



Staying calm and being together in challenging times

Gwent Attachment Service (2020)

We all face challenges and difficult times, and we are aware that many families may be feeling worried or anxious about Covid-19 currently and the changes to our lives that this might bring. It is very normal to feel anxious, especially when things feel uncertain and it is hard when the things we usually do to manage stress, and keep connected with each other seem less available. We have written this leaflet to offer some ideas of what to do and how to manage at this time, when our lives may feel a bit different from before.

What do I say?

Give children and young people a simple, age appropriate explanation about coronavirus. The below links have more information on how to do this. Be prepared to answer any questions children might have, and to be honest when things are uncertain or we don't know. It may be that you have to do this a few times as things change and be prepared for repeated questions. It is important too, to foster some sense of control - that we can take action to by washing our hands, staying at home a bit more than usual, and using tissues or sleeves when we cough.

<https://www.tinabryson.com/news/coronavirus-talking-points-for-parents-amp-teachers-with-the-whole-brain-child-approach>

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-teens-about-the-new-coronavirus-2020031419192>



Tips for your time and keeping in touch

Think about what routines can be kept going and try to set up new ones. This will give your time some structure and predictability to keep you busy and build a feeling of safety at a time of anxiety

Be creative about keeping in touch. Use online and remote calls and videos. Exchange e-mails and texts. Send letters and drawings

If separated from loved ones for longer periods - swap a toy, book or special item with friends or family members to hold onto, or have your child choose a sticker and give the same sticker to others. This helps you keep a bit of them close while you are apart

Break up your time. Have a routine but build in different kinds of activity if you are at home for long periods including quiet, physical and thinking and learning activities



Look after yourself as well as your child

Be aware of your own stress and anxiety levels and manage this too. Not only will this reduce yours and your child's anxiety, it may also be an opportunity to show your children directly how to do this and give the message that it's important

Think about what you can do to take time out for you – a breath of fresh air, a bath, some push ups, some mindfulness exercises

Think about what is most likely to trigger off your 'shark music' and how you will recognize it

Take regular breaks from the news and social media – whilst there is lots of helpful information out there, it can feel overwhelming to be connected to this all of the time and may make us feel more anxious if we look at this too much

Accept that there may be times you feel upset and uncertain, these feelings will come and go - be kind to yourself

Try to focus on the 'here and now'. When things feel a bit overwhelming, rather than worrying how to get through the next x weeks/months, it can be more helpful to think about what you need to get through the next day or hour – just take things a bit at a time

Ask yourself – when tomorrow you look back on what you did today, what will you be glad you did?

Managing big feelings

Children and young people need a bit more help to understand and 'organize' their feelings during times of change and uncertainty. You may notice some changes in their behaviour – becoming quieter, more emotional, clingy or more active and dysregulated than usual. At these times we may need to work a bit harder to help them manage their feelings. Giving a good explanation will help, together with the following:

- Setting aside some time each day to discuss any worries and try and work through them – you can have a bank, worry monster or jar to help hold these and work through them gradually
- You can help children and young people take care of their feelings and their bodies through short bursts of physical and sensory activity. Keeping these regular and often can ensure young people stay in their 'window of tolerance' – not getting too dysregulated or too under-stimulated and lacking in energy

“Research has shown that when we change our physical state – through movement or relaxation, for example – we can change our emotional state” (Siegel, Bryson, 2011)

- If children get upset take 'time in' – stay with them, be curious about and accept what they feel and help them to express it. Don't punish or dismiss
- Look out for successes and celebrate small moments of joy or fun – leave time to be playful
- Find some soothing activities – mindfulness for kids, make a rice pit, blow bubbles, practice deep breaths, try new flavours, dig in the garden



Additional resources

Mental health and Coronavirus: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapse86765>

Comic exploring the Coronavirus:

<https://choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

Managing anxiety about Coronavirus with chronic health conditions:

<https://creakyjoints.org/living-with-arthritis/coronavirus-anxiety-with-chronic-illness/>

Social Story explaining Coronavirus for those with ASD:

<https://www.ppmid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>

Practical Psychological advice for parents supporting children if schools close or if someone in your family is affected by Coronavirus :

https://medium.com/@siobhancurrie/how-to-respond-to-the-coronavirus-when-it-impacts-your-family-ceba63cd4235?fbclid=IwAR1phZEniWaWfWrurKgWlZt3xyDS5quacU2kK9Ky5La2rTUIntH8O-_rlg

CBBC Coronavirus Questions & Answers with Dr Chris & Dr Xand:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089>