

## Coronavirus (Covid 19) Support for Parents

### What's going on – setting the context

The Coronavirus has begun to spread across the United Kingdom. This is something that has not been experienced in living memory. While it likely to cause disruption and some worry for adults, including parents, children and adolescents are less well equipped to manage anxieties and, as such, their worries can start to snowball into something much bigger, leading to increased anxiety and distress. Children with mental health concerns can be especially at risk, not least when the pre-existing support structures of school (including trusted teachers, friends, and a clear and reliable timetable for the day) are taken away. If your child's school has shut down, then they may well be feeling a loss of these forms of support – after the excitement of school closing has faded away.

### Information Sharing

Rather than keeping children away from information, it can be useful for them to get information from trustworthy and age-appropriate websites. These include:

- Newsround: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51387017>

Adult advice and guidance can be found:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

### Signs to look out for

We all deal with stress and change in different ways and so a full list is not possible here. Emotional reactions can, however, be grouped into two broad categories: either we become more energised, agitated and vigilant, or we become more sluggish, quiet and secluded. A noticeable change in your child's mood, demeanour and behaviour may indicate that he or she is worried about something.

Some things to look out for include:

- Increased agitation and a difficulty settling to anything.
- Increased arguments and conflict.

- Rapid changes in mood.
- Anxiety and worry. This might be about something specific, such as the virus or health, or it may be a more generalised anxiety about the situation as a whole.
- Increased lethargy and sleeping more than is usual.
- Increasingly quiet and withdrawn and reluctance to talk about what is on his or her mind (more than is usual).
- Increased difficulties with going to sleep and staying asleep.
- Worry and resulting controlling behaviours involving people coming to and leaving the home.

As noted above, a general rule is a noticeable change in behaviour. You, as parent, know your child best.

## What can you do as a parent?

The first thing you are doing as a parent is being there physically and psychologically, and paying attention. At times of distress, a warm and caring parental presence is the “go to” for scared and uncertain children. The following are some helpful next steps:

**Listen to your child.** Talk to them about what is happening and ask them what their thoughts and feelings are. Listen and let them get their thoughts across. It can be all too tempting to fix or solve problems away but children can then interpret this as not having their fears taken seriously.

- Find time to sit with your child. Maybe while cooking or doing an activity as face-to-face conversations can be hard.
- Ask them what they are thinking and how they are feeling, letting them know that there is not a thought too silly or scary to talk about.

**Validate:** acknowledge that their concerns are valid. Go through them in turn. It may be helpful to write them down or draw them out, so that your child does not have to keep trying to hold on to and remember their worries. Drawing such things is in itself a helpful activity and you can join in too.

**Contain the worry:** sometimes we cannot make a problem go away. We just have to bear or hold it. This can sometimes be experienced as a rising panic or other strong emotion in us as we listen. That is fine. As a parent, you are modelling something powerful: that you can experience a feeling such as anxiety or worry and not be completely swamped by it (all the time) .

**Resource your child.** Resourcing is important. It is the process of identifying skills, qualities and strengths your child already has, or can acquire, that can help them cope or respond to their worries.

If their fear is about catching the corona virus, for example, you might remind them of a time when they last had a cold or illness. How did they cope? What got them through? What could they learn from their experiences or what skills could they borrow from others that can help them manage this time?

If their worry is about supply shortages then you might explore how a relative, friend or favourite superhero might manage.

*The idea is to get them to recognise that they have the capacity to manage adversities better than they think.*

## Action planning.

Once you have a sense of what your child's worries are the following questions are a helpful tool to help them "de-catastrophise". Go through them in turn. You could discuss these in turn, write it down in a diary, or draw it out. Joining in with your child in this can signal how you all have the skills and the determination to manage this as best you can.

- What is the worst thing that can happen? (your job is to ensure some reality exists here)
  - How can they manage the worst thing?
- What is the best thing that can happen?
  - How can they make the best thing more likely to happen?
- What is the most likely thing?
  - How can they handle the most likely thing?

## Our support

As part of Ifield Community College's psychological and well-being support, our Educational Psychologist, Dr Xavier Eloquin has made available some time for virtual/telephone consultations with parents. These consultations are an opportunity for parents to bring questions and concerns about their children's emotional well-being and related behaviour during enforced school closure. These slots are available on a first come first serve basis between 9:00 and 12:00 on:

- Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March
- Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> April

If you would like to arrange for a thirty-minute consultation please email him in advance at:  
[drxeloquin@gmail.com](mailto:drxeloquin@gmail.com)