

Supporting children during the COVID-19 pandemic


The following fact sheet is to provide some guidance in supporting children during COVID-19

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has rapidly impacted our world. Your children are hearing others talk about it and may be overwhelmed by the constant news and changing information they are receiving.

How children react to challenges is different from adults, and is also different from child to child. There is no typical or “normal” reaction and there are many things that may influence their response, including age and temperament.

They may have a heightened level of worry, and those who are usually a little more anxious may be more pre-occupied with becoming sick, handwashing or avoiding usual activities. It is important that we provide them with clear and accurate information at an age appropriate and developmental level in a calm and measured way.

Parents or caregivers know their children best, however here are some extra tips:

- **Provide reassurance** – let them know there are a lot of people working very hard in the health industry to keep them, and everyone, safe. Keep the tone of the conversation calm, hopeful and fact-focused. For example “We will get through this together”. Let them know that information around COVID-19 is likely to change and you may not have all the answers. Being available and open to chat is what matters most.
- **Ask them to let you know what they have heard and how they are feeling** – this will allow you to address any fears and correct misinformation. Acknowledging how they feel and normalising these reactions helps them to understand, accept and manage their emotions. Reinforce facts from reliable sources and keep the language clear and simple. Let them know that this is still relatively rare (the flu is more common).
- **Focus on things they can do to minimise infection.** Provide them with information on what they can do to stay safe. Teach them how to wash hands properly and make it fun! Get them to sing their favourite song when washing their hands. Talk to them about coughing or sneezing into their sleeve, elbow or a tissue. Encourage them to stay at least an arm length away from others. Explain that adults are also using these precautions to keep safe. Be sure to role model these behaviours in your family.
 
- **Minimise TV, radio, newspaper and social media coverage where possible.** Constantly viewing or listening to reports around COVID-19 may increase anxiety, worry and fear. If your children are viewing news and media, watching with them can provide an opportunity to talk and address any concerns or questions. Ensure you use information from reliable sources, e.g. [NSW Health](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/).
- **Increase self-care activities for the whole family.** Plan extra fun activities for the family and be sure to include physical exercise. This will help build resilience. Maintain your regular home routine where possible, or see if you can establish some new routines, especially if there is increased home time associated with social distancing or self-isolation. Routine helps children (and adults) feel safe and secure, it is familiar and provides opportunities to engage in positive coping and distraction.



WATCH OUT FOR SIGNS THAT SOME ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MAY BE HELPFUL

- Increasing or escalating reactions
- Reactions that are not resolving with time
- Behaviours that are worrying or concerning you
- Intense emotions that are difficult to comfort or settle.
- Changes in sleep and appetite

Connect up with available support early, even if it is to check in.



SUPPORT SERVICES:

Speak to your **General Practitioner** to make a plan for support, including referral to a Psychologist

Employee Assistance and Psychological Service(EAPS): Support is available 24/7 for all NSW Ambulance employees, partners and families. Phone: **1300 360 364**

Speak to a **NSW Ambulance Chaplain**

Headspace (12-25 years): visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au) to find your nearest centre or call eheadspace on 1800 650 890

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or [kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

ReachOut: [reachout.com.au](https://www.reachout.com.au)

Visit the NSW Ambulance Families page for more details, including the support options that are available to NSW Ambulance staff.
www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/foassn

Supporting children during the COVID-19 pandemic

