



Helping children manage in unsettling times

The Coronavirus outbreak has led to lots of worry, uncertainty and concern. The issue is in the news everyday, and all adults and children will have some degree of awareness of what is happening.

During these times both children and adults can feel anxious and unsure about their safety. Alongside school, parents and carers can help provide opportunities to talk about big feelings and worries in a safe place, as well as keeping a sense of normality, routine and calm. Supporting children will enable them to process and manage their feelings and help them build resilience.

Signs that someone may be becoming overwhelmed with anxiety:

- Noticing your mind becoming **preoccupied** with stressful events, you find it hard to think about other things
- Becoming **more sensitive** towards news or information, the person may become emotional when they wouldn't usually
- Having **trouble staying focused** or concentrating on things
- Having **trouble falling asleep, or waking up** in the night
- Shallow breathing, faster heartbeat
- **Constantly checking social media** or news sources



For younger children this may look like:

- **Needing more cuddles, nurture and reassurance**
- **Asking lots of questions**
- **Not being able to manage their emotions**, so they may become angry or upset more than usual
- They may begin to **try and take control** over things, trying to do things more in the way they want to
- **Finding it difficult to be still** or to focus
- **Changes to sleeping or eating patterns**
- **Becoming focussed on bugs or germs** and hand washing



However, there are lots of things we can do to help:

- 1 **Reassure children that they are safe:** Children will need to be reassured regularly they are safe, and that adults will always try to keep them safe.
- 2 **Let children know that it is alright to be upset:** Tell children all feelings are OK, but help them to find safe ways to express these.





3 **Stick to routines.** Uncertainty can be challenging for people, sticking to routines and making things clear and predictable is important to help children feel they are safe. Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping children and young people calm and happy. Using resources such as visual timetables can be very helpful to help children understand these routines, particularly if some things change. Set up a work/exercise routine for children at home. Make extra time to listen to what your children need to tell you.

4 **Place an emphasis on resilience and strengths:** Focus on the child's skills, in terms of their daily life. Help them see they have many strengths to help them cope if feeling anxious or upset.



5 **Look for opportunities to help others:** Acts of charity and humanity help to restore positivity about the world and help them understand the importance of empathy and kindness.

6 **Provide opportunities for physical exercise:** Exercise is valuable in developing natural chemicals in the brain to help us cope with feelings such as shock or worry.

7 **Communicate any concerns:** If you have any worries or concerns about your child's emotional behaviour please do let the virtual school know. There will be things we can do to help further.

8 **Look after yourself:** A time of stress can mean less energy and more potential for illness for you, as well as others. So please take care of yourself.



9 **Connect with others** - provide opportunities for both you and your children to spend time talking to and spending time with people who make you happy. Avoid only talking about the coronavirus.

10 **Try some breathing and mindfulness exercises:**

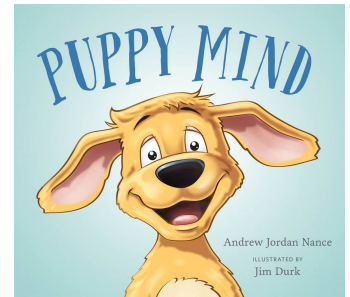
- If you don't know much about mindfulness yourself, why don't you **learn about mindfulness together.** Do some research and learn about how and why mindfulness has been shown to help children and adults regulate their emotions, feel calmer and more focussed.
- **Bubble breaths** - this is a lovely, fun activity where children learn how to breathe big deep breaths. Practice deep breathing without the bubbles then try to make the biggest bubble you can with a big deep breath that you let





out in a controlled way. Who can make the biggest bubble?

- **5 finger breathing** - Have children spread one hand out like a star. Then instruct them to use the index finger on their other hand to trace the outline of their 'star hand'. On the inhale move the index finger to the top of the thumb. On the exhale move the index finger down between the thumb and first finger. On the next inhale move to the top of the first finger and on the exhale move down between the first and second finger. Repeat until children have taken five slow, deep breaths (or more if needed for them to feel calmer and more relaxed). You can do it alongside children to demonstrate and feel calmer yourself!
- There are lots of lovely **mindfulness books**, a good example is 'Puppy Mind' by Andrew Jordan Nance. If you can't put your hands on an actual copy of the book, you can hear it read here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xd7Cr265zgc>
- **Mindfulness colouring** - there are lots of free mindfulness colouring resources online, or there are books full of different designs
- Lots of different **mindfulness apps** have free sections or free trials e.g. Headspace, Smiling Mind and Calm.



If you are concerned about the young person's welfare please contact one call, if you need support from the Virtual School, email us and we'll get back to you.

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