

How to talk to your teens about Coronavirus

There is a great deal of information, coverage and opinion circulating about COVID-19. Children and young people are hearing a lot about COVID-19 and typical life will be disrupted over the next few months for all of us. Whilst the extensive media coverage provides helpful information about changing guidelines and how we are working through this, it can also be overwhelming. It is natural that children and young people may worry about themselves, family members and friends and we know it's a very challenging time to be parenting a teenager.

Parents, carers and other family members can be a great help when children and young people become anxious but getting teenagers to talk openly about what's bothering them can be difficult, especially if you're feeling stressed yourself. Children and young people are very good at picking up on their parents/carer's feelings, so taking some time to manage your own emotions is very important. It's ok and natural to feel heightened anxiety and stress currently, showing young people how you are positively managing those feelings is key.

Check your own headspace

Some ways to do this are:

Re-take control	It can feel like right now we have lost control, but there are still lots of things that we can control, for example we cannot control what is posted on social media, but we can control our engagement by limiting our time on social media and only used trusted sources of information. Other examples of things we can control are our routine, how we follow the guidelines, the conversations we have and our actions. When we can identify what really is in our control, we can focus our energy on that to create positive change instead of wasting our energy on things we have little or no power to change.
Reflect on how you are feeling	Write down how you are feeling and reflect on why you feel this way. This exercise helps your mind to manage the thoughts and worries you are feeling and connect with your emotions. Writing down your thoughts and feelings to understand them more clearly helps to identify negative thoughts and identify emotions. From this you can work on letting go unhelpful thoughts and think of more positive ways to manage your worries.
Practice self-care	Such as exercise, cooking, building a new routine and getting enough sleep. There are lots of exercise videos on YouTube, ranging from high intensity to yoga, as well as daily celebrity 'live' home workouts that can be a great replacement for going to the gym, or breaking up the day to get you moving.
Share your thoughts and feelings with a trusted friend or family member	It is ok to have struggles and to talk about these. Sharing your thoughts and feelings helps release any anxiety you may be having. This could be over the phone or via video chat if there is no-one in your household you can talk with.
Practice mindfulness	Stay in the present moment and remember that thoughts aren't facts. Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress. Some breathing methods to try are Box Breathing, Calm Breathing and Colour Breathing – YouTube has videos for guided breathing, apps like Headspace and Calm or the website: https://www.nhsinmind.co.uk/
Look for the positives	Unprecedented times can bring heart break and negativity, but there are some positives we can be aware of. Every day that passes is another day closer to when we get through this, and we will get through this. Focus on the good media stories, the sense of community and kindness. Recognise that we are not stuck at home, we are safe at home and that when this is over, we can savour all the things that we are missing right now; like seeing our family and friends.

Maintain social connections with family and friends through Facetime and Skype to reduce feelings of loneliness.

Having a conversation with your teenager

Have a conversation with your teenager about coronavirus when you are feeling relatively calm and not stressed or anxious; the above tips are a good place to start. The following tips will help in having open and supportive discussions with young people:

Know your facts; this will help your discussions to be relevant and rational.

There's a lot of misinformation about coronavirus being spread by the media and on social media. Inform yourself about the facts from trusted sources, such as World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and the daily government briefings. If you can't answer their questions, don't guess. Use it as an opportunity to explore the answers together. Explain that some information online isn't accurate and that it's best to trust the experts. Be aware that things may change rapidly, so be sure to have the most up-to-date information

Talk about their media intake

Ask your teen what media they have been consuming (from the news and social media) about coronavirus. Check if they are aware that some stories about COVID-19 may be based on rumours or incorrect information. Help to build their rational thinking by being curious about who is creating this news? Is it credible? How can we tell that it's credible? What's the source? Again, directing young people towards trusted sources of information will help to stay rational. Limit social media and news intake if you and/or your teen are finding the updates triggering

Have open and honest communication

Conversations about coronavirus can be particularly challenging as sometimes we may not always have the answers of information or be able to explain why your teen is feeling the way that they are. As we have never dealt with something like this before, it is important to be honest about this.

- Let them know that you understand it's a stressful time and that it's normal to feel upset. Reassure them that they're not alone in this.
- Make space for conversations (in a quiet place where you have some privacy) where you might ask them, 'How are you feeling at the moment?' Share some of the things you are feeling and thinking (age appropriate), along with the plans you're making to take care of them and yourself. Telling them the proactive things you're doing to cope will help them feel less hopeless and uncertain. As mentioned earlier, young people are very good at picking up how parents, carer's or family members feel, so it is important to stay in a good headspace ourselves.
- Be accepting of and curious about how they say they're feeling. Ask follow-up questions, such as: 'What do you think is making you feel that way?' or 'Is there anything I can do to help?'

Offer reassurance

When we're seeing constant updates of troubling images on TV or online, it can feel like the crisis is all around us and we cannot escape it. When we are worried or anxious, we can find it more difficult distinguish between images on screen and reality, adding to concerns that we are in imminent danger. Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible, especially before they go to sleep, or help create new ones that suit life right now.

Show them how to protect themselves and their friends

One of the best ways to stay safe from coronavirus and other diseases is to simply encourage regular handwashing. Following the social distancing guidelines and staying at home will minimise the risks of coronavirus and reassure them that you are following the best methods. It doesn't need to be a scary conversation.

Useful Apps

With more time at home, inevitably people will be using their phones and devices more. A handful of useful applications and services are either free or offering free periods for the coming weeks in response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Please see below for some suggestions to support young people's mental health

- Calm
- Catch It – CBT focused guide
- CBTi – CBT app for sleep difficulties
- ChillPanda
- Daylio – daily mood/activity recording
- Flowy – breathing game
- Headspace
- HospiChill
- Mindfulness Gnats
- Mindshift
- WellMind

[Where to get further support](#)

If you are worried about your or your child/ or young person's symptoms relating to coronavirus, please visit the [NHS self-isolation advice website](#) for information. If you are still worried, call NHS 111.

If you are worried about your child or young person's mental health. Seek help from a professional or trusted source to best manage this. If the worries are school related, contact the teachers or learning support assistants and address any questions to give the young person more clarity. For other issues that may arise, please see the following page for useful contacts and websites for further help.

Helpful and important contact details for further support:

<p>Young Minds</p>	<p>https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/depression/</p> <p>Useful website with lots of information for young people.</p> <p>Provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis - all texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors and texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus</p>	<p>Text: text YM to 85258.</p>
<p>The Mix</p>	<p>www.themix.org.uk</p> <p>You can talk to The Mix for free on the phone, by email or on their webchat</p>	<p>Freephone: 0808 808 4994 (1pm - 11pm daily)</p>
<p>SHOUT Shout is a 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need help.</p>	<p>https://www.giveusashout.org/</p>	<p>Text: Shout to 85258</p>
<p>Childline Anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through. Trained counsellors.</p>	<p>https://www.childline.org.uk/</p> <p>Download the Childline App – Pin locked, 1-2-1 chats, tips and advice.</p>	<p>Tel: 0800 1111 – FREE doesn't show up on phone bills.</p>
<p>Prevention of Young Suicide (Papyrus)</p>	<p>https://papyrus-uk.org/ Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org</p>	<p>0800 068 41 41 – Call 07786209 697 - Text</p>
<p>The Calm Zone</p>	<p>https://www.thecalmzone.net/</p>	<p>5pm – midnight 365 days a year 0800 58 58 58</p>
<p>Thirteen (website) Information website</p>	<p>http://thirteen.me.uk/</p>	<p>Advice and Support on an array of potential issues</p>
<p>YoungMinds' Support for parents on their child's mental health</p>	<p>www.youngminds.org.uk</p>	<p>Free helpline for advice on: 0808 802 5544</p>
<p>NHS Advice number for medical issues.</p>	<p>https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/urgent-and-emergency-care/nhs-111/</p> <p>If you have difficulties communicating or hearing you can: - Call 18001 111 on a text phone</p>	<p>For urgent medical problems but unsure what to do? Call 111 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.</p>
<p>999 ONLY call 999 if your life is in imminent danger.</p>	<p>If your life is in imminent danger</p>	<p>Call 999 and select the appropriate service</p>