

## Helping children and young people manage in unsettling times

The Coronavirus outbreak has led to a high degree of worry, uncertainty and concern. The spread of the disease and its implications for everyday life has been very present in the news, and in daily conversation. Some young people may already have had their lives disrupted.

During these times both children and adults can potentially feel anxious and unsure about their safety. School staff and parents/carers can help provide opportunities where feelings can be discussed within a safe context, at the same time as maintaining a sense of normality, routine and calm. Supporting children will enable them to process and manage their feelings and help build resilience.

You may find the following suggestions helpful (some of these are adapted from advice shared by the Chinese International School in Hong Kong):

- **Reassure children and young people that they are safe:** Children benefit from regular reassurance that they are safe, and being reminded that adults will do what they can to keep them safe.
- **Let children know that it is alright to be upset:** Reassure children all feelings are OK.
- **Maintain a normal routine:** In school, this is more straightforward. **At home try** to set up a work/leisure/exercise routine there. Many parents will be maintaining their own work from home, so the abundance of useful activities being shared on social media might offer support. Lots of these resources are being shared freely and widely by groups of parents who already home educate. They can be found by doing an internet search too.
- **Emphasise their resilience and strengths:** Focus on the strengths of our children and young people, in terms of their daily life. Help them to see and acknowledge that they have many strengths to help them cope if they are feeling anxious or upset. As above, communication can be used as a key strength by us all just now.
- **Look for opportunities to help others:** Acts of kindness, charity and humanity help to restore positivity about the world. We all know this phrase by now:

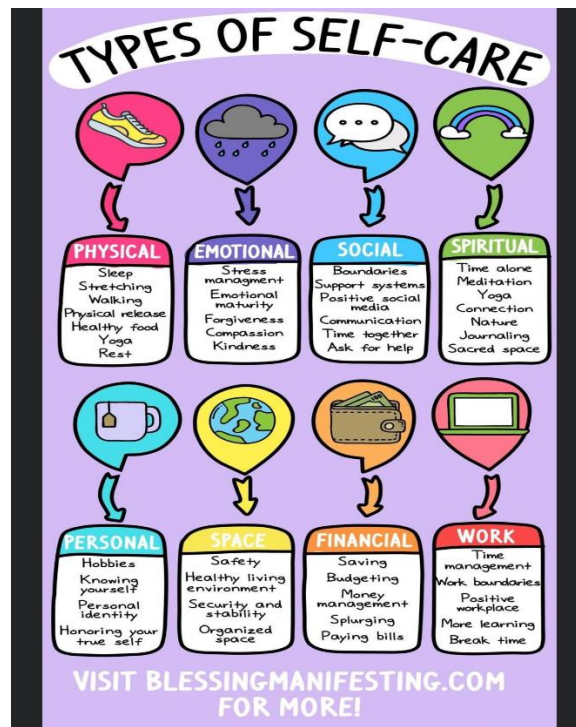


- **Provide opportunities for children to be honest about their feelings:** Sharing worries or feelings of upset with teachers or family members can help to reduce a sense of vulnerability and isolation, and it can raise optimism and self-esteem. Checking in with children and young people to see if they have any worries can help them start these conversations. Take cues from the child – invite them to share what they have heard and how they feel. The crucial thing is, if you can, make extra time to listen to what children need to tell you.
- **Try to help children and young people separate fact from fiction:** The information being shared about coronavirus is plentiful, and changes rapidly, and, as adults, it can be hard to know what is evidence-based, and what is speculation. Children and young people are naturally curious and even more so if they are worried. It is the adults' job, as far as possible, to separate fact from fiction. Try to answer their questions rather than volunteering too much information as this might be a little overwhelming. It is of course okay to let children know if you're unsure of the answer; even though we don't know the answers to everything now, let

them know that you will keep them informed. Consider limiting news and social media exposure.

Being available is what matters most. Attached is a social story (copyright permission granted) which might be useful for helping to explain some of the current changes to our young people with ASD and to others with additional support needs.

- **Provide opportunities for physical exercise:** Exercise can be a valuable way of developing natural chemicals in the brain to help us cope with difficult emotions like shock and anxiety.
- **Continue to keep in contact with family and friends:** Let children know it is still okay and important to have fun and to plan nice things to do together taking account of any restrictions in place. Use technology as a way of keeping in touch.
- **Communicate any concerns with school:** If parents/carers have any concerns about their child coping with the current situation, please do let the school know. There will be things the school can do to help further.
- **It is important to look after yourself too:** A time of stress can mean less energy and more potential for illness for you, as well as others. If you're feeling anxious or worried, it probably isn't the right time to answer your child's concerns. So please take care of yourself. Some suggestions for self-care are attached.



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