

Parent Guides

Coping with Covid-19 by Dr Chloe Paidoussis Mitchell



This lockdown period has challenged all of us to learn about how to manage our responses and those of our children to the difficult events we face. Our mental wellbeing is taking a hit and I'm delighted that Dr Chloe shares her advice with us here on "How to support children's mental health and wellbeing through Covid-19."

Francesca Geens, Creator The HappySelf Journal



1.) Manage your anxiety

One of the most important things you can do for your children is look after your own mental health. Notice what triggers your anxiety and take positive action to reduce it.

Self-soothing activities such as baking, gardening, painting, or anything crafty reduces stress and anxiety. Mindfulness and meditation, breathing exercises and good emotional support all help too.

Remember that feelings are contagious and children will quickly pick up anything negative (even if you think you are hiding it). So, moderating your emotions is a big comfort to children because they will feel reassured you are secure and contained.



2.) Notice how your child carries stress

Every child is unique. For example, one child may regress, another may seem un-phased, whilst another may need more physical contact. Some children don't know they are stressed and they act out stress with naughty and difficult behaviours, whilst others report headaches and stomach pains.

Everybody experiences stress in a unique fashion and giving yourself the opportunity to recognize how your child copes with stress will inform your strategy for supporting them.





3.) Reduce your child's anxiety about Covid-19

Stay calm and regularly have “check-in” conversations with your child to protect and nourish their wellbeing.

This means, having chats that allow you to gauge how they are so that you can offer them reassurance if they seem worried. Just being there for them is a big support.

When we feel understood and emotionally held, we prevent anxiety from ballooning. This applies to children too, so it is vital that you give them permission to ask you any questions they have, whenever they want. Show them you are listening and follow their lead. Reassure them that they are not burdening you with their worries.

During these chats you can also catch misinformation from friends and you can gauge how their imagination may be running wild about the virus and this may be impacting their wellbeing. Make time to check in with every child one-to-one and do this in an appropriate environment.

If they ask you difficult questions, be truthful in an age appropriate fashion. If you don't know the answer, explain that you don't know and go and seek the answers together.

It is also really important you explain what you do to help yourself with difficult feelings. This reassures children that they can cope and they can copy your behaviours and practices.

To counter-balance the crisis, it is really good to share stories of compassion and care. So many health workers, young people and scientists are helping others and this is a big comfort to children as it reassures them that many compassionate people are taking positive action together to help those more vulnerable.

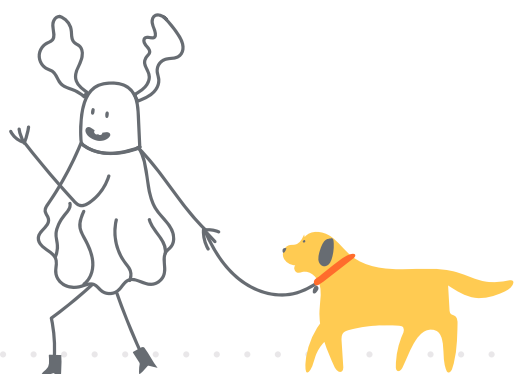
4.) Adjust your expectations

During this time, many children may feel confused or anxious about school closure, projects they can't finish, plays they won't perform, exams they won't sit and friendships they may lose – especially if they won't be returning to that school again.

It is really important that you accept what they feel. If they are anxious, upset, sad, worried, bored, frustrated or down, just let them. They are having normal human responses to the losses they are facing.

Normalise their emotions, accept them and empathise with them. You can really reassure children by acknowledging and giving them safe, non-judgmental space to talk.

If you are finding that you are worried about their learning and development, adjust your expectations. You can't replicate the school academic timetable. It is more important during this time of unprecedented crisis that you show some flexibility, you create routines that work for you, and you involve them in their daily plans.



5.) Establish good boundaries and routines

A good plan is reassuring for children. All children need structure and boundaries to thrive.

Make sure you involve them in the creation of the plan and reward them for independent actioning of the plan. You can display it in timetables and make sure you acknowledge how well they are doing with it. This will be a resilience building exercise.

As part of your routine make sure you get the balance right – so include time to connect with friends, time in solitude to self-care and rest, time with the family and time to do work.

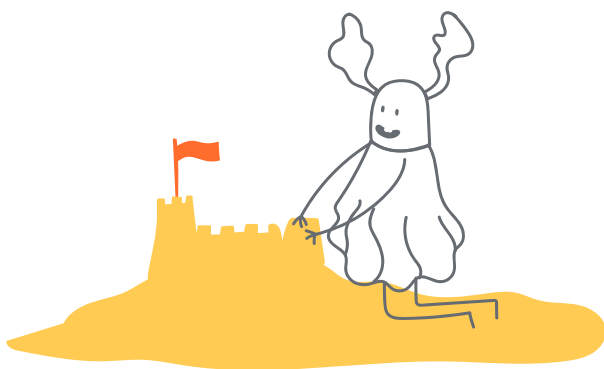
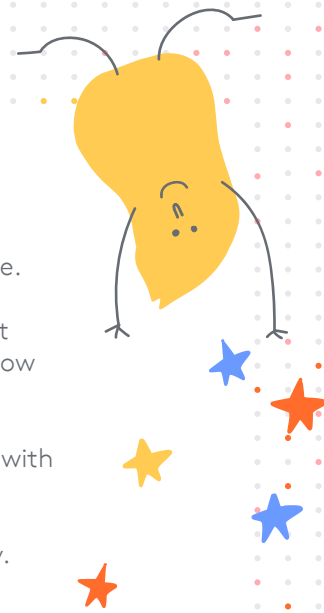
Try to keep work in one place because this helps to maintain a work and home boundary.

Encourage them to practice self-soothing with drawing, playing, baking, sewing, knitting, crafting, colouring in, gardening and painting.

Use a feelings box where your child can write down their questions and feelings and you can discuss them as a family.

Make time for gratitude and celebrating good things about the day.

Have meals together, moderate screen time and reduce access to constant news.



Sources of further support

Dr Chloe Paidoussis Mitchell
www.dr-chloe.com

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk>

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/covid-19-guidance-for-children-and-families/>

<https://www.unicef.org>

About the author

Dr Chloe Paidoussis Mitchell is a leading UK Chartered Counselling Psychologist, working with people from all over the world to help them remove their Mental Health blocks. She is passionate about helping her clients embrace their Mental Health mindset which she knows allows them to “tune-in” to Mental Health, to value it just as much as Physical Health, to nurture it and to recognise signs of deterioration and shut down. Dr Chloe offers one to one private therapy sessions to help people overcome difficulties in Mental Health, has a popular monthly blog and regularly runs webinars and digital workshops.



Join Dr Chloe's community:

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