

Hertfordshire Educational Psychology Service suggestions for supporting children and families during the coronavirus pandemic

In response to the rise in cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the recent decision to close schools, Hertfordshire Educational Psychology Service (EPS) have collated some useful resources to share with our community. This is a non-exhaustive list that provides ideas for supporting:

- children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- parents and carers

Below is some guidance and links which signpost useful resources. These are for talking to children about coronavirus and ways to help respond to theirs and our feelings.

Please let us know on Twitter @HertsEPS if there are other questions or topics you would like us to cover.

Children and young people

Talking honestly to children and young people about what is going on in age appropriate language is important. It is most helpful to maintain a calm approach, as children are sensitive to the moods of adults. Here are some resources aimed at addressing particular questions or issues children and young people may have:

- *What is coronavirus?*

Short book to support and reassure children suitable for those under 7:	https://www.mindheart.co/descargables
A useful explainer video suitable for KS2-3 children:	https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/

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A simple explainer book for KS 1-2 children:	https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Childrens-story-about-coronavirus.pdf
A simple visually supported and reassuring social story, useful for younger children with SEND or those with literacy needs:	https://theautismeducator.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf
A visually supported social story for children with SEND and good literacy skills:	https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf
Mencap visual explanation for young people with SEND:	https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/coronavirus

- *Why is my school closed?*

Children may experience a range of feelings about school closure. It is not a holiday or typical break and not something that they have caused. The impact on their sense of belonging, connectedness and disruption to their learning can be helpfully acknowledged. Finding ways to keep in touch with peers may also be helpful.

Short simple social story:	https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/School-is-Closed-Social-Story-FREEBIE-Interactive-Color-BW-5333335
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- *I'm feeling anxious. What can I do?*

As the situation is changing and uncertain, it may be that some (but not necessarily all) children and young people feel anxious. It can be helpful to recognise and validate that feeling and then think of ways to help. Below are some suggestions to build individual resilience and strategies for reducing anxiety in children.

Young Minds provides ideas and suggestions for helping reduce anxiety:	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/
Anna Freud Centre has a great list of self-care activities for young people:	https://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/
Short video on breathing exercises for young people:	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxbdX-SeOOo
Yoga, mindfulness and relaxation for children aged 3+:	https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga

Parents and carers

This is an unprecedented and uncertain time for us all. It is especially important for parents and carers to be self-aware about how they are affected by this naturally anxiety-provoking period, and seek appropriate advice, support and help if needed.

- *How can I explain coronavirus to children?*

Guidance has been produced that provides suggestions on what to say to children and age appropriate language to use to explain what is happening.

British Psychological Society (BPS) has created some guidance for talking to children about coronavirus:	https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus
National Association of School Psychologists from the U.S. has also given advice and guidance on talking to children:	https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource

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Suggestions for how to talk to children about world trauma, with ideas for differentiating language according to age:	https://www.heysigmund.com/how-to-talk-to-kids-and-teens-about-world-trauma/
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- *How can I look after myself while taking care of children at home?*

Recognising individual self-care needs is important in order to be ready to support others. Below are some recommended resources to aid emotional wellbeing.

This resource contains ideas for self-care:	https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3262-young-children-at-home-during-the-covid-19-outbreak-the-importance-of-self-care
Psychology Today reminds us to take a balanced approach:	https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/anxiety-files/202003/coronavirus-anxiety
Headspace has a free trial which introduces guided meditation/mindfulness practices:	https://www.headspace.com/

What else could I do to support my child?

- Keep things positive and give children hope. Remind them of the actions we can all take to reduce spread, such as increased hand washing and reducing social contact. Tell children that many people are doing their best to make the situation better. If someone they know contracts the virus, assure them it is not their fault.
- Try to keep familiar routines, which provide a feeling of safety and stability.
- Do nice things together and keep active. Make a plan and suggest regular family times where you can play games, exercise or do other enjoyable activities. Find a balance between activities and screen time (which can also be a shared activity).

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- Keep in contact with family and friends, using audio or video calls (following NHS guidance on ‘social contact’). This will help children connect with others and know that others are thinking about them. It will also reassure them that others are well, especially elderly relatives.
- Be aware of the conversations that children and young people may over-hear for example between adults or on the television or radio in the background.
- Moderate your own media consumption so that it is balanced. Be mindful of the things you are reading and watching, including social media – as this may add to worry and anxiety. Consider a few updates every day from reliable sources.

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