

Mental health services during COVID-19

We know that you are probably flooded with information about COVID-19. We just wanted to touch base with a collation of resources to manage your wellbeing and some mental health services & apps for young people & their parents we think may be useful at this time. Please get in touch if we can help your school.

Take care,

Lucinda Nash & Cathie Matthews - School Link Coordinators Western NSW

Tips & resources for schools, parents & young people to manage this period

The following information is contained in this booklet.

- Tips for coping with Coronavirus anxiety by the Australian Psychological Society
- Be You: what educators & schools can do
- Headspace Dubbo – How to cope with stress related to coronavirus
- Raising children Australia – Talking to your children about Coronavirus

Other recommended sources

Reach out Australia – reachout.com

- a collection of self-help resources for young people who may be feeling anxious and uncertain, including where to get accurate information on the Government's COVID-19 response
- a new self-help resource to manage wellbeing during any period of self-isolation
- a new self-help resource for parents and carers of teenagers to help them discuss COVID-19 and relate facts without causing alarm
- a collection of resources for school-based professionals.

Mental health services for young people

Lots of mental health services are offering free services during this global crisis:

APPS

- smiling mind - mindfulness
- headspace (UK) usually paid - mindfulness app
- Sanvello - on demand help for stress, anxiety and depression.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- This way up - Online CBT Offering free courses until April 30. <https://thiswayup.org.au/>
- Kids helpline - call 1800 55 1800, email or webchat
- Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service - Dubbo 6881 4000
- Mental health line: 1800 011 511

Feel free to get in touch if School-Link can support you or your school.

A background image showing the back of a woman's head with long dark hair, looking towards a television screen displaying a news broadcast. A dark teal rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title text.

Tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety

As the number of coronavirus cases rise across Australia, the level of anxiety within the community is increasing.

Feelings of worry and unease can be expected following a stressful event, such as the recent declaration of a global pandemic, however, it is important that we learn to manage our stress before it turns to more severe anxiety and panic.

This information sheet outlines some useful strategies which can help both adults and children cope with the stress or anxiety experienced as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

Learn the facts

Constant media coverage about the coronavirus can keep us in a heightened state of anxiety. Try to limit related media exposure and instead seek out factual information from reliable sources such as the Australian Government's [health alert](#) or other trusted organisations such as the [World Health Organization](#).

Keep things in perspective

When we are stressed, it is easy to see things as worse than they really are. Rather than imagining the worst-case scenario and worrying about it, ask yourself:

- *Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome?* Remind yourself that the actual number of confirmed cases of coronavirus in Australia is extremely low.
- *Am I overestimating how bad the consequences will be?* Remember, illness due to coronavirus infection is usually mild and most people recover without needing specialised treatment.
- *Am I underestimating my ability to cope?* Sometimes thinking about how you would cope, even if the worst were to happen, can help you put things into perspective.

Take reasonable precautions

Being proactive by following basic hygiene principles can keep your anxiety at bay. The World Health Organization recommends a number of protective measures against the coronavirus, including to:

- wash your hands frequently
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- stay at home if you begin to feel unwell until you fully recover
- seek medical care early if you have a fever, cough or experience breathing difficulties.

Practise self-care

To help encourage a positive frame of mind, it is important to look after yourself. Everybody practises self-care differently with some examples including:

- maintaining good social connections and communicating openly with family and friends
- making time for activities and hobbies you enjoy
- keeping up a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting quality sleep and avoiding the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to cope with stress
- practising relaxation, meditation and mindfulness to give your body a chance to settle and readjust to a calm state.

Tips for talking with children about the coronavirus

Children will inevitably pick up on the concerns and anxiety of others, whether this be through listening and observing what is happening at home or at school. It is important that they can speak to you about their own concerns.

Answer their questions

Do not be afraid to talk about the coronavirus with children. Given the extensive media coverage and the increasing number of people wearing face masks in public, it is not surprising that some children are already aware of the virus.

Providing opportunities to answer their questions in an honest and age-appropriate way can help reduce any anxiety they may be experiencing. You can do this by:

- speaking to them about coronavirus in a calm manner
- asking them what they already know about the virus so you can clarify any misunderstandings they may have
- letting them know that it is normal to experience some anxiety when new and stressful situations arise
- giving them a sense of control by explaining what they can do to stay safe (e.g., wash their hands regularly, stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing)
- not overwhelming them with unnecessary information (e.g., death rates) as this can increase their anxiety
- reassure them that coronavirus is less common and severe in children compared to adults
- allowing regular contact (e.g., by phone) with people they may worry about, such as grandparents, to reassure them that they are okay.

Talk about how they are feeling

Explain to your child that it is normal to feel worried about getting sick. Listen to your child's concerns and reassure them that you are there to help them with whatever may arise in the future.

It is important to model calmness when discussing the coronavirus with children and not alarm them with any concerns you may have about it. Children will look to you for cues on how to manage their own worries so it is important to stay calm and manage your own anxieties before bringing up the subject with them and answering their questions.

Limit media exposure

It is important to monitor children's exposure to media reports about the coronavirus as frequent exposure can increase their level of fear and anxiety. Try to be with your child when they are watching, listening or reading the news so you are able to address any questions or concerns they may have.

Seek additional support when needed

If you feel that the stress or anxiety you or your child experience as a result of the coronavirus is impacting on everyday life, a psychologist may be able to help.

Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals, skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns, including stress. A psychologist can help you manage your stress and anxiety using techniques based on the best available research.

If you are referred to a psychologist by your GP, you might be eligible for a Medicare rebate. You may also be eligible to receive psychology services via telehealth so that you do not need to travel to see a psychologist. Ask your psychologist or GP for details.

There are number of ways to access a psychologist. You can:

- use the Australia-wide Find a Psychologist™ service. Go to findapsychologist.com.au or call 1800 333 497
- ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.

More information

Australian Government Department of Health

The Department of Health has developed a collection of resources for the general public, health professionals and industry about coronavirus (COVID-19), including translated resources.

<https://bit.ly/38OwHe>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides reliable information about the coronavirus such as its symptoms, steps you can take to protect yourself, and what to do if you are affected.


<https://bit.ly/39MEml8>

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization provides information and guidance regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease.

<https://bit.ly/3cQUwCw>

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Coronavirus (COVID-19): Supporting educators, children and young people

Educator self-care is important for supporting children and young people during the coronavirus outbreak.

The sense of community that schools offer is important to maintain for children and young people, even as routines change due to the coronavirus outbreak. This resource provides information to help you look after students', and your own, mental health during the outbreak.

What educators can do

Look after yourself

Make time to look after yourself so you're in a better position to support those around you. Children and young people's emotions can be affected by how adults are feeling.

Try to maintain your routines, know your limits, debrief with trusted colleagues, family or friends and try to do things you enjoy to manage your stress levels.

The Be You website provides information on [wellbeing tools](#) and how to practise [mindfulness](#), which can help with stress management. The Beyond Blue website provides more information on how to [look after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](#).

Maintain routines where possible

Maintain as many aspects of your routine as possible. Break tasks down into manageable chunks

and give as much notice as possible about transitions and changes to routines and environments. Have realistic expectations of children and young people during this time, especially if they are transitioning in and out of school. More information on [transitions](#) is on the Be You website.

Talk about what's happening in the news

Talk about the importance of getting information from trusted sources like government websites. Draw their attention to the facts around the outbreak and the reassuring aspects of this information. For example:

- Children are unlikely to experience severe symptoms if they contract coronavirus.
- There are few cases in Australia compared to the rest of the world
- Government and health professionals have been preparing for a pandemic for a long time and are acting quickly to minimise the outbreak and develop a vaccine.

It's important to listen to any questions children and young people may have, and to let them know that it's normal to feel concerned.

If the media or the news is getting too much for them, encourage them to limit their exposure.

For more information watch Beyond Blue's video on [Talking to kids about scary stuff in the news](#).

Focus energy in a positive direction

Encourage student led discussions and talk about what they can do to minimise the spread of coronavirus to help them feel more in control, for example practising good hygiene as explained by the [World Health Organization](#).

Help regulate emotions

Support children and young people to express their emotions so they feel listened to and validated. Explain that it's normal to feel a range of emotions during this time. The Be You website offers guidance on helping children and young people [self-regulate](#) their emotions.

Look for changes in behaviour

Children and young people who may be feeling overwhelmed by stress or anxiety could be tired, withdrawn, irritable, fearful, unmotivated, moody, lose their appetite, need more comfort, have trouble concentrating and feel physically unwell.

Consult with colleagues, school leaders or families if you're unsure whether you're witnessing a change in behaviour.

Support children and young people feeling stressed or anxious

Take extra care to notice and listen to children and young people during this time. This will give them the opportunity to explore their emotions and reach out for help.

If you think a child or young person in your care needs extra support, consult with the relevant leader at your school. Ensure you're familiar with your wellbeing response plans so you know what to do if a child or young person is in distress.

Consider using the Be You [Mental Health Continuum and BETLS observation tool](#) on the Be You website.

What schools can do

Communicate with families

Take a coordinated approach with families to supporting children and young people's mental health. The World Health Organization has developed a flyer on [Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak](#), and the

[Raising Children website](#) also has information that could be distributed to families.

Promote mental health action plans

Maintaining mental health during this time may be a challenge given precautions against coronavirus are changing so many aspects of our lives. Encourage children and young people to manage their stress levels by using positive self-talk, exercise, healthy eating, connection with their friends, and finding ways to enjoy themselves.

The headspace website offers tips on [How to cope with stress related to Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) and has a downloadable [healthy headspace action plan](#) for young people. The Be You website explains how you can [practise mindfulness](#) in the classroom, and the [Smiling Mind app](#) has daily meditations and mindfulness exercises for children and young people.

Understanding stress

Everyone responds differently to stress

There will be a range of experiences in your classroom. Growing up can be stressful at times and the coronavirus outbreak may add another layer of stress. The coronavirus outbreak may also be harder for some children or young people to handle than others, for example those already experiencing anxiety.

This may change over time as different types of stress come and go from their lives.

Impacts of stress on learning

Children and young people develop coping skills through exposure to manageable amounts of stress. However, when there are high levels of stress or multiple stress factors (especially those they can't control) then it can impact on their physical and mental health, relationships, and learning and development.

For more information on [stress](#) and [anxiety](#), including [how to support children and young people experiencing anxiety](#), visit the [Be You website](#).

COVID-19

headspace Dubbo special edition newsletter - march 2020

how to cope with the stress related to novel coronavirus

This information is for young people affected by stress related to Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).

It can feel stressful and overwhelming during an event like the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and we can all be affected differently. You might feel overwhelmed by the information, conversations and the increased levels of stress in your community. It can be hard to know what information to trust especially in a situation where things are changing so quickly. It can be helpful to keep up-to-date but it's also okay to switch off from the 24 hour media cycle if this is getting too much.

During this time some things in your life may be affected by attempts to contain the spread of the virus. You may have been looking forward to a gig or a trip that's been cancelled. You may be affected by school, uni or your workplace temporarily closing. Or you may have a loved one who is directly affected by the virus.

It's important to find the right level or type of support for you. And keep in mind that the type of support you may need can change as time passes. For many people staying connected to family and friends/loved ones is important.



Tips to maintain a healthy headspace during this time:

- Be mindful of exposure to information through stories, traditional and social media. It can be helpful to take a break from the 24-hour news cycle.
- Do things that make you feel physically and emotionally safe, and be with those who are helpful to your wellbeing
- Engage in activities that promote a sense of calm and feeling grounded (use of alcohol and other drugs can be counterproductive with this).
- Our [7 tips for a healthy headspace](#) demonstrate simple and effective things that can help people to create and maintain a healthy headspace, irrespective of whether they have been affected by COVID-19 or not.
- It can help to talk with a trusted adult if it all feels a bit much.

Common reactions

Fear and Anxiety

At this time you might experience feelings of fear or anxiety. You might be worried about the virus and how it might affect you, your loved ones or your life.

Anger, frustration and confusion

It can be difficult to understand what to do in these situations because of the volume of different information available. This might feel confusing and frustrating, this is normal. Events like these can reduce the things we normally do in our days and that can seem unfair. This might make you feel frustrated or [angry](#).

Sadness

If you've been asked to stay at home or stop your normal activities you might feel disconnected from important people or things in your life. This might make you feel sad or bored.

Denial

When bad things are happening, some people might prefer not to think about them at all. This might be helpful to start with, but our feelings can catch us by surprise later on. It's OK to distract yourself, but also find some time to think about what is happening and how you're going.

If you start to notice that you are experiencing these things, it is important to remember that these are normal reactions to a not normal time. During this time it is important as best as possible to keep engaged with the activities that support your wellbeing. You might need to get creative in how you continue to do them.

When should I get help?

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming or intense emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately.

National 24/7 crisis services

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 or suicidecallbackservice.org.au

beyondblue: 1300 224 636 or beyondblue.org.au

Additional youth support services

headspace: visit headspace.org.au to find your nearest centre or call eheadspace on 1800 650 890

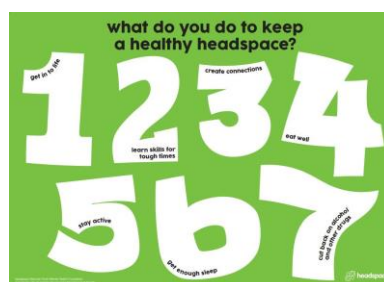
Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au

ReachOut: reachout.com.au

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 or sane.org

Talk with a trusted adult, such as a parent, teacher, school counsellor or headspace Dubbo, phone 5852 1900. You can also access headspace online: headspace.org.au/eheadspace/

Speak to your local doctor or [General Practitioner \(GP\)](#) and help make a plan for your recovery. Or you can search for a health service and GP on healthdirect.



Talking to children about coronavirus (COVID-19)

Your child is probably seeing and hearing a lot about coronavirus (COVID-19) on TV, radio, and social media, as well as from other people. Talking with your child about coronavirus (COVID-19) can **help your child understand and cope** with what's going on. Here's how.

Make time to talk

Find the right time to talk with your child. This might be when your child gets home from school, at bedtime or in the car. When your child is ready to talk, give your child your full attention.

Find out what your child knows

It's a good idea to start by asking your child what she knows about the virus and whether she has any questions. For example, 'On the news today, they were talking about coronavirus. Were people at school talking about that? What were they saying?'

Explain coronavirus (COVID-19) in a way your child can understand

- Use a calm, reassuring tone and stick to the facts.
- For younger children, keep it simple and brief. For example, 'That's right, some people are getting sick with a germ. It makes them cough and sneeze. The sick people are being looked after well by doctors and hospitals'.
- For older children, offer more detail. For example, 'I heard you talking with your friends about how you catch coronavirus. The virus spreads through things like sneezing, coughing and touching infected things. That's why good hygiene and hand-washing are really important. They help to protect everyone.'

Tune into your child's feelings

Some children might not be worried about coronavirus (COVID-19). But some might be frightened, upset or worried. They might be worried about the virus itself or about how it might affect their lives.

Ask your child how he's feeling and listen to what he says. You can also ask him what he needs to feel better. It might reassure your child if you share your own feelings and let him know what you're doing to cope with them.

For example:

- 'I can see that you're worried about grandpa getting really sick. I love how caring you are. If anyone we know gets sick, the hospital will take good care of them. Right now, I could really do with a cuddle from you.'
- 'It can be scary not knowing what's going to happen with the virus. Scientists all over the world are working hard to find a vaccine and treatment. In Australia, we have good hospitals, doctors and nurses who can look after us.'
- 'It's OK to be worried about catching coronavirus. I sometimes worry too. Some people are only getting minor symptoms like what you get when you have a cold. If I need some good information, I look at the health department website.'
- 'It's disappointing we can't go to the footy on the weekend. But the doctors say that this will help stop the spread of coronavirus, so this is how we can help. Let's watch the footy on TV together.'

It's important to monitor how much media coverage about coronavirus (COVID-19) you and your child are seeing. It's not helpful for anyone to hear distressing news over and over again. If you have the facts you need, it's often best to switch off or switch to something else.