

# COVID-19 INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

---

## Supporting Your Young Person

With the upcoming school holidays, this information has been prepared to assist you in supporting your young person's thoughts and feelings about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and how it may impact them.

The following information has been adapted from the *Australian Psychological Society (APS)* and *The Queensland Department of Education*.

Feelings of worry and unease are normal following a stressful event, such as the unforeseen occurrence of COVID-19 and the ongoing impact. However, it is important that we learn to manage our stress before it turns to anxiety and panic.

### How parents can support their young person?

There is a common misconception that talking with young people about a topic such as COVID-19 may increase their anxiety. However, research suggests that it usually has the opposite effect. For young people, not having information is scary, and many young people will fill in the blanks with their own imagination or through invalid sources (e.g. gossip and social media) – often imagining something far worse than the truth, which can become overwhelming or misleading.

## Tips for Parents and Carers

### Communication is important

It is important to communicate with young people. Young people need to feel informed and safe, especially when they hear so much information in the media. Young people will inevitably pick up on the concerns and anxiety of others. It is important that they can speak to you about their own concerns. Discussing COVID-19 situation openly with young people will provide the opportunity to reassure them that they are safe and dispel any misleading information they may have heard in the media or through rumours. Given the extensive media coverage and the increasing number of people wearing face masks in public, it is normal for young people to have mixed feelings about the virus.

### Responding to Questions

- Speak to your young person about COVID-19 in a calm manner
- Ask them what they already know about the virus so you can clarify any misunderstandings
- Let them know that it is normal to experience some unease and anxiety when new and stressful situations arise
- Give 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)
- Limit unnecessary information (e.g., mortality rates) as this can heighten their emotions

### Be Aware of Your Own Behaviour

It is important that adults understand the effect their own behaviour can have on young people. Model calmness when discussing COVID-19 with young people and do not alarm them with any concerns you may have about it. Young people 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. If you're visibly upset or react in a way that suggests you're fearful, young people may replicate this.

### **Limit Media Exposure**

It is important to monitor young people's exposure to media reports about COVID-19 as frequent exposure can increase their level of unease. Scary headlines attract attention and help sell newspapers, but they are often misleading. Try to be with your young person when they are watching, listening or reading the news so you are able to address any questions or concerns they may have. This also includes monitoring their use of social media.

Inform young people that the Government and relevant bodies are responding quickly. International travel has been restricted, and scientists are working to develop a vaccine. In Australia, the government is carefully monitoring and actively managing the situation and the risk to the public.

## **Tips for Helping You and Your Young Person Cope**

### **Offer Practical Advice**

The easiest way to reduce the risk of being affected by *viruses of any sort* (including the common cold) is to:

- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze (coughing into your elbow),
- Keep hands clean by washing them regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub,
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.

These are easy habits for young people to adopt and should help them feel as though they're able to exert some control over their circumstances.

### **Practise Self-Care**

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

- Keep in touch and communicate with family and friends
- Making time for activities and hobbies you enjoy
- Keeping up a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly and getting quality sleep
- Role-modelling appropriate use of technology and social media and monitoring your young person's use
- Practising relaxation, meditation and mindfulness to give your body a chance to settle and readjust to a calm state

## **Available Support**

- Call *13Health* (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
- Visit the *Headspace* website for information on stress related to COVID-19 and other topics (<https://headspace.org.au/>), as well as access to e-counselling support
- Contact *Kids Helpline* (1800 55 1800) or visit their website (<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>)
- *Lifeline Australia's* telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 or visit their website (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>)
- Obtain help and information from the local *General Practitioner* or *Community Health Centre*.