

Guidance for parents and carers on supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic

This advice is to help adults with caring responsibilities look after the mental health and wellbeing of young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Looking after your own mental health

As well as thinking about the children or young people in your care, it is important to take care of your own mental health and wellbeing. Children and young people react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and carers deal with a situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children and young people. Parents and carers can be more supportive to others around them, especially children, when they are better prepared.

Helping children and young people cope with stress

There are some key points you can consider about how to support your child or young person, including:

Listen and acknowledge: Children and young people may respond to stress in different ways. Signs may be emotional (for example, they may be upset, distressed, anxious, angry or agitated), behavioural (for example, they may become more clingy or more withdrawn, or they may wet the bed), or physical (for example, they may experience stomach aches).

Look out for any changes in their behaviour. Children and young people may feel less anxious if they are able to express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Children and young people who communicate differently to their peers may rely on you to interpret their feelings. Listen to them, acknowledge their concern and give them extra love and attention if they need it.

[MindEd](#) is a free online educational resource on children and young people's mental health for all adults, which can support parents and carers through these exceptional circumstances.

Provide clear information about the situation: Children and young people want to feel assured that their parents and carers can keep them safe. One of the best ways to achieve this is by talking openly about what is happening and providing honest answers to any questions they have. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe, including any actions they can take to help, such as washing their hands more often than usual. Use words and explanations that they can understand. There are resources available to help you do this, including the Children's Commissioner's [Children's Guide to Coronavirus](#), or the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have produced a [storybook developed by and for children around the world affected by coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Make sure you use reliable sources of information such as [GOV.UK](#) or the [NHS website](#) – there is a lot of misleading information from other sources that can create stress for you and your family. It will not always be possible to provide answers to all the questions that children and young people may ask, or to address all their concerns, so focus on listening and acknowledging their feelings to help them feel supported.

Be aware of your own reactions: Remember that children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how you respond to the situation is very important. It is important to manage your own emotions and remain calm, listen to and acknowledge children and young people's concerns, speak kindly to them, and answer any questions they have honestly. For further information on how to look after your own mental wellbeing during the pandemic, see the [guidance on how to look after your own mental health and wellbeing](#) or visit [Every Mind Matters](#).

Connect regularly: If it is necessary for you and your children to be in different locations to normal (for example, due to staying at home in different locations or hospitalisation) make sure you still have regular and frequent contact via the phone or video calls with them. Try to help your child understand what arrangements are being made for them and why in simple terms. Support safe ways for children and young people to maintain social interaction with their friends, for example via phone or video calls.

Create a new routine: Life is changing for all of us for a while. Routine gives children and young people an increased feeling of safety in the context of uncertainty, so think about how to develop a new routine, especially if they are not at school:

make a plan for the day or week that includes time for learning, playing and relaxing if they have to stay home from school, ask teachers what you can do to support continued learning at home. The Department for Education have published a [list of recommended online educational resources for home schooling](#)

encourage maintaining a balance between being on and offline and discover new ideas for activities to do from home. The [Children's Commissioner guide](#) signposts to some ideas to help fight boredom

children and young people ideally need to be active for 60 minutes a day, which can be more difficult when spending longer periods of time indoors. Plan time outside if you can do so safely or see [Change4Life](#) for ideas for indoor games and activities

don't forget that sleep is important for mental and physical health, so try to keep to existing bedtime routines

it may be tempting to give children and young people treats such as sweets or chocolate but this is not good for their health, especially as they may not be as physically active as normal. See [Change4Life](#) for ideas for healthy treats

Limit exposure to media and talk more about what they have seen and

heard: Like adults, children and young people may become more distressed if they see repeated coverage about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the media. A complete news blackout is also rarely helpful as they are likely to find out from other sources, such as online or through friends. Try to avoid turning the television off or closing web pages when children or young people come into the room. This can peak their interest to find out what is happening and their imagination can take over. Instead, consider limiting the amount of exposure you and your family have to media coverage.

Young people will also hear things from friends and get information from social media. Talk to them about what is happening and ask them what they have heard. Try to answer their questions honestly and reassure them appropriately.

Where to get further support

If you are worried about your or your child or young person's symptoms, see the [NHS website](#). If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111.

If you are worried about your child or young person's mental health, seek help from a professional. You may have services attached to your child or young person's school or college who can help. You could also contact your GP, or look up information on children and young people's mental health services on your local CCG website or on the NHS website.

In a medical emergency [call 999](#). This phone line should be used when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk. A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical health emergency and is a situation where your child or young person requires immediate professional care. For more advice on where to get support for a mental health crisis please see [this NHS page](#).

If you do not feel safe at home there is help and support available to you and your family. The household isolation instruction as a result of coronavirus does not apply if you need to leave your home to escape domestic abuse.

Abuse is unacceptable in any situation, no matter what stresses you or others are under. If you or others are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police - the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.

The Home Office has produced [guidance on further support available during the coronavirus pandemic](#) for those who feel at risk of abuse, and to help perpetrators to change their behaviours.

For support as a parent or carer

Young Minds for Parents and Carers

[Young Minds](#) provides advice about mental health and behaviour problems in children and young people up to the age of 25. You can call the [Parents' and Carers' Helpline](#) on 0808 802 5544. Please be aware Young Minds do not provide any direct psychological services and cannot make referrals to the NHS or Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS).

Helplines and websites for your child and or young person

If your child or young person would like to speak to someone anonymously, they could try calling a helpline or visiting websites such as ChildLine and The Mix.

[Shout](#) provides free, confidential support, 24/7 via text for anyone at crisis anytime, anywhere.

You can:

text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to text with a trained Crisis Volunteer

text with someone who is trained and will provide active listening and collaborative problem-solving

[ChildLine](#) provides a helpline for any child with a problem. It comforts, advises and protects.

You can:

call 0800 1111 any time for free

have an [online chat with a counsellor](#)

check out the [message boards](#)

[The Mix](#) provides a free confidential helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, whatever the problem.

You can:

call 0808 808 4994 for free – lines are open from 11am to 11pm every day

access the [online community](#)

[email The Mix](#)