

Talking to a child worried about coronavirus (COVID-19)

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxiety-mental-health/>

Talking about feelings and worries

- Encourage your child to talk to you or another trusted adult about how they're feeling. We've got tips on how and where to have difficult conversations. Remember, this doesn't always have to be face-to-face – they might find it easier writing their thoughts down. You could create a 'feelings box' where you all put good, sad or difficult feelings in and then talk about them at the end of the day.
- For younger children, play can be a great way to help them talk about their worries or give them a good distraction when they're upset. But not being able to play with their friends can be hard. Set aside time to play together and have fun.
- Your child might have a very real fear of the people they love and care for dying or getting seriously ill. It can be difficult but it's okay to have conversations about death. Marie Curie has advice on talking to children about death and Childline has advice for young people when someone dies.
- Some young people might be anxious about if there will be enough food. Have conversations about how what they might see in the news or online isn't always the same as what's happening. Involve them in food shopping and be mindful of conversations you might have with other adults about frustrations buying food.
- For children with eating disorders, worries about food can be really challenging. Talk to them about their worries and speak to Beat, the eating disorder charity, if you need advice. Read their advice on eating disorders and coronavirus (COVID-19) for up-to-date information and support.
- Rolling news and social media can cause a lot of anxiety. Remind children of the facts and explain what false or sensationalised information is. It's important to allow your children to ask questions about the things they see online. And if you don't know the answer, letting them know that some things aren't certain or known yet is okay.

Keep in touch with family and friends and balance screen time

- It's important to understand the huge impact of missing family, friends and schoolmates can have on children of all ages. Let your child express these emotions and don't minimise their feelings.
- Finding ways to have social interactions can be tricky, especially if you're worried about screen-time, but it's possible to find the right balance with using smartphones and webcams to keep in touch. Talk together about how you can all manage your screen-time as a family. The benefits of alleviating anxiety by staying connected to friends and family cannot be underestimated.

- With most socialising moving online, it's important to have conversations on how an increase in screen-time can have an impact on everyone's mental health and self-esteem. It's okay to let your children know that the way they might feel is a normal response to an abnormal situation.

Try to create structure and routine

- It's normal for a lack of routine and structure to make children and young people feel anxious and upset. It can be challenging to find a routine that works for everyone, especially if you're juggling working from home with taking care of children with different needs. A rota or timetable, even a loose one, can help alleviate anxiety. Structure can help children see what's happening next in the day, look forward to rest of the week and differentiate between weekdays and weekends.
- Finding practical things to do to alleviate anxiety and worries can feel tricky when you're mostly indoors. Some things you can try are yoga, mindfulness, puzzle games, crafting projects, cooking, exercise classes and growing plants from seeds.

Help give children a sense of control

Knowing how to talk to your child about their mental health, or recognising the signs that they might be struggling, can be really hard. Signs of depression or anxiety in children can sometimes look like normal behaviour, particularly in teenagers who can keep their feelings to themselves.

It's also natural for children or young people to feel stressed or anxious about things like exams or moving to a new school. But while these experiences can be very difficult, they're different from longer term depression or anxiety, which affect how a child or young person feels every day.

It can help to think about what's normal for your child and if you've noticed signs that they've been behaving differently recently.

Helping a child with anxiety or depression

Realising that your child may be struggling with their mental health and experiencing anxiety or depression can be hard to accept. Sometimes parents can feel like it's their fault or want to know why their child is struggling with a mental health problem. This is completely understandable, but the most important thing you can do is to reassure your child and not judge them for how they're feeling.

Ways to help a child who's struggling include:

- letting them know you're there for them and are on their side
- try talking to them over text or on the phone if they don't feel able to talk in person

- being patient and staying calm and approachable, even if their behaviour upsets you
- recognising that their feelings are valid and letting them know it's okay for them to be honest about what it's like for them to feel this way
- thinking of healthy ways to cope you could do together, like yoga, breathing exercises or mindfulness
- encouraging them to talk to their GP, someone at their school or [Childline](#). Especially if they're finding it hard to talk at home.
- take care of yourself and get support if you need to. Try not to blame yourself for what's happening and to stay hopeful about your child's recovery.

Childline

Childline is a free and confidential service for young people under 18. Children can talk to a trained counsellor over the phone, online via 1-2-1 chat or via email about anything that's worrying them, 24 hours a day. Many young people find it easier to be honest about their mental health with someone they don't know.

Childline also have lots of information and advice for young people on how to cope with mental health problems.

Their website also offers advice and coping techniques for:

- Depression
- Anxiety and managing anxiety
- Suicide and coping with suicidal feelings
- Eating problems and body image
- Building confidence and self-esteem
- Mental health and Child and adolescent mental health services.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/coronavirus/>

More help for children:

- **BBC's Newsround** has a [COVID-19 website](#) featuring a range of stories and videos on the outbreak
These include:
 - [Facts and myth-busting](#)
 - Newsround advice on [how to manage worries about COVID-19](#)