

Dear Parents,

In these challenging times it is critical that children continue to feel safe and connected while parents are provided with the support they need to support their children.

Concern over this new virus can make children and families anxious. While we don't know where and to what extent the disease may spread here in Australia, we do know that it is contagious, that the severity of illness can vary from individual to individual, and that there are steps we can take to prevent the spread of infection. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate prevention information and facts without causing undue alarm.

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

Specific Guidelines

Remain calm and reassuring

- Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions.
- What you say and do about COVID-19, current prevention efforts, and related events can either increase or decrease your children's anxiety.
- Emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine.
- Remind them that you and the adults around them are there to keep them safe and healthy.
- Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.

Make yourself available

- Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.
- It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them; make time for them.
- Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.

Avoid excessive blaming

- When tensions are high, sometimes we try to blame someone.
- It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people as responsible for the virus.
- Bullying or negative comments made toward others should be stopped.
- Be aware of any comments that other adults are having around your family. You may have to explain what comments mean if they are different than the values that you have at home.

Monitor television viewing and social media

- Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present.
- Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumours and inaccurate information.
- Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this can help reduce anxiety.
- Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety—avoid this.
- Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.

Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible

- Keep to a regular schedule as much as possible, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.
- Encourage your children to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities (if possible), but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

Be honest and accurate

- In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.
- Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with COVID-19.
- Children can be told this disease is thought to be spread between people who are in close contact with one another—when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- It is also thought it can be spread when you touch an infected surface or object, which is why it is so important to protect yourself.
- For additional factual information check the official government website <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

Know the symptoms of COVID-19

- The CDC believes these symptoms appear in a few days after being exposed to someone with the disease or as long as 14 days after exposure:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness for breath

- For some people the symptoms are like having a cold; for others they are quite severe or even life threatening. In either case it is important to check with your child's healthcare provider (or yours) and follow instructions about staying home or away from public spaces to prevent the spread of the virus.

Review and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices for protection

- Encourage your child to practice every day good hygiene—simple steps to prevent spread of illness:

- Wash hands multiple times a day for at least 20 seconds (singing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star slowly takes about 20 seconds).
- Cover their mouths with a tissue when they sneeze or cough and throw away the tissue immediately, or sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow. Do not share food or drinks.
- Practice giving fist or elbow bumps instead of handshakes. Fewer germs are spread this way.

- Giving children guidance on what they can do to prevent infection gives them a greater sense of control over disease spread and will help to reduce their anxiety.
- Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly; this will help them develop a strong immune system to fight off illness.

Take Time to Talk

You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, don't avoid giving them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

When sharing information, it is important make sure to provide facts without promoting a high level of stress, remind children that adults are working to address this concern, and give children actions they can take to protect themselves. Information is rapidly changing about this new virus—to have the most correct information stay informed by accessing <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

Keep Explanations Age Appropriate

- Young school children need brief, simple information that should balance COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as “adults are working hard to keep you safe.”
- Older school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from rumour and fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading.

Suggested Points to Emphasize When Talking to Children

- Adults at home and school are taking care of your health and safety. If you have concerns, please talk to an adult you trust.
- Not everyone will get the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease. School and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.
- It is important that all students treat each other with respect and not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have COVID-19.
- There are things you can do to stay health and avoid spreading the disease:
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Stay home when you are sick. o Cover your cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Wash hands often with soap and water (20 seconds). o If you don't have soap, use hand sanitizer (60–95% alcohol based).
 - Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

Wellbeing resources

URSTRONG, are providing parents with **free lifetime access to their URSTRONG Family membership**. To access your complimentary membership, please visit here (<https://urstrong.com/shop/parent-membership/>) and use the coupon code **URSTRONG**.

URSTRONG has also launched a virtual **URSTRONG Classroom** that will provide free friendship lessons directly to children. These classes will ensure that students stay connected to other children. All of the classes can be found here (<https://urstrong.com/events/>) and below are some of the initial offerings:

- Friendship Mapping (March 25)
 - Friendship Goals (March 27)
 - We're all Potatoes at Heart (March 30)
 - Kind-on-Purpose (April 1)
 - Forgiveness (April 3)
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- Mindfulness activities – <https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-kids/>
 - Mental Health activities for children - <https://www.kingdomofbaby.com/mental-health-activities-for-kids/>
 - Interactive mental health games - <https://mentalhealthdeltadivision.com/interactive-games/>
 - Fun mental health games - printable worksheets <https://printableworksheets.in/?dq=Fun%20Mental%20Health%20And%20Games>
 - Mental health activity sheets – www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/feeling-good-promoting-childrens-mental-health-activity-sheets-for-children/
 - Prep specific activities – <https://www.brighthubeducation.com/preschool-crafts-activities/125389-collection-of-fitness-and-health-activities/>
 - <https://mommypoppins.com/family/coronavirus-pandemic-update-indoor-activities-resources-kids>
 - <https://mommypoppins.com/weekend-events/virtual-things-to-do-storytimes-concerts-and-more-kids-events-to>

As a school, we are committed to the social-emotional wellbeing of our students. We hope that you take advantage of these opportunities, as we know that relationships are the heart of wellbeing.

Thank you,
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9 MENTAL HEALTH ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH YOUR CHILDREN

 @BELIEVEPHQ



WORRY TIME

- Set aside a time each day for your child worry. Discuss with your child how long the worry time will be for. In this time your child can write down their worries, discuss them with your or problem solve to overcome them

THOUGHT CHALLENGING

- Help your child to write down any unhelpful thoughts they that experience. Try to challenge them with your child and come up with more realistic and helpful ones

BEING PRESENT



- Help your child to be present and live in the moment. Go for a walk and see how many different things you can both take in with all your senses

ACTIVITY PLANNING



- Create an activity diary with your child and help them to schedule in some pleasurable and achievement related activities

TALKING ABOUT FEELINGS

- Why not create a time each week where your child can speak to you about their thoughts and feelings



3 GOOD THINGS



- Before bed spend some time with your child to identify and write down three good things they achieved from the day

WELLBEING



- Support your child to look after their wellbeing. Cook healthy meals with them, exercise or play sport with them and make sure they are getting enough sleep

IMAGERY

- Work with your child to imagine themselves in an imaginary future where everything has turned out in a positive way

THOUGHT TESTING

- Try setting out some simple activities to help your child test out the validity of a thought.

