



Supporting our clients during **COVID-19**

Enhancing children's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic

The influx of ever-changing information and new ways of living plus home-schooling can prove to be stress-provoking for many children and young people. Discuss as partners, parents and as a family, the changes to family life, and where possible, seek to understand others' concerns, priorities and wants.

Accommodating the changes that may be asked of us (working from home, proactive home-schooling, having children at home) all come with potential opportunities and impacts. It can be helpful to be as prepared for change as possible to minimize stress and reduce the likelihood of conflict. For example, discuss how physical space will be divided to support everyone's needs.



Consider how your child responds to stress? Your child might:

- **Be more emotional** – some children might have a feeling of being completely overwhelmed with emotion.
- **More likely to take it out on others** – some children might raise their voice suddenly, march around the house, slam doors or even become angry and violent.
- **Become avoidant** – some children could feel overwhelmed and believe it's all too hard, so they just want to hide.
- **Pretend everything is fine** – some children can put on a brave face and act like everything is fine but deep down they feel like they're drowning.

Constantly worrying about the future creates stress. Negative self-talk or negative thoughts can have a big impact on the way we deal with stressful situations. Help your child to instead look to the things that they can control by focusing on the following:

- **Encourage routine:** Study time can be scheduled to provide routine and stability.
- **Focus on activities:** Discuss how helping out around the house, learning a new skill, cooking a family meal are all things you can control and take your mind away from uncertainty.
- **Set goals:** Achieving goals whether daily or weekly tasks can help in staying focused and succeeding in something bigger.
- **Develop rituals:** Every morning set routine to get the most out the day. During the day encourage your child to be involved in certain things to ensure that they are feeling at their best.

Consider how you will manage shared devices in your home. Not every family has devices for each individual and this can cause conflict, or parents may have varying ideas about how much technology they wish to have used at this time.



Supporting younger children

You can use these tips to help you reintroduce peace and calm and help embed habits for positive mental health in school-aged children.

1. **Breathing exercises** – deep inhale followed by a deep exhale. This gets rid of the body's build-up of cortisol (the stress hormone) and is an instant calm. Make it into a regular game and watch kids start to self-manage this exercise when they feel stressed!
2. **Play the 'my favourite place' game** and get everyone to close their eyes and imagine they're in their favourite place. Make sure everyone is hearing and seeing and feeling everything around them. Just five minutes is enough!
3. **Create a free-play art session** where the children get to express exactly what they're feeling right now – no judgements (options 1-3 make a great combined exercise!)
4. **Use music as a stress reliever**, either to calm combined with quiet closed-eyes time or to create an upbeat, happy, dancing around the room exercise.
5. **Embrace the therapeutic effect of blowing bubbles** (this works for kids of any age – including the grown-ups!). The deep breath exercise of blowing the bubbles combined with the distraction of the bubbles is an instant stress reducer.
6. **Get outside in the fresh air** – rain, hail or shine! Movement and activity outside provide instant stress relief. Combined with a discovery or learning exercise allows the brain to forget about stressful thoughts.

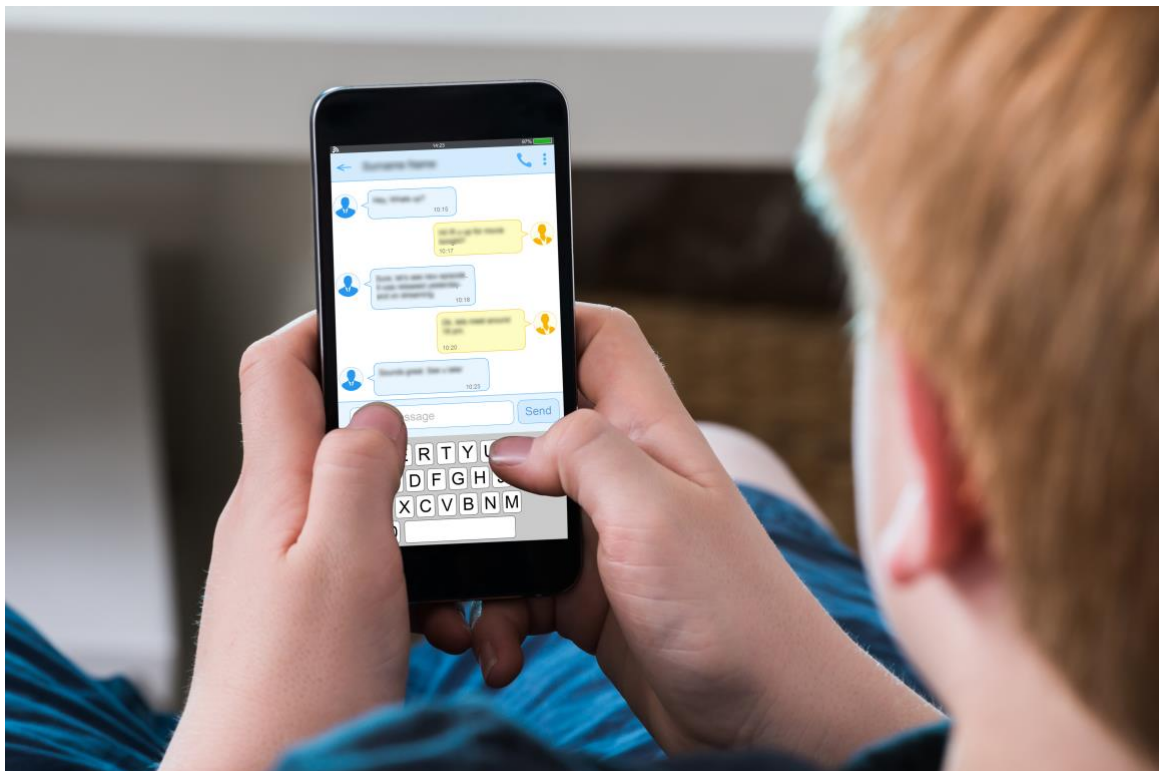
7. **Think about fun resources** that you might need to entertain the kids at home including books, board games, educational materials, and craft supplies. Your child's school might have worksheets and resources to loan. There are also great online resources and Facebook groups to support you. Some examples are provided:

<https://www.wbir.com/article/news/education/resources-to-keep-your-kids-entertained-and-learning-while-theyre-stuck-at-home/51-3a73c594-a52c-4cdc-8ed9-4334fa64bc20>

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/feature/artful-resources-to-keep-kids-entertained-at-home>

Supporting teens

As young people have more time on their hands whether, in isolation or completing schooling from home, they will spend more time with their phone. Encourage limiting daily social media use by using screen time apps and creating a schedule for home that involves other activities and limits the use. Suggest that they unfollow unhealthy sites; and snooze friends or extended family members who may be causing distress with posts.

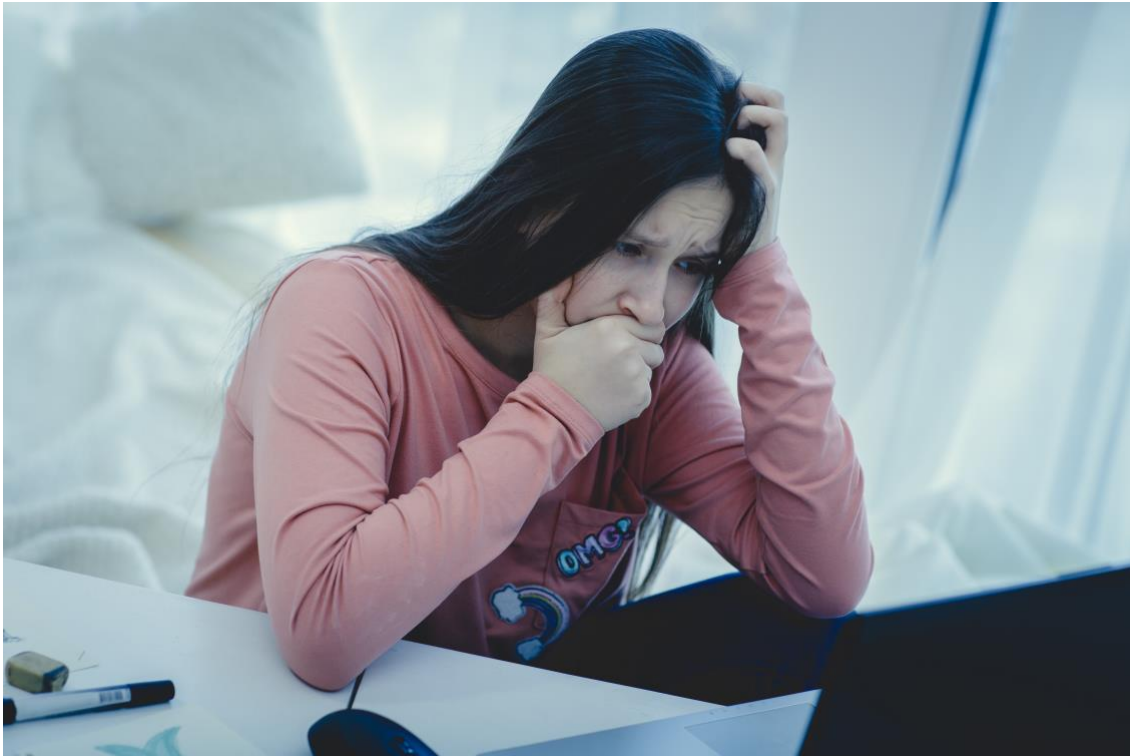


It is important that young people create a daily routine that allows self-care and exercise of the mind and the body to help deal with the mix of emotions. Support your children to focus on what they can control at the moment, rather than what they cannot control.

Some tips to help support wellbeing are provided.

1. **Check in** and ask about how their food and sleep is going? Sounds simple but, some healthy nourishment and a good night's sleep will always make children feel better.
2. **Encourage breathing.** A useful exercise is "Take a deep breath, breathe it out and repeat". This simple exercise that you can do anywhere, any-time, reduces the cortisol in your body and helps replace it with the happy hormones.
3. **Use mindfulness activities.** Ask the question "What's your favourite place in the world? The beach, your friend's back yard pool? Now use the exercise where you suggest that they close their eyes for 5 minutes and go there imagining all the sights and sounds that make it the best place to be. Ask if they feel better?"
4. **Spend quality family time.** Get together at dinner, talk about the day and have some light hearted banter.
5. **Encourage getting into the flow.** Whether your child is the sporty, arty, crafty or the musical type. What's that thing that takes your child somewhere else? The mental distraction and physical distraction helps clear the mind and promotes a better night's sleep.

Possible reactions of children & young people



If you are concerned it is important to talk to your General Practitioner (GP) or school counsellor. A referral can be made to a qualified counsellor such as a psychologist or social worker with specialist skills in seeing children and adolescents. Your child can also call the Kids Helpline for support.

For children

Kids Helpline – 24/7

1800 551 800

A counselling service for kids and young people.

For young people

headspace

eheadspace provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 - 25 and their families and friends.

<https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/>

To chat to a clinician

1800 650 890

Below is a list of signs to look for that might indicate your child is being affected by this stressful and traumatic situation, and how you can provide support.

Pre-school Age: Children 2-5 years

Possible reactions	How to support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of being alone • Disrupted sleep/changes to sleep patterns/nightmares • Speech difficulties • Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, or bed-wetting • Change in eating patterns, including loss of appetite • Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience and tolerance • Provide reassurance • Encourage expression through art and crafts, play, storytelling • Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements • Facilitate calming and comforting activities before bedtime • Maintain regular family routines • Avoid media exposure • Regression in child development (e.g. crawling rather than walking)

School Age: Children 6-12 years

Possible reactions	How to support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability, whining, aggressive behaviour • Clinging behaviour • Change in sleep pattern/nightmares • Loss of appetite • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches, etc.) • Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest • Competition for parents' attention • Forgetfulness about new information (e.g. chores, what was learned at school) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Play sessions and staying in touch with friends. • Regular exercise and activity • Engage in fun activities (puzzles, games) • Participate in structured household chores and maintain family routines • Set gentle but firm limits • Encourage expression through play and conversation • Limit media exposure

Possible reactions	How to support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased statements of worry or fear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about what they have seen/heard including at school Reward positive behaviours often

Adolescent Age: Young people 13-18 years

Possible reactions	How to support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.) Sleep/appetite disturbance Agitation or decrease in energy Ignoring health promotion behaviours Isolating from peers and loved ones Avoiding/Skipping school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patience, tolerance, and reassurance Encourage continuation of routines Encourage discussion of COVID-19 experience with peers and family Stay in touch with friends through online, phone, video games (in moderation) Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning activities and strategies to enhance health promotion behaviours Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation

Children with disabilities:

Children with disabilities will likely act based on their developmental age. Reactions may include a combination of those previously mentioned. The best way you can help is by providing increased access to comfort measures and offering factual information with short, clear answers to questions within the scope of their understanding.