

Supporting children during lockdown



COVID-19 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.

It's important 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 the current changes and uncertainty in their life.

Tips for responding to your child's concerns

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. **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.'



5. **Talk to your child in an age-appropriate manner**, by changing how much and what information you share so that it's appropriate for your child's age. For younger children, keep it simple, whereas older children/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.

6. **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.'

7. **Try to be realistic** when talking to your child. 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.

8. 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.

9. **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.

10. **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.

Relationships Australia
VICTORIA

Tips for communicating changes to your child

1. **It's important for parents to be the ones to make any major decisions** for their family or child (e.g. about money, security or living arrangements).
2. 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 this calmly to your child. This reinforces the message that the adults are in control and taking care of the situation.
3. **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.
4. Whenever 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.
5. **Parents who are separated should try to be consistent in the rules** for hygiene and social distancing in each houses to avoid confusion and differences for your child.

Tips for staying at home with your 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. The following tips can help to keep family members engaged, manage outbreaks of anger or conflict, and reduce tension in the home.

1. **If you have a younger child, vary their activities** to help keep them engaged and focused. While 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.
2. 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.

3. Staying at home during periods of lockdown or 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, come together to look at old photo albums, have a family board game evening, or make future plans.
4. 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.
5. 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.

Need support?

We're committed to safely supporting Victorians throughout the evolving COVID-19 situation. Visit www.rav.org.au/COVID-19 to access more free resources and find out how we can assist you.

For additional information and resources, visit:

- **Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne:** www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo
- **Raising Children Network:** raisingchildren.net.au

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.