

COVID-19: Advice for Adults Supporting Children and Young People

Explaining Coronavirus to Children and Young People (CYP)

It's good to talk to children and young people honestly but calmly about what is happening in the world. Although it can feel difficult, try not to ignore, avoid talking, or shield them from what is happening. Don't be afraid to discuss Coronavirus with children, not talking about something may make children worry more.

It is really important that adults explain what is happening in an age appropriate way so that children and young people can make sense of what is happening around them. Give them factual information but adjust the amount and detail to fit their age or developmental stage.

A way of explaining Coronavirus to younger children (primary aged) could be to say; "Coronavirus is a type of virus. You might have heard people say they have a cold or the flu, this is what Coronavirus is like. Sometimes these things make people feel very ill. Most of the people who get Coronavirus will only be a little bit ill and they will get better. We don't know a lot about Coronavirus as it is a new virus. We don't yet have a vaccination or medicine for Coronavirus yet, but doctors and scientists are working very hard on it".

For older children (secondary aged), a way of explaining Coronavirus could be to say; "The Coronavirus is a worldwide disease that has spread from China to most other parts of the world, including the UK. The Coronavirus (which can also be called 'COVID-19') is a virus that can make people feel unwell. It can cause a high temperature, a cough and / or difficulty with breathing. Most people who get the Coronavirus will get better at home. Sometimes it can make people feel very unwell and they might have to go to hospital for treatment."

A range of professionals have developed new resources and social stories that can help adults explain and talk about Coronavirus with children and young people. Some of these are listed in our guides to supporting children aged 7-11 years and young people aged 11-18 years.

Responding to Questions

Allow children to ask questions, it is natural that they will have questions and worries about Coronavirus. Giving them the space to ask these questions and have answers is a good way to ease anxiety.

Try to remain calm if faced with blunt or unexpected questions (e.g. can people die from it?). Try to give honest answers. It may help to say things like, "sadly, some people do die but most people will get better and children seem to be only mildly affected".

It is fine to say you don't know - at the moment, there are still lots of questions we don't have answers to about Coronavirus. Let children know that information changes regularly and you will keep them updated with changes and information when you know.

Younger children will need shorter answers and explanations, older children will need more information, time to process and to ask follow up questions.

It is important to prevent any stigma surrounding Coronavirus to ensure no person or group of people is blamed.

Remember that children often repeat themselves when they are feeling worried or uncertain. Allow them time to ask the same questions and try not to be annoyed or frustrated.

Helping Children to Talk and Ask Questions

Some children and young people may not know how or feel able to ask questions, it is important to regularly check in with them and let them know you are there to talk if they want to. You will know the CYP you are supporting best, use your judgement about when is a good time to talk.

Spending time doing a collaborative activity with your child (e.g. reading, playing, painting, cooking) can provide children space to talk through their concerns, without feeling overwhelmed by having a 'big chat'. It can also help reassure them and reduce any anxiety.

Be aware that your child may want more close contact with you at this time and feel anxious about separation. Try to provide this support whenever possible.

Encourage your child to think about the things they can do to make them feel safer and less worried.

Try to avoid talking in depth about *your* worries with a child as this may overwhelm them. However, it may be helpful to model and talk about how you are feeling to help children express their own emotions. For example, "I am feeling unsure about all of this, is that how you feel to?" or "lots of people are talking about the Coronavirus, that makes me feel nervous sometimes, have you felt nervous?"

Reassure children that it is ok to be worried, scared or nervous about the current situation and that lots of other people will feel that way too. Remind them that it is ok to not think about it or be worried about the Coronavirus too. It is ok to feel happy and have fun, even though other people might not feel that way.

Some children may not be worried about the Coronavirus itself but may have worries or fears about the changes in their lives as a result of the current context (e.g. not seeing friends, not sitting exams, not being at school).

Preparing and Responding to Changes

Children and young people of any age will be affected by the huge changes that are going on around them. Some of these will include:

People wearing face masks: explain that people might be wearing facemasks to help them avoid germs. Explain that nurses and doctors often wear these in the hospitals too for the same reasons. Just because someone is wearing a mask, doesn't mean they have Coronavirus or are unwell. They may wish to wear a mask but it is ok if they don't want to either.

Increased focus on hygiene and hand washing: it may be helpful for children and young people to know what they can do to help. Remind them of the importance of hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes. Reassure them that this is everyone is responsible for this, not just them. Remind them of important times to wash their hands which could include before or after eating and when coming in from outside. Remind them that it is ok if they forget and not to feel guilty. There are ways to make handwashing engaging and interactive for young children such as singing songs, using timers or countdown songs.

Reduction in physical contact: it may be upsetting or distressing for some children and young people they are unable to have physical contact with loved ones if they are unwell. Reassure children their loved ones still love and care about them very much. You could explain that, “When someone has a cold or is ill, they can keep others from getting ill by not hugging or kissing for a while. When they feel better and are healthy again, you will be able to give them a big hug and a kiss!”

Separation and loss: children and young people are likely to experience some separation from a range of people that are very important to them including family members, friends, school staff and key workers. They may experience a sense of loss which can bring a range of emotions such as fear, worry, upset, sadness. Reassure children that the important people in their life still care about them. Remind them that one of the best ways to keep people safe and to avoid getting unwell during this time is to have time apart from each other. Remind them that this won’t last forever and it is temporary.

Increased social media and news exposure: try to encourage children and particularly young people to avoid checking the news and social media too much. It is normal to be interested and the right amount of information will be helpful. It may be helpful to all agree to have certain times where you look or watch the news together and then have time and space for questions and discussion. If CYP wish to be updated, encourage them to use reputable sources like the World Health Organization, BBC and NHS websites.

Being at home for increased time: this maybe a difficult change and may take some getting used to for lots of families. Having a daily structure and a routine will be important. There are some additional ideas to help with this in the following section.

Exams being cancelled: older pupils may be feeling a range of emotions and have concerns and questions about their exams being cancelled. They may feel unsure about what this means for them and their future and that all their hard work is not being recognised. Reassure young people that the Prime Minister has said that all children and young people will get the qualification they worked towards. Acknowledge that the plan is a bit uncertain right now. Reassure young people that the Government and Department for Education are working on a plan to get things right for them.

Tips for Being at Home

School work: we imagine that work has been suggested by your schools and it is very important you follow the guidelines and information shared by the school your children attend.

Routine: keeping routines as normal as possible can help your child to feel safe and secure. Try to keep bed times and getting up times the same. Encourage children to get dressed during the week, even if you aren’t going to leave the house.

Timetables: it might help to have a timetable at home to keep a little bit of structure and organisation. Visual timetables help children see what is planned across the day and know what to expect. Jobs and activities could be structured into a timetable and ticked off once achieved (see our example at the end of the document and a blank one for you to complete). Allow yourself to be flexible in your timetable – it won’t be possible to replicate a full school timetable and that is ok.

Breaks: remember to consider the age of your child, younger children will require shorter activities with breaks in between. Older children can usually concentrate for longer but breaks are still very important.

Roles and responsibilities: having jobs or roles can help children to have a purpose, feel helpful and is another way of creating structure. Find safe ways to involve your child in cooking, cleaning, organising tidying up or gardening. For primary aged children, jobs can be a way of helping them to develop skills important for their learning. For example, matching (pairing socks), organising (tidying a drawer), fine motor development (sorting/tidying small objects), writing (making to do lists) and reading and ordering (putting DVDs in alphabetical order).

Be flexible and adapt: as time goes on, you will learn more about what works best for you and your child. A firm routine and structure may be really helpful but it may not work for some and more flexibility may be needed. You might find that there are certain points of the day where your child can concentrate and focus on school work best and times to avoid if they are finding it difficult. You might find that it helps your child to have a relaxing activity before they do school work or they might need a more active one. Look out for these things and adapt your routines based on how you see your child responding and behaving. Remember all children learn differently.

Working area: try to set up a specific space or working area of children and young people to complete tasks. This might be at a desk or a table but we understand that not everyone has access to these. It may help to have a box or a drawer that school work goes into once completed.

Do what you can: we understand that not all adults supporting children and young people in these circumstances will have teaching experience. If your child needs help with their work, help where you can but it is ok to feel unsure. Do not feel pressured to work with your child for a full school day. There are lots of other important ways of helping your child develop and learn which include playing, talking and spending quality time together.

Be active: regular physical activity and opportunities to move around will be important for all children and young people. These activities could be included in your timetable (you could call them 'indoor PE' or 'garden PE' if you have one). Children may have ideas about activities from school that they are already used to which could be adapted for being in the home. Some ideas could include: home workouts (videos / tutorials can be found on the internet), discos or dancing activities, assault courses, circuits etc.

Calming activities: it will be beneficial to plan calming and low-arousal activities into the day. You will know best which activities are calming for the child you are supporting. Activities could include, mindfulness activities such as breathing activities, body scanning and yoga (tutorials can be found on YouTube), listening to calming music, sharing a story together or quiet reading, colouring in or drawing, jigsaws or puzzles, working on a personal project, writing in a diary, Lego or construction activities.

Stay connected: children and young people may feel a sense of loss by the big changes happening around them in school and the community. Try to find a range of ways for them to stay in touch and connected with important people in their life. Social media, video calling, online chats, phone calls, emails, writing letters and drawing pictures are some of the many ways this could be done.

Stay safe online: it will be very important to ensure appropriate supervision and parental controls are in place during the times where children and young people may be spending an increasing amount of time online.

Limit screen time: although technology can be an effective way of helping young people feel informed and stay connected with others, it will be important to have time away from screens and technology and to engage in a range of activities throughout the day. We understand that suggesting this idea may feel difficult at times. It could be helped by having an agreed 'no screen times' or a 'no phone challenge' and to spend time together doing joint activities with your child or young person (e.g. an hour completing a jigsaw together, cooking together, doing a workout video together). It might help to agree together where this could go in the timetable if you are going to use one.

Look after you: remember to look after yourself too. If you yourself are feeling worried or anxious about Coronavirus and the implications for you and your family, talk to someone you trust who can listen and support you. There are various helplines, websites and online support groups that you may wish to explore (including Samaritans, Mind, Family Lives and Family Action).

Activities for Families to enjoy at Home

Please view any websites or resources that have been suggested first to ensure they are appropriate for your child's age and developmental stage.

General Activities

Twinkl is offering free resources for a month: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk>

There is a wide range of online activities to develop learning skills across the curriculum available at: <https://uk.ixl.com>

BBC bite-size has a wide range of resources, games and ideas: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>

Online activities and resources for preschool, nursery, reception and Key Stage 1 pupils (aged 5-7 years): <https://www.bigeyedowl.co.uk/>

Cbeebies has a range of online activities and games for younger children: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/makes>

Khan Academy is a free app for young children offering a range of activities: <https://learn.khanacademy.org/khan-academy-kids/>

Sesame Street has a range of videos, games and activities for young children: <https://www.sesamestreet.org/>

Literacy and Phonics

Phonics Play is currently offering free access to their website and resources to help with children being at home: <https://www.phonicsplay.co.uk/>

World Book Day website has a range of free online resources: <https://www.worldbookday.com/resources/>

Maths Activities

<https://www.myhomeschoolmath.com>

<http://www.amathsdictionaryforkids.com/>

<https://www.10ticks.co.uk/>

Science and History

A range of free online resources, activities and apps for primary and secondary pupil: <https://learning-resources.sciencemuseum.org.uk/>

National Geographic offering a range of free online resources and ideas: <https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/>

Exercise Activities

10 minute activities to get younger children moving: <https://www.nhs.uk/10-minute-shake-up/shake-ups>

The Body Coach (Joe Wicks) has lots of free workout videos on YouTube which children and young people could join in with

Creative Activities

Paper and pencil type activities which develop problem-solving skills such as noughts and crosses (or make up your own shapes e.g. cats and dog, same grid, just draw cats and dogs). More ideas here:

<https://www.playworks.org/resource/fun-paper-and-pencil-games-to-play/>

Play cards and board games to help develop a range of skills such as turn taking, waiting, problem solving, maths, reading and to have fun.

Storyline Online has lots of free on-line stories read by actors and with animations:

<https://www.storylineonline.net/>

Crayola has a range of free printable sheets to colour in for children, young people and adults:

<https://www.crayola.com/featured/free-coloring-pages/>

Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness colouring: <https://diaryofajournalplanner.com/free-mindfulness-colouring-sheets/>

Free mindfulness online classes: <https://www.mindfulschools.org/>

Yoga for children: free videos and tutorials can be found on YouTube.

Cosmic Kids is offering a 2 week free trial of their Yoga app: <https://www.cosmickids.com>

CPD Opportunities

Free Online Training

Here is a list of some training that you can complete online, most of which are free, which might be useful for school staff or parents/carers.

MindEd a free educational resource on children & young people's mental health for adults:

<https://www.minded.org.uk/>

Communication Trust Speech and Language training:

<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/projects/professional-development/online-short-course/>

Trauma awareness training: <https://www.acesonlinelearning.com/>

The Open University have a range of free courses: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education/free-courses>

Free training about brain development: <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/training>

Autism training:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/training-consultancy/online.aspx>

Podcasts

List of podcasts looking at trauma-informed practice and resilience: <https://www.lisacherry.co.uk/8-top-podcasts/>

Understanding the architecture of the brain: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/the-brain-architects-podcast-brain-architecture-laying-the-foundation/>

Child in Mind looking at mental health: <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/expert-advice-and-guidance/child-in-mind-podcasts/>

Psychology: <https://digest.bps.org.uk/podcast/>

Timetable Example

Time	Activity	Jobs (tick them once completed)
Before 9am	Wake up	Have breakfast Brush teeth Get dressed Make bed
9am – 10am	School work	School work packs Read a chapter of book Practise daily spellings
10am-11am	Exercise time	Walk outside (if possible) 15 minute circuit activity
11am – 11.15pm	Relaxing time	Mindfulness activity or short yoga activity from YouTube
11.15am – 12pm	Lunch and choosing time	Eat Lunch Choose your own activity / games
12pm – 1pm	School work	School work packs or reading
1.30 – 2.30pm	Exercise time	'Wake up Shake up' or 'Just Dance' activity from YouTube
2.30-3pm	Art time	Drawing, colouring or making bracelets
3pm – 4.30pm	Choosing time	Indoor play or garden play
4.30 - 5pm	Helping time	Help to either: Make dinner or tidy up
5pm – 6pm	Choosing and keeping in touch time	Phone Nana to tell her about your time Facetime Sophie Choosing indoor or outdoor

Time	Activity	Jobs (tick them once completed)