforce the anxiety. It is natural to want your loved ones to tell you things will be OK, but when you start needing that reassurance several times a day it's time to take a step back.

- **Challenge your worries** – in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) there is a technique called 'Countering'.

In 'countering' we confront repeated worries with a rational counter-statement. For example, if your persistent thought is something like "Everyone I love will die from this virus" you can counter it with factual statements such as "Actually, most people who get Covid-19 are likely to make a full recovery, and that's assuming mum, dad and my little sister will even catch it at all."

- **Look for the helpers** – It can be important, and comforting, to know that there are people helping each other with acts of kindness and generosity during this difficult time.

Unicef advises: "*Share stories of health workers, scientists and young people, among others, who are working to stop the outbreak and keep the community safe. It can be a big comfort to know that compassionate people are taking action.*"

- **Look after your health** – General health advice about eating healthy, well-balanced meals, reducing/avoiding alcohol and drugs, getting a good nights' sleep, drinking enough water are as relevant as ever. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. You can access free mindfulness meditations online at:

<http://franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness/>

- **Get moving** – even if this is star jumps in your bedroom, or shaking your body parts, exercise will help get the adrenaline out of your system. *For some people it may not be wise to do this if it goes against any underlying health conditions or it goes against your therapist's advice.*

- **Do enjoyable activities** - Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.

Do things that will give you a little boost. This doesn't need to involve spending money: put the kettle on, cook or bake, have a hot bath, listen to a song you love, sing and dance around the kitchen.

- **Stay connected** - with people via phone and video calls and social media.

“Social distancing” does not have to mean social isolation. Connecting with our friends and loved ones can help us maintain ties during this stressful time.

- **Routines** - Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- **Treatment plans** - For our families who have treatment plans and “homework” set by therapists, continue to follow this where you can. We are trying to offer telephone and/or virtual sessions where we can but this may not always be possible.

### **Remember that this anxious state isn't permanent**

Whilst we are in this stressful time it can be hard to see a way through but this period will end. It can be hard to remember this, particularly if we have loved ones who might be showing symptoms. Try to be kind to yourself and look after each other.

### **Resources:**

- Mencap – EasyRead information about coronavirus

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Information%20about%20Coronavirus%20ER%20UPDATED%20130320%20SD%20editsAH.pdf>

- Young Minds – page for parents on talking to your child about coronavirus

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>

- Young Minds – resources *for* children and young people on coronavirus worries

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>

- Young Minds – resource *for* children and young people on looking after your mental health while self-isolating

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/>

- Unicef – How to talk to your child about coronavirus: 8 tips to help comfort and protect your child

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

- The Little Corona King – book written by parents in the UK. Available to buy as an e-book and download. See example pages and information to buy on:

<https://littlecoronaking.com/>

- Coronavirus comic – free comic available about coronavirus worry. Can be printed off (see printing link and folding instructions via the link below)

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?t=1584531808242>

- Social story – helps explain the current situation

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf>

- SHOUT/Young Minds Crisis text service

Young people can text YM to 85258 for free 24/7 mental health support.

- Kooth online counselling - Kooth offer free, safe and anonymous online support for young people

<https://www.kooth.com/>