

## TIP SHEET Nº5

# A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Ways to help your children through this challenging time.



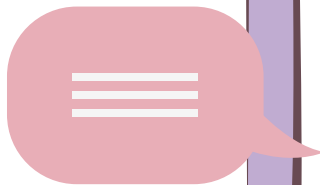
Children may experience a range of emotions including fear, helplessness, frustration, grief and confusion around the COVID-19 outbreak. Most children and families will cope well, and there may even be some benefits to wellbeing from the slowed down time spent together closer to home. Parents can also help children cope by providing them with the right support and information, alongside encouraging the use and development of existing skills in emotional regulation, critical literacy and pro-social skills.

## GET INFORMED

To help children, parents need to be informed.

Tip Sheet #1: Getting Informed can provide you with links to reputable information sources and tools to share with older children and teenagers to understand COVID-19.

Use these resources to help your child understand, explore their reactions especially feelings, and take the opportunity to correct any misinformation you observe.



## GET TALKING

Adults can support children by creating an environment where children ask questions and express feelings. This proactive approach can help children cope and reduce mental health difficulties. Children may require support with understanding information and coping with difficult feelings. Below are some suggestions you may find helpful:

### PROCESS YOUR OWN ANXIETY FIRST

Before any conversations with our children, it is important for adults to take a moment to reflect on our own wellbeing and ensure we are feeling calm. Children listen out for the emotional tone of the conversation, not just the content and look to adults to determine how worried they should be. You don't need to know all the information or have all the answers, however when talking about COVID-19 to or in front of children, convey calm and confidence, instead of alarm and helplessness. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. If you're feeling anxious or upset, reach out to others and take time for self-care. Use resources such as [Coping with Stress](#) (Source: World Health Organisation) or [Managing Anxiety](#) (Source: Just a Thought) or phone 1737 Need to talk?

### KEEPING PERSPECTIVE

Remember to maintain a normal family rhythm, with routines and activities as normal as possible.

### SHIELDING VERSUS COMMUNICATING

For young children, shielding them from distressing information is preferable. Direct education about COVID-19 should be avoided. Whilst adults and older children may cope by learning and preparing, for younger children their primary needs are emotional support and feeling safe. Emphasise children are safe, and adults oversee keeping people well and looking after people who are sick. For older children, communication and empowerment are key to reducing anxiety including facts and information about COVID-19, understanding the science and what actions they can take.

# GET TALKING CONTINUED.....

## EXPRESS HOPE AND CONFIDENCE

Be aware that most children and young people will cope well with COVID-19 impacts. Share confidence in their resilience and in our community capacity to respond.

## NORMALISE FEELINGS

Listen for feelings and remember that all feelings are normal and helpful. Acknowledge and validate feelings. Let the child know that you think their feelings make sense and their questions are important.

## WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD?

Younger children obtain information from playground conversations, media and from overhearing adult discussions. They are more emotive than cognitive, and therefore the aim of conversations and education is foremost to enhance children's feelings of safety and agency. Take your cues from them and invite them to tell you what they have heard. You may ask "Have you heard anything about a new sickness? For an older student 'What are your friends saying about the coronavirus? This will give you an opportunity to find out what they know, answer questions, provide reassurance and correct misinformation without oversharing. If younger children do have some awareness, it is important they don't rely on peers or media for information.

## FACTS NOT FEAR

Acknowledge concerns and provide the facts about COVID-19 and what they can do to reduce fear and enhance coping. Be mindful of language, avoiding words such as plague.

## EMPOWERMENT

To channel anxiety into empowerment, all conversations should emphasise **what can be done and what is already happening**. Children can be reassured that their job is not to worry about the virus. Their role is to become knowledgeable and active, taking action to be healthy, stay safe and be kind to others. Older children can be provided with information and encouraged to take protective measures and help others. Generally, like adults, children are more confident and cooperative when there is an opportunity for choice. Explore how they have coped with challenging situations or helped others in the past to draw out their strengths and coping.

## KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Conversations about COVID-19 and wellbeing are not one-offs. Return to the topic and check in with about their feelings and questions. Be prepared to repeat information.

## BE KIND AND AVOID STIGMA

When talking about COVID-19, it is important to be mindful of language. Avoid stereotyping, assumptions about who might be sick and focusing on specific locations or ethnicities. Emphasise the people experiencing the disease using words such as 'acquiring' or 'contracting' COVID-19 rather than describing the process as 'people infecting others' or 'spreading the virus'. (Source: UNICEF) Emphasise the solutions, rather than assigning blame. Explain that the virus has nothing to do with where people are from or what people look like. Remind them that it is possible to be kind to others, even when we are uncertain or scared.

## MASTERS OF CRITICAL THINKING

Find out what children have already heard and where they got the information. Build on their critical thinking skills, encouraging them to question, investigate, consider and/or examine their information sources. This provides an opportunity to compare and contrast misinformation and rumours and discuss media literacy and understanding.

## PANNING FOR GOLD

Highlight the silver lining within the COVID-19 situation. For example, as was the case during the 1918 flu pandemic, it provides an opportunity to come together as a country and as communities, connecting to and supporting each other through sharing, empathy and kindness. When schools requires closure, it presents a chance to spend time with pets and family. For older children, discuss the opportunity to review how humanity is living, what created this and what can we learn?

## USE EXISTING KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORKS

Tap into existing knowledge. Even very young children understand sickness and can be told that this new sickness is a bit like a cold or flu. Most children can comprehend healthy habits, and protective actions are best discussed alongside other health behaviours such as sleep, eating well and spending time outside and in nature. Older children understand stigma and discrimination.

## HIGHLIGHT THE HELPERS (INCLUDING THE CHILDREN THEMSELVES)

Point out examples of helpfulness and kindness that is appropriate to their age. With older children, discuss how hard everyone is working to respond to COVID-19 referring to what government, communities, scientists and health systems are doing e.g. developing a vaccine, helping people in quarantine and preparing hospitals. Remind older children that we are "all in this together" highlighting ways in which they are can help through behaviours e.g. linking their social distancing to protecting the community or taking supplies to people who need help or are in quarantine. When they feel disappointed about missing an event or social visit, acknowledge their feelings and remind them of the social responsibility, that is 'it is better for everybody' and protects others.

## RESOURCES TO SUPPORT CONVERSATIONS

- [Ministry of Education Talk to Children about COVID-19](#)
- [Tips for Caregivers Parents and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)
- [Unicef: Talking to Children](#)
- [Emerging Minds Video](#)



## TURN ANXIETY INTO ACTION

### Helping Younger Children with Understanding and Coping.

**USE METAPHOR** to explain social distancing and staying at home.

- Children can be taught how to be social butterflies, keeping the distance of two wing spans away from others.
- School closures can be likened to hibernation like a winter animal. Read stories, for example Frederick by Leo Lionni.

**SING ALONG** with children to help them learn new behaviours.

- [Wiggles Hand Washing Song](#) (Source: Wiggles via You Tube)
- Every Little Cell (Source: Music in Isolation via You Tube)

**READ, TALK AND PLAY** to help children be kind and patient.

- Read or listen to stories for example '[Oat the Goat](#)' Explore how we can be kind to others at home and in the community.
- Do some activities from [Sparklers](#) to extend on these conversations.

**CREATE PICTURES OF THE DAY** to remind children of protective actions.

- For example handwashing
- Use blackboard, white board or other visuals to paint a picture of the day (using pictures rather than words with small children).

**BUILD A ROUTINE** to provide them with a predictable and flexible structure and within this offer small choices about activities, chores and food choices.

- [Every Little Cell](#) (Source: YouTube).

### Helping Older Children with Understanding and Coping.

**USE RESOURCES FROM TIP SHEET №1** to discuss COVID-19, impacts and actions. Help them develop their understanding, separate facts from reality and explore their feelings. Help them turn anxiety into action.

**WATCH TOGETHER** [Nanogirl Hand Washing](#) (Source: You Tube) or [Hand Washing Dance](#) (Source: UNICEF). Involve them with plans for hand hygiene at home. Consider a family song of the children's choice [Wash Your Lyrics](#).

### LEARN TO SPOT FEAR AND FAKE NEWS

Help your older children explore where to get information about COVID-19, determine reliable sources of information and discuss critical thinking. [Critical thinking in an age of fake news](#) (Source: Newsroom)

**DEVELOP LIMITS** together with your older child on exposure to media and conversations about COVID-19. Share with them your strategies and explore with them which COVID-19 conversations are helpful and which add to anxiety.

**HAVE FUN** with developing a greeting for friends and neighbours [Alternatives to the Handshake and Hongi](#) (Source: The Spinoff)

**HELP THEM HELP** by exploring and facilitating the actions they would like to take to help others at home or the community.

### USE THE OPPORTUNITY

- Explore stigma discussing [UNICEF Stigma and COVID-19](#)
- Discuss collective actions
- Have conversations about personal growth and cultural / community change, for example discuss [Test of National Values](#) or [COVID-19 and Climate Change](#)

## STAYING AT HOME

Children will experience different reactions to staying at home, some will be relieved being away from school and others will show signs of loss, protest and struggle. Many children will show signs of stress and this may show up in their behaviour over time, which is normal and expected.

For everyone's wellbeing, slow down, focus on fun, rhythm comfort and family togetherness. Don't worry about getting behind in school, all of us are in the same boat. Keep in mind what the children will remember from this time is the atmosphere and emotional tone of the family. Keep in touch with schools and they will provide you with the help and support you need for helping your child with learning during this time. [Ministry of Education](#)

**FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN:** Establish a gentle rhythm to the day, spend time outside, explore the ideas being shared every day for sensory play, stories and at home activities (for example, [Sparklers](#), [Read Aloud Stories](#) and [Chatterpack Boredom Busters](#)).

**FOR OLDER CHILDREN:** Use Tip Sheet #4: Staying at Home Guide to plan for and review the experience for staying at home together with your child. There is also useful advice for parents of teenagers at [Child Mind](#).

**FOR SIBLINGS:** Help them find a balance between connection and space with advice from Dr Laura Markham [Aha Parenting Siblings](#).

## HELPING CHILDREN WITH ANXIETY

All of us will experience anxiety in these uncertain times and it is normal for children to experience a range of feelings.

You can help children cope by acknowledging their feelings, talking with them and helping them develop ways of coping and taking action. All the tip sheets in the series are aimed at helping you support your child with information, understanding and strategies.

- For further information see [Emerging Minds](#), [Sparklers Managing Worries](#) and [Maggie Dent](#).
- A series of videos are available [Managing Anxiety Videos](#).
- For parents of children with OCD see this advice by the International Foundation of OCD, [Children with OCD](#) and get in touch with your health providers.
- Please also see Tip Sheet #2: Help for Mental Health.