

Barnardo's School Counselling Services

Surviving the Coronavirus Crisis - Information for Parents and Carers

These are worrying times for us all. If you have concerns for your child right now, here are some things to think about and do to help you through the worry and uncertainty.

1. Notice any Changes for your Child



Think about how your child has been since school closed. Have you noticed any changes? Maybe they are more active and noisy, or more quiet and withdrawn? Are there more questions? Do small things upset? Does your child need more reassurance or want to be more close than usual? Are bedtimes more difficult, hard for your child to settle? Whatever the change, it is probably a sign that your child is struggling to make sense of these new and strange times. It's important to bear in mind that being quieter doesn't necessarily mean your child is doing OK. It's likely a sign that they deal with changes by being more withdrawn and introverted.

2. Communicate and Connect



When you speak to your child about any changes you've noticed in a supportive way - not being negative or judgemental – this really helps them feel understood. They feel you get it. You know that things are tough. It shows that you want to help them get through all the changes that are happening. Pick your communication moment carefully! Maybe when your child is having a morning snack, or while you are sitting quietly on the sofa together, or during a quiet-time before bed. Ask your child how they are with the virus situation. Listen to them. Don't ask lots of questions. Gently speak about any differences you've noticed in how they've been. If they're reluctant to talk, you can name some of the changes that other people are coping with and the things they are worried about, like:

- not being at school
- being away from friends
- not having the usual routines
- not being able to go out to play
- being worried about the illness
- worrying about grandparents or other family members getting sick and dying
- hearing all the bad news on TV
- the international scale of the virus.

3. Reassure and Normalise



Naming fears with your child helps to reassure them that their worries are normal. All their reactions – including your own - are normal responses to this *abnormal situation*. This is a key message to give to yourself and your children. Don't hide. Don't pretend that things are OK. But don't overdo the negative information either. Try and find a balance. Limit your child's exposure to the news. Acknowledge that the virus is real and that it's a big issue for everyone. You don't need to pretend you have all the answers, but you should also reassure your child that the government, scientists and medical staff are working really hard. They are learning everyday about the virus, trying to stop it spreading and helping people recover.

4. Find a Routine that Works



Routines help us feel safe and secure. They help manage worry and anxiety. When there's a big change in life, routines help us get through. With school out and many parents working from home, finding a routine that works is a basic survival strategy for the whole family. Agree a time for getting up in the morning – keep it similar to when school was open – and make sure that you have breakfast together. Find a balance during the day that includes a mix of:

- **Active time** *garden sports, online workouts etc.* (approx. 1 hour)
- **School time** *as set by teachers, 1 timeslot before & 1 after lunch* (approx. 2.5 hours)
- **Creative/Fun time** *drawing, cooking, crafting, playing an instrument* (approx. 1 hour)
- **Chores time** *helping with simple chores around the house* (approx. 30 mins)
- **Quiet time** *reading, puzzles, listening to music, nap* (approx. 1 hour)
- **Free time** *devices/screens, TV, play cards* (limit device time to 2 hours per day)
- **Family time** *sharing meals (without screen!), board games, family movie night etc.*

5. Remember Who's in Your Corner



At this time of social distancing it's more important than ever that you remember who's in your corner. And it's so important for your kids too. Spend time with your child talking about all the people that matter to them and who care for them. Make a big picture of all the main players in your family's support network. Think about ways to keep in touch via texting, group chat, phone and video calls. For older relatives and any friends or family in the 'vulnerable' group encourage your child to keep in touch. Think of ways you can all show kindness during this period of lockdown. Finding ways to *feel connected* during this time of actual separation is key to surviving these strange and unsettling times.

Remember to get support for yourself if you are feeling distressed or anxious. The calmer you feel, the better you will be able to support your child's anxieties. Talk to family members, friends or a professional counsellor. It's not selfish to get support for yourself. It's ultimately about finding ways to be calm enough to support your own family.

6. Human Connection will get us Through



Being human means being connected. It's what humans do. We are born with a need to connect to others and to show empathy. It's how we survive tough times. We buffer and shield each other. Make every effort you can to stay connected to your friends and family in whatever ways are possible.

In the end our ability to connect with and support one another will get us through these difficult Coronavirus days. There are tough times ahead. But they will not last. We *will* get through. *Together.*