

Supporting your child's emotional wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak

Just like us adults, children might be experiencing a variety of difficult emotions in response to the current uncertainty we are experiencing. Young children don't always have the words to express their difficult feelings. Therefore, anxiety and other emotions can be expressed through their actions and behaviours. A few examples might be

- Tummy aches or headaches
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Angry outbursts
- Tearful
- Nightmares
- Refusal to engage
- Seeking more attention than usual



If your child is experiencing any of the above feelings, they might need you to help them recognise this.

"You've had lot's of tummy aches recently, that's no fun. I'm wondering if you might be feeling a bit worried about things?"

Things I can say instead of 'don't worry'

Tolerating our children's challenging feelings can be tough. It can trigger our own distress and we can worry that giving time to difficult feelings might make them worse. We might say things like 'try not to worry about it,' or 'it won't happen to us.'

When we empathise with our children's feelings, we begin helping to soothe their distress.

Here are a few things you can say instead of 'don't worry'

- "It does feel scary doesn't it, you aren't alone in feeling like this"
- "I have scary feelings too sometimes"
- Just be there and sit with them
- Help them to understand more about coronavirus and why we have to stay at home, using age appropriate language (at the end of this document there are some useful resources to help you with this).



Structure

There are lot's of things that can help children to process and manage overwhelming feelings in times of uncertainty. Times of uncertainty and change naturally give rise to feelings of anxiety as we are unable to predict what is going to happen.

Creating a consistent structure can help children to feel in control of their environment and therefore, reduce stress and anxiety. It is important to find a daily structure that works for you and your family.

Below are some of the key things we feel could be included into your daily structure support your child's wellbeing.

1:1 time

Movement

**Mindfulness/
relaxation**

**Play and
creativity**

Learning

Fresh air

Keep reading for more ideas...

1:1 time

Children thrive on 1:1 time with their parents/ carers. At Clear Sky, we call it 'You and Me Time.' It can be difficult to find the time or headspace for 1:1 playtimes every day, particularly if you have more than 1 child. Here's what's great, just 20-30 minutes per week can be enough.

Below are our top tips for enjoying some 1:1 time with your children:

- **Add it to the weekly schedule - at the same time, on same day, for the same amount of time each week**
- **Let your child lead/ choose what they want to do with the time**
- **You and Me Time happens even if the child has expressed challenging behaviours or has broken rules throughout the day (some 1:1 time is probably what they need)**
- **Introduce some safe but gentle boundaries such as 'we look after you, we look after me and we look after anything we choose to play with during You and Me Time**
- **Remind the child of the rules if they are struggling to stick to them.**



Movement

Building regular movement breaks into your day can help children to regulate difficult feelings, to focus and to sleep better.

Here's an activity that you can introduce into your schedule

- Together with your children, create some movement cards. They can choose some movements to write on them and draw a picture/ decorate them if they'd like to
- Some ideas could be

Skipping
(imaginary rope)

Running on
the spot

Big stretch

Jumping
jacks

Do a silly
dance

Press ups

- Put all of the cards into a pot
- Pull out a card, set a 30 second timer and perform the movement until the timer stops
- Choose 10 cards (5 minutes of movement) before moving onto your next daily activity.



Mindfulness & Relaxation

Mindfulness is about awareness in the present moment. This includes being aware of your thoughts and feelings, your body and what is happening around you. With the current change and uncertainty we are facing, focusing on the here and now feels more difficult. Taking time to breathe and give our minds a break from thinking can help soothe and calm any difficult feelings being experienced.

The following activity is used by our therapists to support children in feeling grounded and calm at the end of a session.

Teddy breathing

- Ask your child to choose a soft toy
- Ask them to lay on their back with their soft toy on their tummy
- As you count to three, ask them to breathe in through their nose, filling up their belly. They should be able to watch their soft toy rise up as they breathe
- Count to three and ask them to breathe out through their mouth as they watch their soft toy gently lower
- Practice up to 10 times, or more if you are really enjoying it.

Parents, it is extremely important that you too are getting your own downtime to rest and recuperate. At the end of this resource is a link to some free online guided relaxations for both you and your little ones.



Play

Play is essential for playings sake and every child needs the time and space to play. When children play they have an opportunity to explore their world. They can test out and try new things or new ways of being; they build resilience by experiencing failure and having another go.

It is important to make space for play every day. Finding a balance between making time for free play where children can choose what they want to do (providing it's safe) and also some play that is guided by an adult.

Below is one of our favourite games. It's great to play before getting stuck into creative writing, art or other creative activities as it encourages spontaneity.

Anything can be anything

- Pick an object (anything will do, a stick, a tea towel...)
- Explain that "this object can become whatever you want it to be"
- You say "This is not a stick, this is " and mime what it is
- Your child/ children have to guess what you are pretending it is (it really can be anything, a horse, a wand, an earring, a steering wheel, a phone...)
- Pass the object to your child and let them have a go...




Learning

There is a lot of pressure on parents and carers to become teachers right now and it is of course important that children are presented with the opportunity of their right to an education.

Hopefully school have got you covered on your learning materials. Try not to get disheartened if your child is struggling to remain focussed and get all of their work completed. Every child needs their own balance of learning, movement, play and relaxation.

Get creative with what you are learning, let them make up a dance routine, draw the flowers in the garden and learn about the bees. Take time to think about relationships and learn about empathy, fix a bike, grow some vegetables...

Children often have a positive relationship with their teacher. The child could create a notebook out of paper, and at the end of each day, they can write a note to their teacher, letting them know what they have done. They can give it to them when we get back to school!



Remember that learning can take many forms. For example, you can bake and do maths whilst measuring out the ingredients.

Further Resources

Explaining Coronavirus in child friendly language

Tips for talking to children about corona virus (from the UK mental health foundation)

<https://mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/talking-to-children>

Free downloadable picture books for primary aged children to help them understand Corona Virus

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

<https://nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2/?>

[fbclid=IwAR1GVgFeDXI9EZK6Rvtd0wNw8zgdjsct8cgzhYe00dchUmTF9d71rsN8FZ8](https://www.facebook.com/nursedottybooks/?fbclid=IwAR1GVgFeDXI9EZK6Rvtd0wNw8zgdjsct8cgzhYe00dchUmTF9d71rsN8FZ8)

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Story-about-Coronavirus.pdf>

Movement

Search 'PE with Joe Wicks' on Youtube, for a 30 minute class Monday-Friday at 9am

Mindfulness and Relaxation

Tamara Levitt has made some of the content from the 'Calm' app freely accessible for this current time. The below link has resources for both adults and children.

<https://blog.calm.com/take-a-deep-breath>

Further Resources Continued

Play

Keep checking in with us, we will be releasing some documents on attachment games, movement games and creative games that you can play with your child/ children

Learning

If you are having trouble getting all of your learning done on paper, the radio times share some of whats online and on TV whilst we are off of school

<https://www.radiotimes.com/news/tv/2020-03-26/kids-entertainment-tv/>

Stay tuned,
we'll be sharing
more games that you
can play alongside
some useful tips on
emotional support
and building a
secure relationship
with your little ones

