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Dear Parents and Carers,

These are uncertain times for us all and our thoughts are with you, your families and the community at this time. We appreciate your understanding and support that we are currently working in new ground that we have not experienced before and our priority will remain, as always, the children, our families and our staff.

We are aware that some children are worried and / or concerned about the coronavirus pandemic and have voiced their concerns in school. As a direct result we have been open and honest with the children, discussing their worries, both at whole school, class, group and at an individual level. At Chapelford, we have already initiated the following activities:

- Increased number of PSCH sessions to allow children the opportunity to question and share concerns
- Open communication in a safe environment where children's worries are valued and responded to in an age-appropriate manner
- Additional support with the SENDco for our more vulnerable children
- Listening space available with Mrs Chesterman daily during lunch which can be accessed by all children who wish to talk or share a worry
- Clear advice on how they can help by taking responsibility for hygiene with lots of support from staff to encourage regular hand washing and use of hand sanitisers
- A positive approach to sharing information with a focus on what is being done to help
- Online learning opportunities shared with children so that they are not concerned about missing schoolwork if self-isolation is needed

News of the coronavirus COVID-19 is everywhere, from the front page of all the newspapers to the playground at school. Many parents are wondering how to bring up the pandemic in a way that will be reassuring and not make children more worried than they already may be. Here is some advice from the experts at the Child Mind Institute and University of Sussex and Sussex Partnership NHS Trust.

Should I talk to my children about this...?

Yes, DO talk about it. It is tempting to try to shield children from knowing about frightening things. But, chances are they've heard it about it school, or even nursery. And, in all likelihood, they will have heard things that have scared them. They've also probably heard things that are just plain wrong – rumours and myths do seem to flourish in playgrounds. So, DO answer any questions that your children ask. And if they don't ask any questions, try starting a conversation with them: "Have you heard anything about this





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new bug that is going round?”. Keep your tone casual and light. Try to keep the worry out of your voice and out of your face.

What do I say...?

Start by finding out what they know. And by this, we mean, what they think they know... Ask open questions such as “What are the kids at school saying? What do you think about it?” If they’re carrying round any weird ideas (“Mr Smith the PE teacher has got it, and if you go near him YOU WILL DIE”), you can then set them straight!

How much detail do I go into...?

Follow your child's lead. Some children may want to spend time talking. But if your children don't seem interested or don't ask a lot of questions, that's OK. The general and not very helpful advice that we always give to parents is to give just enough, but not too much. By this, we mean, listen to your child and just answer the question they are asking. If your six-year-old has asked how you catch COVID-19, they don't need an undergraduate-level seminar in virology. Just a few words about germs getting on our fingers and into our mouths. And if they asked about how you catch it, you don't need to start telling them about fatality rates – save that for if/when they ask. Which brings us to our next question...

How honest should I be...?

If your child asks a straightforward question about the risk of dying, do answer it. If you fudge the issue, they will make up an answer themselves and chances are it will be worse than the truth. But, again, read your child a bit, and try to give just what they need to know. So, a seven-year-old doesn't need to know chapter-and-verse on percentage estimates. A teenager may want detailed information and benefit from a discussion of it. But, for a younger child, a simple “most people will be just fine, but some people get very poorly and need to go to hospital and sadly, some people will die.”

Is there anything I shouldn't tell my kids...?

In general, we say that honesty is the best policy – if a child asks a question, it is best to answer it, even if you do so quite simply. However, we do advise that you keep young children (up to the age of about 10) away from all sources of news. We say this all the time – not just when there is a scary story in the news. Children just don't need that level of information. They can't put it into context, and they definitely don't need some of the scare stories that are out there. Turn off the TV and radio when the news comes on, or when people start talking about the coronavirus. Don't leave newspapers lying around.

After about the age of 10 (you know your own child best) we usually say it's OK to see a little careful news – CBBC Newsround is good for taking a calm, child-centred approach. But, watch it with them, and be ready to discuss anything that it brings up.

If your child uses the internet, be aware that there are a lot of horrible, scary stories out there. You have probably got quite good at filtering out the most ridiculous bits, but they haven't learnt how to do that yet. Keep a close eye on what they are viewing.





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If your child asks about something and you don't know the answer, say so. Use the question as a chance to find out together. Check the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](https://www.cdc.gov) for up-to-date, reliable information about coronavirus (COVID-19). That way, you have the facts and children don't see headlines about deaths and other scary information.

How can I reassure my child?

Offer Comfort and Honesty

Focus on helping your child feel safe, but be truthful. Don't offer more detail than your child is interested in. For example, if children ask about school closings, address their questions. But if the topic doesn't come up, there's no need to raise it unless it happens.

Speak calmly and reassuringly. Explain that most people who get sick feel like they have a cold or the flu. Children pick up on it when parents worry. So when you talk about coronavirus and the news, use a calm voice and try not to seem upset.

Give children space to share their fears. It's natural for children to worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Let your child know that children don't seem to get as sick as adults. Let them know they can always come to you for answers or to talk about what scares them.

Talk about all the things that are happening to keep people safe and healthy. Young children might be reassured to know that hospitals and doctors are prepared to treat people who get sick. Older children might be comforted to know that scientists are working to develop a vaccine.

Children and teens often worry more about family and friends than themselves. For example, if children hear that older people are more likely to be seriously ill, they might worry about their grandparents. Letting them call or Skype with older relatives can help them feel reassured about loved ones.

Let your children know that it's normal to feel stressed out at times. Everyone does. Recognizing these feelings and knowing that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help children build resilience.

How much reassurance should I give...?

Give plenty of reassurance. In particular, make it very clear that children and teenagers are extremely unlikely to get very ill and if you, yourself, are youngish and reasonably healthy, you can also give some assurance that you are also very unlikely to get seriously ill. However, be wary of giving absolute guarantees. For instance, it is very tempting to say, "Oh Granny and Grandpa will be fine, I promise!" The





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chances are that they will be fine, but if they are not, then it might be difficult for your child to trust your assurances in future.

What if my child is very anxious...?

If your child is really struggling, here are some extra things that you can do.

Whenever there is something scary in the news, we tell parents and children to 'look for the helpers'. So, rather than focusing on the virus, focus on the nurses and doctors who are working really hard to help people get better. Look at the scientists who are working really hard to come up with a cure. Look at the cleaners who are working really hard to keep everywhere clean and germ-free. Everyone is working together to try to sort this problem out.

Reassure them (and yourself) that is OK to feel worried. We all feel worried at times – it's a normal human emotion. But if it really does get too much and you feel as if they are constantly worrying and looking for reassurance, you could try 'worry time'. This is a technique that we use with kids who are real worriers. It's where the parent and the child agree a time each day that will be 'worry time'. Say, 5pm, just before dinner. Then, for 20-30 minutes, sit down with your child and let them worry to their heart's content. Your job is mostly to listen. If there is a worry that you can easily resolve, do so. But, mostly listen and be sympathetic. Then outside of that time, when your child starts worrying, gently ask them to save the worry to 'worry time'. It can be a good way of getting children to start feeling a bit of control over their worries. Do something positive to help the situation. Helping other people is a really good way of dealing with a bad situation. It releases feel-good chemicals in our brain and makes us feel more in control. So, with your child, think of what you can do to help other people. Could you make a small donation to the local foodbank (most take cash online, if your own supplies are running low)? Can you phone an elderly neighbour and offer to get shopping for them? Do ask your child if they have any ideas.

Do some meditation or relaxation exercises. There are tons of these on the internet. Find something aimed at children and then do it together.

Do something fun! Fun is a great distraction – play a game, bounce on the trampoline, bake a cake. Whatever floats your child's boat.

How can I help my child take control?

Let your children see that you are taking steps to control the situation – feeling that your parents know what they are doing is very reassuring. So, maybe you can take everyone's temperature in the morning, and remind everyone to wash their hands lots. But, try to do these things calmly – giving an air that it's all under control, rather than a vibe that you are panicking! Even better, let your kids get involved in preparations. Maybe they can take their own temperature or disinfect a few doorknobs. This will help them feel in control too. Teach children that getting lots of sleep and washing their hands well and often can help them stay strong and well. Explain that regular hand washing also helps stop viruses from spreading





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to others. Be a good role model and let your children see you washing your hands often! Let your kids see you in control.

What if we need to self-isolate or get locked down...?

Children will react to a lockdown in different ways. Some will see it as an adventure, and if so, go with that! Others will take it as a sign of impending doom and will need more reassurance. If your child takes it badly, to try to keep the daily routine going as much as possible – same time to get up, same to go to bed. Do a bit of schoolwork if you like. But, spot the opportunity here - use it as a real chance to re-connect as a family. We are all so busy usually – most children say that they don't get enough time with their parents. Well, here's your chance! Play silly games, watch films together, read to them. Encourage them to take control and find ways of making new types of fun – can you play Monopoly over Skype...? Who knows – give it a go! Have fun and try to find the silver lining – if you can do that in a situation like this, you are teaching your children a truly wonderful lesson.

Children need a lot of exercise. If they don't get enough, they can get antsy and stressed and badly behaved. This might be difficult to arrange in a lockdown. Get them out in the garden if you have one – kick a ball around, bounce on the trampoline, do cartwheels. If not, see if you can find some fun dance videos online and do them together in the sitting room.

Children need a lot of play. They really do NEED it. If you've got more than one child and they play well together, great. If you haven't, then you may need to get stuck in yourself. Playing with kids can be unbelievably dull, but dive in and try to do it. They really, really need it! With older kids, you might be able to arrange some Skype playdates.

What if I am feeling really anxious...?

Many of us are feeling quite anxious at the moment. But what if you are really struggling? The first advice is talk, talk, talk. Call a friend, Skype your sister, talk to your partner. But, try to make sure that your children do not overhear these conversations. Little ears are surprisingly good at hearing things (when they want to...) so if you are having a big worry session, make absolutely sure no children can overhear.

When we feel anxious, it is very easy to become over-protective, and this is quite bad for kids. The problem is, at the moment, we are all having to be quite protective about things – keeping clean, social contact, staying healthy. Make a big effort to stop this protectiveness from spilling over into other areas of your child's life. It's still OK to swing upside-down from the climbing frame if that's what they normally do. It's still OK to be out of sight for a few minutes, if that's what they normally do. In other words, try to be the same parent you would usually be.





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If you find talking to your kids about the coronavirus too upsetting, it's OK – delegate to someone else. Get your partner to do it, or your friend – anyone who you can trust to talk calm good sense.

Keep the Conversation Going

Keep checking in with your child. Use talking about coronavirus as a way to help children learn about their bodies, like how the immune system fights off disease.

Talk about current events with your children often. It's important to help them think through stories they hear about. Ask questions: What do you think about these events? How do you think these things happen? Such questions also encourage conversation about non-news topics.

The following video clips are also useful resources for children:

Coronavirus: Your questions answered

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

Coronavirus: Here's some advice if you're worried about it

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51896156>

These are unprecedented times and we would like to reassure you that we are taking measures and realistic actions to ensure that we are addressing your child's mental health and well-being at this challenging time. We hope that you will find the above resources and videos useful in the coming weeks. Finally, if you have read this, you are clearly a good parent. You are making your child's wellbeing a priority at this difficult time. Remember, when they have caring parents, children are incredibly resilient. They will be fine!

*"How do you do it?" said night
"How do you wake up and shine?"
"I keep it simple," said light
"One day at a time"
Lemn Sissay*

Kindest regards and warm wishes,

Joanne Hewson
Headteacher

