

# Coronavirus (COVID-19)



## Advice for parents and carers to support children and young people

*This fact sheet contains tips to help parents and carers have calm conversations with their children about Coronavirus – ensuring they have accurate information and their mental health and wellbeing is supported.*



### Pay extra attention to your child's emotions and needs

During the Coronavirus pandemic, children and young people may be particularly worried. For parents, it's important to:

- recognise signs of increased anxiety, stress or worry;
- know that it is a normal reaction; and
- help children feel safe and supported.

You may notice changes in your children's behaviour, sleep, mood, or eating habits – these are all normal expressions of worry and by noticing and responding with care and support, you will help your children to feel better.



### Be aware of your own behaviour

It's important to understand the effect your own behaviour can have on your children. If you're visibly upset or react in a way that suggests you're fearful, children will take their cues from you. Remain calm in your conversations with children and young people, and reassure them that, although this is an uncertain time, you are there to look after them and keep them safe.



### Communication is important

There is a common misconception that talking with children and young people about a topic such as Coronavirus may increase their anxiety. However, research suggests that it usually has the opposite effect. For children, not having information is scary. Many children will fill in the blanks with their own imagination – often imagining something far worse than the truth. For older children, they may take to the internet for their answers, which can be misleading and overwhelming.

Children and young people need to feel informed and safe. Discussing Coronavirus openly with your children and answering their questions calmly will provide the opportunity to reassure them that they are safe and dispel any false information they may have heard in the media or through rumours.

With the situation changing rapidly, conversations about Coronavirus should take place regularly between you and your children. This will help to minimise the anxiety they may feel when they hear new and sometimes contradictory information or advice.



### Tell children the facts

Scary headlines attract attention and help sell newspapers but they don't always tell the whole truth. Ensuring you're armed with facts will help keep conversations calm, considered, and constructive. In discussions with children, it is important to emphasise that:

- Although the number of confirmed cases of Coronavirus in Australia is increasing, measures are being put in place to help to slow the spread of the virus.
- The majority of people who contract Coronavirus will have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, from which they will recover easily. Only a small minority of people may become very ill.
- We are lucky to live in a country where children will be able to access prompt and high quality medical attention.
- The risk of serious illness for people their age who are in good health is low.

Sharing this information should help reassure children that there is no immediate risk to themselves, their friends, or their family.



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## Explain what efforts are being made to contain the virus

Authorities are responding quickly. Travel in and out of Australia has been restricted, with only Australian citizens and residents being allowed back into the country. Also, scientists in Australia and around the world are working hard to develop a vaccine and a treatment for the virus.

In Australia, the Government is carefully monitoring and actively managing the situation – this is why advice for how to stay safe is updated often. Children should be confident that anyone who has the virus and needs medical attention will receive high-quality treatment quickly in our world class hospitals.



## Restricting exposure to news and social media

It is normal for children and young people to get overwhelmed by the constant discussions about Coronavirus, which can lead to increased worry and anxiety. If parents and carers notice their children becoming anxious or scared due to the amount of information they are hearing about Coronavirus on the news or through social media, it may be necessary to encourage and assist them to take a break from the 24-hour news cycle and to focus on other things.



## Focus attention away from Coronavirus

Encourage children to engage in things at home that help them feel physically and emotionally safe (for example listening to music, playing a favourite game with the family, or doing some exercise in the home).

A great way to focus children's attention to other things and decrease their anxiety is to include wellbeing activities into their learning day. You can find suggested activities in the [Wellbeing Activities for Learning at Home](#) booklet on the department's [learning@home](#) webpage.

It is also particularly important for children and young people to feel close to their immediate family who they are living with and, where possible, continue to communicate with those people outside the family (by telephone or video calls) who are helpful to their wellbeing.



## Finally, offer practical advice

Tell your children what you can all do to help slow the spread of Coronavirus, including:

- Staying at home as much as possible and only going outside to exercise with your family or to collect food/medical supplies or attend medical appointments.
- Avoiding close physical contact with people outside of those living in your household. This means having a distance of 1.5 to 2 metres between you and anybody else, except for people who live with you in your home.
- Staying at home if unwell and avoiding contact with others outside of your immediate family.
- Coughing or sneezing into your elbow or a clean tissue.
- Keeping hands clean by washing them regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

## Available supports

Schools make a number of staff available to provide extra support to students who may be anxious and to provide information and advice to parents and carers. If you are concerned about your child's wellbeing, you can contact their school to ask what additional support might be available.

Support is also available through a number of Queensland Government agencies and community organisations. Parents and carers can:

- call 13Health (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
- review Queensland Health's [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the latest information and advice
- review headspace's [dedicated page about coping with stress related to Coronavirus](#), or contact [headspace](#) for professional support
- review the Queensland Mental Health Commission's [supporting children and young people](#) website for further information and advice
- contact Lifeline Australia's telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 for information, referral and advice
- obtain help and information from the local General Practitioner or Community Health Centre.