

Learning Bulletin

Supporting our school ethos and vision for learning

What to do if your child's anxious about Coronavirus...

Adjusting to change

The developments of Coronavirus have resulted in sudden, dramatic changes for most people and this can cause anxiety for adults and children alike.



Lots of things we have previously taken for granted have changed, including our usual routines: many of us are now schooling or working from home; we have been advised to avoid using public transport cafes and restaurants are closed; and most large gatherings have been cancelled.

Teenagers may be especially anxious about not being able to see their friends often, if at all. So the first thing to do is to acknowledge that things have changed and that life as we know it at the moment is not normal. This is not to say that you shouldn't strive to introduce new structure and routines to create as much normality as possible, but recognising that things are different helps make that adjustment sooner. Remember also, these changes are temporary. Make sure you know the facts so you can provide reassurance.

Get talking

Talk to your children and explain what's happening and listen to how they feel. Their perspective and concerns are unlikely to be aligned with your priorities, so find out what's worrying for them.

Help them understand that for most people, coronavirus will result in a short-term temporary illness from which they will fully recover; however, it is very contagious which is why strict measures have been put in place to reduce the risk of people passing it on to one another and to try and avoid everyone being ill at the same time.

Being online

Online resources are great for staying up-to-date and getting the latest information, but they are also a magnet for alarmist stories and scaremongering, especially amongst social media where articles and opinions are widely shared without first checking for accuracy. Check what your children are reading online and enforce regular breaks so they are not barraging themselves with information (or possibly misinformation) through every waking minute, as this can result in reinforcing panicky feelings.

Take care of their physical health by making sure they eat well, get plenty of sleep and stay active. Also, adopt practises to improve their mental health and reduce feelings of panic, such as deep breathing, meditating and spending time in a soothing environment. Importantly, stay connected. We may not be able to attend social gatherings and get together, but we can stay in touch with those we love using social media, messaging and telephone calls. It's very important to do this, as isolation and the possible over-thinking without distraction, is very

poor for mental health.

Signs of anxiety and stress

It's good to be aware of the signs of anxiety and stress so you can watch out for them. A change in behaviour for a day or two might be nothing to worry about, but if you notice a regular change, then it's usually a sign that something is wrong.



Some of the more common signs of anxiety include:

- Losing interest in things they've previously enjoyed;
- Behaving in the opposite way to usual – quiet children can become very chatty, chatty children can get withdrawn;
- Being grumpy and irritable;
- Lots of headaches and digestive problems (stomach aches, diarrhoea, constipation, vomiting etc);
- Worrying all the time, this can show itself in only picturing negative outcomes (what if I fail, I'm going to fail, I can't do this);
- Talking over and over the same concern and being unable to either stop thinking about it or to find relief;
- Physical symptoms (sweaty palms, shaking, fast heartbeat, aching muscles); Restlessness and being unable to stay still;
- Inability to concentrate (such as taking in what's happening in a TV programme);
- Panic attacks;
- Not sleeping.

Remember to keep perspective. If they have had several late nights, they are likely to be tired and this increases irritability. If they've been exercising, they might have aching muscles. If they've just run to meet you, they'll have a fast heart rate. Individual or a short-term combination of the above symptoms are normal.

How to help

If you notice your child is suffering, it's time to help them. That doesn't always mean you stepping in (that could add to the anxiety) although it's good to let them know you've noticed something's wrong and give them a chance to talk to you if they want to. Avoid broaching the subject in front of others, this could make them feel embarrassed or inadequate and make them feel worse (they might think they are doing a job good of hiding it). Don't forget, the aim isn't to eliminate anxiety but to teach them how to

manage it. There are two ways to help. Encourage them to take part in an activity that will provide a distraction so they stop thinking about whatever is making them anxious. Giving the brain some time out from worrying can help obtain a better perspective later.

Physical activities – it doesn't matter what activity - dancing, football, swimming, walking – so long as it's something they enjoy, gets their endorphins flowing and requires focus so the mind is concentrating on something different. If you have a garden or park nearby (and are not restricted to staying at home) make the most of it and get them to visit daily. If you are restricted to home and don't have a garden, try doing something active inside, perhaps following an online exercise workout, dancing or walking from room to room. Sitting still all day is a sure way to get cabin fever!

Music – Music has an amazing ability to transport you to a different time and place. Anything that evokes positive memories and experiences is a good thing. To reduce anxiety, it's better to listen to relaxing and calming music rather than something that stimulates.

Talking – it may not be to you! A sibling, grandparent, family friend or friend at school or perhaps a charity chatline. Expressing worries out loud can sometimes make them feel less significant than when they're playing on loop in the mind. Talking aloud also encourages finding their own solutions – prompts such as 'what would need to happen to make you feel better', can help them reframe to seeking solutions rather than dwelling on troubles.

Avoiding stimulants – bright lights, loud music, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, too much excitement (a thrilling computer game, exciting movie) can all promote adrenaline production and increase feelings of anxiety, so these are best avoided. Reducing lighting (have dimmable lights or table lamps in the bedroom) also helps to increase feelings of calm and can help prepare for sleep.

Please visit the Mental Health & Wellbeing page on our website for further support and advice:

<https://thetutorialfoundation.co.uk/mental-health-wellbeing/>