

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Managing Self-Isolation With Your Children and Family

TIP SHEET



Children look to adults to provide safety, security and a sense of calm when facing uncertainty, particularly when there is instability and change in the environment. In the current state of heightened stress around coronavirus (COVID-19), keep the following points in mind.

Responding to your child's concerns

It's important to listen to your child's concerns, both in terms of what you hear, what you see and what you feel (your gut instinct, or in your heart). Your child may tell you their fears or concerns, or they may show you by changes in their behaviour. You may notice differences in your child's level of irritability, desires for space or closeness, tantrums or disruptions in their sleep.

It's important to respond to your child's changing needs. Keep in mind that how you respond may need to differ for different children. This may mean more cuddles for one child and more space for another.

When talking to your child about COVID-19, try to remain calm in both the words you say and the tone of voice that you use. Reassure your child that the situation is under control and that the adults are taking care of things to protect people against the virus; this is why everyone is staying home from school and working from home - to stop spreading the germs.

Talk to your child in an age-appropriate manner, by changing how much and what information you share so that it's appropriate for the your child's age. For younger children, keep it simple, whereby older children and teenagers may require more detail. If you have children of different ages, you may need to talk to you children separately, or talk in more detail with older children when your younger children aren't around.

If you don't have answers to all your child's questions, it's okay to be honest. For instance, saying "I don't know the answer to that, but I'm sure we could find out", or "we might hear more about that in the future".

When talking to your child, try to be realistic. Being overly positive or dismissive of their concerns, by saying things such as "you have nothing to worry about" or "everyone will be fine", can escalate their anxiety or make them feel like their fears are invalid.

Offer your child space to talk about their fears and validate them. For example, "I can hear you are feeling scared", or "it makes sense you are worrying about this".

You may need to provide time frames to reassure your child that the current situation is temporary and will not last forever. Some children, particularly younger children, may be preoccupied with the idea of death in the family, and regular reassurance can help calm their anxiety.

Exploring possible solutions with your child can help to lessen their fears, reduce their anxiety and teach them how to respond to their fears in the future. This may include doing something they like, such as drawing, reading or making something, taking deep breaths, or going for a walk.

Try to limit how much media coverage and news your child is exposed to, as excessive or inappropriate content can increase their anxiety. It's also best to avoid making negative or blaming comments in front of your children, such as who or which country was responsible for the virus, or insulting politicians or political groups, as this can lead to stigma.

Communicating changes to your child

It's important for parents to be the ones to make any major decisions for their family or child (such as those related to money, security or living arrangements). If you're in conflict or disagreement with your child's other parent about decisions, try to avoid including your child in this conflict, and only speak to your child once a solution has been reached. When you, as parents, have come to an agreement, communicate your decisions to your child calmly.

This reinforces the message your child receives; that the adults are in control and taking care of the situation.

Explain any planned changes affecting your child ahead of time, including what is going to happen and when, such as changes to living situations, routines, or pick-ups and drop-offs. Providing reasons for the changes may also be useful or necessary. As much as possible, try to maintain a consistent routine for your child, including when they wake up, eat, play, wash and sleep. Stability in routine can help your child to manage periods of change.

Parents who are separated should try to be consistent in the rules for hygiene and social distancing in each house to avoid confusion and differences for your child.

Staying at home with family

While there are benefits to spending more time with the family, social distancing during COVID-19 can also result in increased tension and conflict, for both adults and children. There are, however, some tips and strategies that can help to keep family members engaged, manage outbreaks of anger or conflict, and reduce tension in the home.

If you have a younger child, vary their activities to help keep them engaged and focused. While making sure you're adhering to the current social distancing rules, this could include incorporating both indoor and outdoor activities, such as games, physical outdoor activities, puzzles, screen time, reading time and play time.

If your child is angry, or there is conflict and tension among family members, try to help them find ways to let off steam. One idea is to get creative and implement an exercise circuit in the family home. This could include running around the house, jumping up and down, and doing push-ups.

Social isolation can also be an opportunity for the family to get together and bond. You could complete a family project together, attend to household jobs that have been put off until now, come together to look at old photo albums, have a family board game evening, or spend time planning for the future.

For parents who are both working from home and have child-rearing responsibilities, try tag-team parenting to enable both of you to be involved in caring for your child, without foregoing your work responsibilities or careers. This involves agreeing on set times to watch over your child, carry out discipline responsibilities, complete domestic chores, work, and prepare food, among other activities.

If possible, try to set up a work area away from your main living space. This can help create a distinction between office and home life. It may also be worthwhile for each parent to speak to their employer about options for shifting work hours to accommodate shared parenting arrangements. Planning ahead and communicating effectively can help parents be a team who can respond to uncertainty and changes together.

Key message

The main message is for parents to try to work together harmoniously as much as possible during COVID-19. This will help to provide your child with a secure base and internal stability to cope with change and the current uncertainty and instability.

Useful resources

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne: Kids Health Info

https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Supporting_children_and_young_people_to_cope_with_the_coronavirus_COVID-19_pandemic/

Our Other COVID-19 Tip Sheets

www.rav.org.au/COVID19-Resources/



Need support?

If you're feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed by the current situation and would like some support, our counsellors are here for you.

We're committed to supporting people throughout the coronavirus crisis. We're continuing to deliver services via telephone, online and video-conferencing appointments, including through our online counselling service.

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations. We have over 70 years' experience providing a diverse range of family and relationship support services.

These include counselling; family dispute resolution (mediation); and family violence prevention services; relationship skills courses; mental health services; workplace services; and professional training.

Our services are for all members of the community.

Contact us

For more information or to talk to us about how we can support you:

- Visit www.rav.org.au
- Call 1300 364 277

To learn about our typing-based online counselling service or to book an appointment, visit onlinecounselling.rav.org.au

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