

Managing Anxiety Levels and Wellbeing

You might be noticing signs of increasing anxiety in your child as their usual routines have changed and they are spending much of their day indoors at home. These might include:

For pupils ages 3-6 years:

- Regressing to behaviour they've outgrown, such as thumb-sucking or bed-wetting
- Showing greater fear at being separated from you
- Tantrums
- Trouble sleeping

For pupils ages 7-10 years:

- Expressing sadness, anger or fear
- Sharing false information that they're hearing from their peers or seeing online
- Wanting to talk about coronavirus all the time
- Not wanting to talk about the current situation at all
- Having trouble concentrating
- Tantrums

For preteen and teenaged pupils:

- Acting out – this might include things like picking fights with you or with siblings
- Becoming afraid to leave the house
- Distancing themselves from their friends and family
- Exhibiting intense emotions but being unable to talk about what they're feeling

It's really important to take care of your own physical and mental health, too. Children are very perceptive, and they react to what they sense from the adults around them.

But, no matter how calmly you manage the current environment, children are likely to be anxious, so it's important to talk to them about what's happening. Also, children pick up bits of information from their friends, from the news and from listening to adults talking around them – but they can misunderstand what they're hearing.

See the next page for information about how to talk to your child.

How to talk to your child about what's happening

For younger children

Deal with the news head-on and talk about it openly and calmly, giving them the facts

- Give them age-appropriate information – take a look at https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/news/watch_newsround – regularly updated with information and advice
[#covibook](#) – for under 7s
[Children's guide to coronavirus](#) – a download from the Children's Commissioner to help explain the situation to children
- Teach them how to know if information they find on the internet is reliable. Explain how some stories on social media may be based on rumours or inaccurate information
- Encourage them to take breaks from listening to or reading the news – overexposure isn't helpful

Encourage questions

- This will give them the confidence to reach out, if they have anything to ask
- Be reassuring but honest when answering questions – it's ok if you don't have all the answers
- Be ready to answer the same question over and over – children tend to repeat themselves when they're feeling uncertain or worried, so you might have to answer the same questions more than once as they seek extra reassurance

Be a role model

- Recognise and manage your own worries first
- Be open about your own feelings and let them know it's normal to be concerned – for example, let them know you're also finding the news a bit worrying and what you're doing to stay calm

Explain how our body's immune system protects us

- It's constantly working against germs without us knowing. We can't and don't need to control this process
- Explain that we're taking precautions against this particular germ because it's a new one which our bodies haven't come across before
- Remind them how important it is that they eat healthy food, sleep and exercise, as this helps to fight germs
- Reassure them that the effects of this virus on healthy young people are very mild

Keep doing your bit to help children reduce the spread of germs

- Remind them to maintain good hygiene like bathing daily and wearing fresh clothes
- Encourage them to sing 'happy birthday' twice when they're washing their hands

For older children

Older children will have the same anxieties about their own health and that of their family and friends as younger children. But they're also likely to feel socially isolated, and worried about the result of school closures on their education and what life will be like after the pandemic is over.

In addition to the steps above:

Reassure them that when more guidance comes from the school about how grades will be awarded, you'll share this with them as soon as you have it – you could also check that they understand the information you've received so far, in case there are any points of confusion or worry that the school could help to clarify

Encourage them to maintain social ties – relationships are especially important for older children, so give them room to keep in touch with their friends

Equip them with accurate information – for example:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters> from the World Health Organization
- <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/covid-19-coronavirus-infographic-datapack/> from Information is Beautiful (regularly updated)

Share tools to help them manage anxiety

- YoungMinds: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/> for general wellbeing advice and information
- YoungMinds: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/coronavirus-and-mental-health/> for information and support more specifically around coronavirus

If your child struggles with higher levels of anxiety

Some children are naturally more anxious, such as those with existing phobias or obsessive-compulsive disorders. The current situation can make those anxieties worse.

- Get them to do activities such as counting, ordering and sorting tasks which can help them calm down
- Encourage them to use relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing
- Look out for obsessive or compulsive behaviours and try to get ahead of them early by challenging unhelpful thoughts and assumptions
- If you're worried about your child's anxiety, **YoungMinds** is a charity dedicated to children's mental health. They've opened a [parents' helpline](#) for confidential, expert advice. You can reach them at 0808 802 5544

Helplines and websites for children and young people

If your child would like to speak with someone confidentially, there are helplines and websites specifically for them.

ORGANISATION	CONTACT INFORMATION
Shout Free, confidential support via text, available 24/7	Text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to text with a trained crisis volunteer who'll provide active listening and collaborative problem-solving
ChildLine Confidential telephone counselling service for any child with a problem	Call 0800 1111 any time for free Have an online chat with a counsellor (9am to midnight daily) Check out the message boards
The Mix (suitable for young people under 25) Free confidential telephone helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, whatever the problem	Call 0808 808 4994 for free (11am to 11pm daily) https://www.themix.org.uk/get-support