

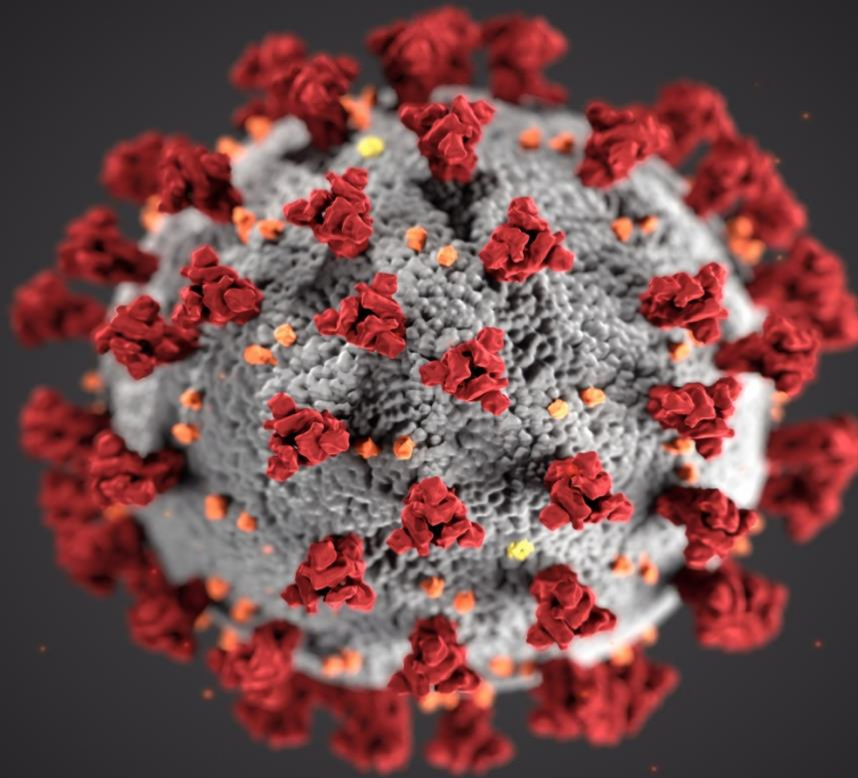
Anxiety and Coronavirus

Support for families, children and young people



“It is important they feel comfortable talking to you about Coronavirus as you will be the best source of information and reassurance for them.”

(British Psychological Society, 2020)



The following advice has been compiled by educational and child psychologists from the Department of Education, Sport and Culture to support families during the Coronavirus outbreak.

Introduction

The Coronavirus has been declared as a global health emergency and presents a real threat to our health and wellbeing and the health and wellbeing of family and friends. Global strategies to manage the pandemic have required significant changes to the way we live our lives. Our current reality of being asked to stay at home and only leave for essentials, such as food shopping; educating our children at home as most schools have been closed; visitors not being able to come to the Isle of Man; staff being asked to work from home; no public gatherings; and, social distancing being compulsory, was unimaginable for most a month ago.

The disruption in the normality of life invariably provokes a strong psychological response for many people. There is no right or wrong way to feel during a crisis of this type. Some individuals may feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, bored or lonely. Others can present as more withdrawn or irritable. Although the primary concerns for many may be the risks associated with exposure to the Coronavirus, the economic impact can place further stressors on families, for example, concern regarding employment and providing for your family. It is important to note that these feelings are okay and part of our normal response to a stressful situation of this nature.

We need to be careful not to medicalise reactions to the Coronavirus and disempower people; particularly parents, who are best placed to meet the needs of their children and provide information and reassurance. It is also important to make the distinction between anxiety linked to this type of global crisis and anxiety disorders associated with the need for mental health support.

Supporting yourself to support children and young people

It is important for parents/carers to be mindful of their own mental health and wellbeing. The change and uncertainty associated with Coronavirus will place significant stress and strains on adults, which we may not always notice at first. The fears and worries of keeping everyone safe, adhering to the Government and Public Health advice, combined with the new demands of education children at home, caring for friends and family who are socially distancing or self-isolating, and financial concerns, are all but a few difficulties you may be facing.

The message is simple. If you want to look after and support your family and others you care for, you must ensure you are looking after yourself. Often parents/carers will notice the anxiety in their children but not be aware of the anxiety they are also feeling. Children and young people will notice changes in people they are close to and this can often be a significant source of worry for them.

There are some simple strategies that can be helpful:

- Staying in touch with family and friends – use audio and video calling
- Talk to others about your worries – it may help them share similar concerns
- Exercise and make healthy meals – home workouts and family cooking sessions are a great way to support the whole family and complete some chores.
- Limit the amount of information you listen to and read about Coronavirus
- Try to maintain a good sleep routine
- Do something for you – even if it is only a 5-minute cup of tea! What things usually help to make you feel a bit calmer? If you are at home, music, breathing and relaxation techniques, distraction (such as watching something funny), and time with family members or pets can all help.
- Talk to your children when you feel calm – it will reassure them.

Sources for further advice

The Isle of Man has developed a Covid-19 Website and has further links to Health & Wellbeing Support. <https://covid19.gov.im>

The NHS (UK) has good online materials for managing anxiety related to covid-19 and further support if anxiety is starting to impact significantly on your functioning at home.

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/>
<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/anxiety/>



Supporting children and young people

Children and young people of all ages and stages do best when they are supported by the adults who are closest to them. The British Psychological Society says it is vital to talk openly to children and reassure them about the changes they are seeing around them due to Coronavirus. They have suggested the following guidance:

It is good to talk

- Children will have heard about Coronavirus and likely noticed changes around them. It is important they feel comfortable talking to you about Coronavirus, as you will be the best source of information and reassurance for them. It is also likely they will talk to their friends or other children, which can involve imagination and misinformation. So, having the chance to check-in with you is even more helpful.
- Don't be afraid to discuss Coronavirus with children
- Not talking about something can actually make children worry more
- Give children extra attention and time to talk if and when they want to

Be honest and accurate

- It is important to be open and honest with children. Think carefully about the sources of information and try to select reputable organisations, like the World Health Organisation, Government or the BBC. Many new organisations have created developmentally appropriate materials to support parents, including cartoons and videos.
- Remind children with facts that very few people in the Isle of Man have Coronavirus and in other places the vast majority of people with the virus recover fully
- Give children factual information, but adjust the amount and detail to make it appropriate for their age. For example, you might say 'we don't yet have a vaccination for Coronavirus, but doctors are working very hard on it' or 'a lot of people might get sick, but normally it is like a cold or flu and they get better'. Younger children might understand a cartoon or picture better. We also recommend that adults watch news programmes and then filter this information to their child in a developmentally appropriate way.
- Parents should discuss the impact of reading and reposting false information, as well as encouraging children to mute, block and report profiles, posts and information that may be distressing. This is a confusing time for everybody but can be particularly challenging for children and young people, especially if the information that they are accessing is inaccurate.
- It must be remembered that this is affecting not only the Isle of Man and the United Kingdom but the wider world. There is on-going research being carried out to develop vaccines and by following the advice issued we can all significantly reduce the spread. It is healthy for children to be aware of world events and it would be an entirely normal reaction for a child or young person to feel worried about the current situation.

Give space and time

- Distraction and keeping busy are helpful strategies for managing anxiety, but it is equally important to ensure children and young people are given time and space with adults to ask questions and reflect on how they are feeling. It is important to enable and allow children to ask questions. It is natural that children will have questions, and likely worries, about Coronavirus. Giving them the space to ask these questions and have answers is a good way to alleviate anxiety.
- Again, try to be honest in your responses – it is ok to say you don't know. At the moment, there are questions we don't have answers to about Coronavirus – you can explain this to your child and add in information about what people are doing to try to answer these questions. Maybe your child has an idea too – let them tell you or draw their idea.

Routines

- There is a need to develop some structure and familiar routines during periods of significant change and high levels of uncertainty.
- Sticking to routine at home is very important. Having regular meal times and bed time routines are an essential part of keeping children happy and healthy. Adding in structure to the day, such as activity time, playtime etc. adds some exciting and anticipation to the day, which children can look forward to.

Giving Practical advice

- Remind your child of the most important things they can do to stay healthy. Gentle reminders to follow the Public Health advice can be a good way to help children understand what they can do to protect themselves when events are beyond their control.
- washing their hands - help your child practise and increase their motivation for keeping going (maybe thinking of a song they want to sing while washing their hands).
- the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' advice for coughs and sneezes.

Sources for further advice

A wide range of professionals and organisations have been working hard to develop materials to support children and young people through the Coronavirus pandemic. The following materials provide helpful prompts to support adults to have discussions with children and young people.

Simple stories to discuss Coronavirus with children and young people:

[Hello, I'm a virus cousin with the flu and common cold](#)

[Carol Gray: My Story about pandemics and the Coronavirus](#)

[Dave the Dog is worried about Coronavirus](#)

[ELSA Support: Coronavirus Story](#)

[Coronavirus: A book for children – Illustrated by Axel Scheffler](#)

Information Videos

[Brainpop Coronavirus Video](#)

[BBC Newsround: Coronavirus: your questions answered](#)

[How Germs Spread](#)

Information flyers

[MENCAP: Information about Coronavirus](#)



Services & Support

The Isle of Man E-Counselling Service

- Qwell - Adult E-counselling service offers mental health services for adults experiencing low level anxiety, stress and depression. <https://www.qwell.io/>
- Kooth - (11-17 years) offers mental health services for young people experiencing low level anxiety, stress and depression. <https://kooth.com/>

School Hubs

There are a number of school hubs open across the Island (primary and secondary) for vulnerable students and students of key workers. It should be possible to contact your local school and seek advice and guidance from professionals if you have any worries or concerns about your child or young person.

Educational & Child Psychology Team (ECP Team)

The ECP Team aims to offer, as much as reasonably possible, a “business and usual” approach through the use of technology. An educational and child psychologist has been assigned to each primary and secondary education hub. For secondary schools, the normal link EP will support where possible. The Educational and Child Psychology Team are offering the following support:

- School and parent telephone/video consultations
- Ongoing support to existing cases (telephone/video consultations)
- Staff support
- Crisis/bereavement response

If you are worried about a child or young person and would like to contact the ECP directly, you can leave a message on the following number (01624) 685812 and a member of the team will get back to you as soon as possible.

Coronavirus information line - Telephone: 686262

A confidential free of charge support line for members of the public for non-medical queries.

Line to assist patients with suspected COVID 19 - Telephone: 111

A telephone helpline to assist patients with suspected Covid-19, however before you call use the online self-assessment at <https://covid19.gov.im>

Staff Welfare Service - Telephone: 687027

A confidential support service for Public Service staff. The Staff Welfare Officers will listen non-judgmentally to your issues and discuss through any options that are available to you.