

## **Advice for parents and carers during response to coronavirus including tips for talking with children and young people about the virus**

### **General advice during school closures**

Being out of school for an unknown length of time, with reduced access to outdoors, alternative facilities and social connections, is likely to be difficult for many children. This may also bring wider family stresses, particularly for those living in close proximity or overcrowded homes.

Adults will need to be aware of signs of stress in themselves and their children. Some may share worries verbally, but others may show it through their behaviours (e.g., withdrawing and / or 'acting out').

Some older children may be able to regulate their worries or independently access resources to support with this and younger children may need adults to help them make sense of their feelings and reduce stress. Exercise (whilst social distancing), art, music and other creative activities can be helpful, as well as using some relaxation strategies together.

Parents and carers can remember:

- Schools are offering a much reduced provision. Although your child may not be able to attend, schools will likely continue to provide regular updates and support / resources. Check with your school how and/or when you can seek advice from staff if you need it.
- Set yourself realistic targets - you will not be able to fully replicate your child's school timetable. It will be most important to establish a routine with frequent breaks. Involve your child(ren) in setting up the daily routine so they feel part of the plan and solution. It may be helpful to display this routine / timetable in a visual way as a reminder to all.
- Expect that you and your child(ren) will get stressed at different times. Be flexible and take breaks / change activities as required. Don't expect your plans and routines to be perfect – remember, this is a highly unusual time so allow yourself to be flexible and respond as needed.
- Remember, you are not your child(ren)'s teacher usually so do not put too much 'academic' pressure on yourselves. Spend time together, enjoy sharing activities and take regular breaks for exercise and brain breaks.
- Reassure your child(ren) that, although we may not have all the answers, it is the job of the adults in their lives to keep them safe and people are working on

answers and solutions every day. Normalise the experience; all children and adults are in the same situation at the moment.

- Help your child(ren) stay connected with their friends. Face to face is limited at the current time so setting up a video group call (discuss with other parents) may be helpful.
- Reduce access to 'rolling news' throughout the day. Try and reduce your child(ren)'s exposure to distressing media coverage.
- Supervise children with screens – it is likely they will be using the internet more than usual over the coming weeks / months. Ensure you have appropriate content filters on – the UK Safer Internet Centre offers guidance on setting up parental controls. Try to ensure there is a balance in the range of activities your child(ren) engages in.
- Play! Remember, this is key to children's wellbeing and development, at all ages, and it also helps to reduce stress in adults!

### **Talking with children & young people about coronavirus/COVID-19**

In light of the current and developing situation and media coverage, it is likely that some children and young people will be concerned and anxious. This is reasonable, they will never have experienced something like this before and do not have the experience to know what may happen.

Make your conversation factual, but adjust the amount and detail as appropriate to the age and development of your child. For older and more mature young people it may be helpful to guide them to the official websites and reliable news sources and share these with them to inform discussions.

- Allow your child to ask questions – give them space to do this and providing an answer can help manage some worries. It is ok to say you don't know – at the moment there are some questions about coronavirus we don't have the answers to.
- Choose a good time for a discussion with the child when they are happy to talk and when you are not having to immediately rush onto other things.
- Ask them to share what they know already. You will then know where to start the conversation.
- Younger children might understand a cartoon or picture more than a verbal explanation. Let them draw their ideas for you to do, if helpful.
- If they share worries or fears – show them that you understand how they are feeling. Don't try to dismiss or minimise their fears.
- Keep to the facts and keep the conversation positive and supportive. Tell them that doctors and scientists are working on the treatments. Talk about what they can do to have some control, for example focusing on good handwashing, using tissues etc.
- Make it clear that they can talk further with you if they have more questions or need more reassurance – and check in with them after a while to see how things are going.
- Try to manage your own worries. We can all feel anxious in times of uncertainty. Ensure you have other adults to talk to and activities you find calming.

- Try to end the conversations with a comment, topic or activity that is calming and reassuring.

### **Resources to support wellbeing**

- [Think Ninja](#) - an app specifically designed to educate 11-18 year olds about mental health, emotional wellbeing and to provide skills young people can use to build resilience and stay well.
- [Sesame Street Breathe, Think, Do](#) – an app for younger children to support relaxation, to do with parent/carer
- Headspace (mindfulness app) have launched a free section called [Weathering the storm](#). This includes meditation, sleep and movement exercises – support for adults and children.