

Coronavirus (COVID-19)



Advice for parents and carers to support children and young people

This fact sheet contains tips to help parents and carers have calm conversations with their children about COVID-19 – ensuring they have accurate information and their mental health and wellbeing is supported.



Pay extra attention to your child's emotions and needs

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people may be particularly worried. For parents, it's important to:

- recognise signs of increased anxiety, stress or worry;
- know that it is a normal reaction; and
- help children feel safe and supported.

You may notice changes in your children's behaviour, sleep, mood, or eating habits – these are all normal expressions of worry and by noticing and responding with care and support, you will help your children to feel better.



Be aware of your own behaviour

It's important to understand the effect your own behaviour can have on your children. If you're visibly upset or react in a way that suggests you're fearful, children will take their cues from you. Remain calm in your conversations with children and young people, and reassure them that, although this is an uncertain time, you are there to look after them and keep them safe.



Communication is important

There is a common misconception that talking with children and young people about a topic such as COVID-19 may increase their anxiety. However, research suggests that it usually has the opposite effect. For children, not having information is scary. Many children will fill in the blanks with their own imagination – often imagining something far worse than the truth. For older children, they may take to the internet for their answers, which can be misleading and overwhelming.

Children and young people need to feel informed and safe. Discussing COVID-19 openly with your children and answering their questions calmly will provide the opportunity to reassure them that they are safe and dispel any false information they may have heard in the media or through rumours.

With students now back at school, continuing to have conversations with your child about COVID-19 will help to minimise the anxiety they may feel when they hear new and sometimes contradictory information or advice.



Tell children the facts

Scary headlines attract attention and help sell newspapers but they don't always tell the whole truth. Ensuring you're armed with facts will help keep conversations calm, considered, and constructive. In discussions with children, it is important to emphasise that:

- Australia has slowed the spread of COVID-19 by putting in place measures such as physical distancing.
- The decision to allow students to return to school was based on health advice that it is safe for children to be at school.
- The majority of people who contract COVID-19 will have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, from which they will recover easily. Only a small minority of people may become very ill.
- We are lucky to live in a country where children are able to access prompt and high quality medical attention.
- The risk of serious illness for people their age who are in good health is low.

Sharing this information should help reassure children that there is no immediate risk to themselves, their friends, or their family



Coronavirus (COVID-19)



Explain what efforts are being made to contain the virus

Authorities responded quickly in Australia. Only Australian citizens can enter Australia and travel between states is restricted. Also, scientists in Australia and around the world are working hard to develop a vaccine and a treatment for the virus.

In Australia, the Government is continuing to carefully monitor and actively manage the situation – this is why advice for how to stay safe is updated often and restrictions are being lifted slowly. Children should be confident that anyone who has the virus and needs medical attention will receive high-quality treatment quickly in our world class hospitals.



Restricting exposure to news and social media

It is normal for children and young people to get overwhelmed by the constant discussions about COVID-19, which can lead to increased worry and anxiety. If parents and carers notice their children becoming anxious or scared due to the amount of information they are hearing about COVID-19 on the news or through social media, it may be necessary to encourage and assist them to take a break from the 24-hour news cycle and to focus on other things.



Focus attention away from COVID-19

Encourage children to engage in things at home that help them feel physically and emotionally safe (for example listening to music, playing a favourite game with the family, or doing some exercise in the home).

A great way to focus children's attention to other things and decrease their anxiety is to include wellbeing activities into their day. You can find suggested activities in the [Wellbeing Activities](#) booklet on the department's website.

It is also particularly important for children and young people to feel close to their immediate family and to continue to communicate with those people outside the family who are helpful to their wellbeing.



Finally, offer practical advice

Tell your children what you can all do to help slow the spread of COVID-19, including:

- Following the Queensland Government's guidelines about where you and your family can go and how many people you can interact with at one time.
- When at school, following the directions of teachers and other staff.
- Outside of school, avoiding close physical contact with people outside of those living in your household. This means having a distance of 1.5 to 2 metres between you and anybody else.
- Staying at home if unwell and avoiding contact with others outside of your immediate family.
- Coughing or sneezing into your elbow or a clean tissue.
- Keeping hands clean by washing them regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Available supports

Schools make a number of staff available to provide extra support to students who may be anxious and to provide information and advice to parents and carers. If you are concerned about your child's wellbeing, you can contact their school to ask what additional support might be available.

Support is also available through a number of Queensland Government agencies and community organisations. Parents and carers can:

- call 13Health (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
- review Queensland Health's [COVID-19 webpage](#) for the latest information and advice
- review headspace's [dedicated page about coping with stress related to COVID-19](#), or contact [headspace](#) for professional support
- review the Queensland Mental Health Commission's [supporting children and young people](#) website for further information and advice
- contact Lifeline Australia's telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 for information, referral and advice
- obtain help and information from the local General Practitioner or Community Health Centre.