



Helping children and young people cope with stress during the pandemic

There are some key actions you can consider to support your child or young person's mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic, including:

Listening to and acknowledging their concerns. Children and young people may respond to stress in different ways. Signs may be emotional (for example, they may be upset, distressed, anxious, angry or agitated), behavioural (for example, they may become more clingy or more withdrawn, or they may wet the bed), or physical (for example, they may experience stomach aches).

Look out for any changes in their behaviour. Children and young people may feel less anxious if they are able to express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Children and young people who communicate differently to their peers may rely on you to interpret their feelings. Listen to them, acknowledge their concerns and give them extra love and attention if they need it.

[MindEd for families](#) is a free online educational resource on children and young people's mental health for all adults, which can support parents and carers through these exceptional circumstances.

Providing clear information about the situation. Children and young people want to feel assured that their parents and carers can keep them safe. One of the best ways to achieve this is by talking openly about what is happening and providing honest answers to any questions they have, using words and explanations that they can understand. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe, including any actions they can take to help, such as washing their hands more often than usual.

There are resources available to help you do this, including the Children's Commissioner's [Children's Guide to Coronavirus](#), or the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have produced a [storybook developed by and for children around the world affected by COVID-19](#).

Make sure you use reliable sources of information such as [GOV.UK](#) or the [NHS website](#) – there is a lot of misleading information from other sources that can create stress for you and your family. It will not always be possible to provide answers to all the questions that children and young people may ask, or to address all their concerns, so focus on listening and acknowledging their feelings to help them feel supported.

Being aware of your own reactions. Remember that children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how you respond to the situation is very important. It is important to manage your own emotions and remain calm, speak kindly to them, and answer any questions they have honestly.

For further information on how to look after your own mental wellbeing during the pandemic, see the [guidance on how to look after your own mental health and wellbeing](#) or visit [Every Mind Matters](#).



Connecting regularly. If it is necessary for you and your children to be in different locations to normal, make sure you still have regular and frequent contact via the phone or video calls with them. Try to help your child understand what arrangements are being made for them and why in simple terms.

Support safe ways for children and young people to connect with their friends. Where it isn't possible for them to meet in person, they can connect online or via phone or video calls. For more advice on helping your children stay safe online, see this guidance on [staying safe online during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Creating a new routine. Life is changing for all of us for a while. Routine gives children and young people an increased feeling of safety in the context of uncertainty, so think about how to develop a new routine, especially if they are not at school:

- make a plan for the day or week that includes time for learning, playing and relaxing
- schools have started to welcome back more children, but if they have to stay home from school, ask teachers what you can do to support continued learning at home. The Department for Education has [published a list of recommended online educational resources for home schooling](#)
- encourage maintaining a balance between being online and offline and discover new ideas for activities to do from home if needed. The [Children's Commissioner guide](#) signposts to some ideas to help fight boredom
- children and young people ideally need to be active for 60 minutes a day, which can be more difficult when spending longer periods of time indoors. Plan time outside if you can do so safely or see [Change4Life](#) for ideas for indoor games and activities
- don't forget that sleep is important for mental and physical health, so try to keep to existing bedtime routines
- it may be tempting to give children and young people treats such as sweets or chocolate but this is not good for their health, especially as they may not be as physically active as normal. See [Change4Life](#) for ideas for healthy treats
- children under 18 that do not live in the same household as their parents or someone with parental responsibility can be moved between their parents' homes to continue existing arrangements

Limiting exposure to media and talking more about what they have seen and heard. Like adults, children and young people may become more distressed if they see repeated coverage about the COVID-19 pandemic in the media. A complete news blackout is also rarely helpful as they are likely to find information from other sources, such as online or through friends. Try to avoid turning the television off or closing web pages when children or young people come into the room. This can pique their interest to find out what is happening and their imagination can take over. Instead, consider limiting the amount of exposure you and your family have to media coverage.

Young people will also hear things from friends and get information from social media. Talk to them about what is happening and ask them what they have heard. Try to answer their questions honestly but reassure where you can.