

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Supporting your anxious child

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

We're all feeling anxious about the COVID-19 outbreak as we've had to deal with some major changes to our lives and the world in such a short time.

Your children may be anxious at this time too – they could be worried about people getting sick, schools closing down or the fact that they can't even visit their friends anymore.

Here are some suggestions to help you support your anxious child:

1. **Manage your anxiety first**

Experts suggest that dealing with our own anxiety is one of the best ways we can help our children feel more secure. So try to stay calm yourself. Take some deep breaths and remind yourself that this is not an easy time for anyone – we are all doing the best we can in a challenging situation.

2. **Be smart about what you are reading and watching on TV**

Not everything we see printed these days is accurate, and reading too much can increase your sense of anxiety and hopelessness. Try to limit the amount of time that the television news is on, so that your children are not exposed to too much information which may be hard for them to understand. Also make sure they are only accessing safe and helpful sites on the internet.

3. **Talk to your child**

Ask them what they already know and what they are worried about. They may have heard some of the facts about coronavirus (COVID-19), but may not understand what it all means. Give them space to talk about their fears and talk with them about what is happening in an age-appropriate manner. Normalise their feelings – it's ok to feel like this, everyone is feeling a bit worried at the moment.

4. **Help your child identify what they can control**

This can include things such as washing their hands and keeping a safe distance from others. Gaining back some control in a rapidly changing environment may help them feel less anxious.

5. **Watch for signs of anxiety in your children**

Children don't always express anxiety in the same way as adults, and they may not even know that they are feeling anxious themselves. Common signs of anxiety in children are stomach aches, getting cranky or easily irritated, sleeping problems, and becoming more clingy.

6. Share some fun times together as a family

Doing their school work at home might protect your children from the coronavirus (COVID-19) but it can add extra stress to the family. If it's all getting too much, log-off the computer and do some fun activities together. Every child's education is going to be affected over the next few months, so do what you can to safeguard their emotional wellbeing which will help them get back to normal quickly after this is over.

7. Establish a new routine and stick to it as much as possible

Children feel more secure when they know what to expect. Set times for school work, exercise, play, meals and sleep. Involve your children and work the new routine out together.

8. Help them to find ways they can engage with their friends and extended family members

This might include catching up over the internet, or playing online games to keep in touch. Helping others can be a great way of feeling less isolated - is there anyone in your network or street who is isolated and needs support? Cooking some biscuits or writing a letter to an elderly neighbour might be a positive way to build connection for all of you.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Supporting Your Anxious Child** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.