

Supporting children during unsettled times

We are currently experiencing unsettled times. We may be concerned and worried about what the next few months will have in store for all of us.

However, we know from previous experience that children of all ages and stages do best when they are supported by the adults who are closest to them. The ideas below are suggestions about how you can support your child and yourself during this time.

Offering a listening ear



Depending on their age, children will have already picked up a lot of information about COVID-19 from school, their friends, social media, the news, or from listening to and watching the reactions of others around them (including their parents/carers). It is important to provide opportunities for children to express their thoughts and feelings about the current situation. Children will often express their feelings through their behaviour. Try to remember that all changes in behaviour (including acting out) could be a way of expressing worry about what is going to happen over the next few months.

Offer reassurance

Depending on their age, reassurance to a child may mean more family time and attention, or reminders that they are safe and that you are there to look after them. Let your child know that it is normal to be worried and upset sometimes. If your child does see you getting upset, use this as an opportunity for them to learn that these feelings won't last forever.

Friends also offer support and reassurance for children and young people. Limits on social contact could be particularly difficult for older children and responsible use of social media may help them to feel connected.

Provide the right amount of accurate information

It is important that you offer honest answers to your child's questions about COVID-19. Give them factual information but adjust the amount and detail to fit their age.



The NHS provides updated, accurate information i.e. at www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus or via NHS Lanarkshire's dedicated web page at www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/coronavirus.

Factual information provided by a trusted adult can help to reduce worry and avoid children jumping to unhelpful conclusions. However, always remember to adjust the information you provide by thinking about the age of your child, and their ability to cope and process information. For example an S3 child will be able to understand the concept of a pandemic, but a p4 child will cope better if you explain that there is a bug going around that can make people feel a bit unwell and that most people recover.

Emphasise strengths, hope and helping

Focus on your own and your child's strengths to get through this time, and remind your child of the many strengths they have to help them cope when they feel worried.

Sometimes thinking and talking about helping others can make us feel better. For example, telephone calls to friends and family can be reframed as your child's way of helping others.

You can also talk about all the people who are helping each other in different ways: scientists who are working hard on a vaccine; people staying connected and providing practical help to each other; and friends or even strangers trying to keep each other's spirits up. Look for examples of this in the news and social media. Watch movies or read books that are inspiring and make you feel hopeful about the future.

Try to follow a routine

Try to continue with whatever normal family routines that you can. If you are self – isolating, try to keep normal waking hours. If you normally eat together as a family, continue to do that too. Think about structuring the weekdays around pieces of school work your child may have available and treat weekends a bit more like 'fun' – play games, have a movie night, etc. It can be helpful to 'break down' the day into small chunks of activity whatever your child's age.



Consider this period of time as an 'opportunity'

Although this may feel hard, look on this time as an opportunity to do more things together as a family.

Have fun reading, playing and learning life skills together. This will help the whole family to feel better.



Look after yourself

This is a difficult time for everyone, and we all cope with stressful times in different ways. It is important to make sure you look after your own health and wellbeing so that you can continue to support your child and others who rely on you.

This means keeping a routine yourself, maintaining contact with friends and family, exercising, and eating and drinking healthily.

Although it can be helpful to keep up-to-date with official guidance and information about COVID-19, try to limit the amount of unnecessary exposure you all have; this can increase worry. Instead, look for positive and accurate on-line messages and supports.

Here are some ideas about activities you could try with your child if they are away from school:

<https://medium.com/pobble/simple-and-fun-non-screen-activities-that-children-can-do-at-home-115543cb3b9c>



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