

Coping guide for children and young people

COVID19 and your well-being

Created by Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service

Over the past few weeks, the coronavirus (covid-19) crisis has caused major disruptions to family life, through the introduction of social distancing, school closures and now effective lock-down.



In difficult times like these, looking after our mental health and how we are feeling is just as important as taking care of our physical health. It's normal for everyone to feel anxious at the moment, and children and young people of all ages are just as affected as adults by the worry and stress coronavirus can cause.

This may feel even more relevant if you or those around you are directly affected by COVID-19. Everyone's experiences of something like this will be personal and could be very different. You may have thoughts and feelings which you have not experienced before. This is a NORMAL reaction to a very ABNORMAL experience and these feelings may last for some time.

HOW YOU MIGHT BE FEELING

There is no 'right' way to feel or respond to stressful situations, such as someone becoming ill due to COVID-19. But below are some common reactions:

- Early on you may have been in shock, and felt confused, helpless or anxious. You may have also felt scared and sad.
- As time goes on you may have felt angry with yourself, or with others. You may have even felt guilt or shame.
- You may have been visualising or dreaming about the virus or your loved ones getting ill.
- You could find yourself avoiding anything to do with COVID-19, including talking to other family members or blocking out thoughts.

People react differently and take different amounts of time to come to terms with what has happened. Even so, you may be surprised by the strength of your feelings. It is normal to experience a mixture of feelings. You may be alarmed or confused by your reaction to events relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. You may have some negative and positive feelings and thoughts. For example, feeling grateful for your own personal situation, as well as guilt or anger.

Other feelings you might experience include:

- **Frightened**... that the same thing will happen again, or that you might lose control of your feelings and break down.
- **Helpless**... that something really bad happened and you could do nothing about it. You feel helpless, vulnerable and overwhelmed.
- **Angry**... about what has happened and with whoever was responsible.
- **Guilty**... that you have survived when others have suffered or died. You may feel that you could have done something to prevent it.
- **Sad**... particularly if people were injured or died, especially someone you knew.
- **Ashamed or embarrassed**... that you have these strong feelings you can't control, especially if you need others to support you.
- **Relieved**... that the danger is over and that the danger has gone.
- **Hopeful**... that your life will return to normal. People can start to feel more positive about things quite soon after a trauma.

NEED FURTHER HELP?

Your feelings and thoughts will be very intense, and should gradually reduce over time (although they may not totally disappear). If your feelings or thoughts continue to cause you difficulties after approximately one month after the event you may want to consider further support. You could talk to your friends, family or a teacher in school.

WHAT ELSE MIGHT I NOTICE?

Strong feelings can affect your physical health. In the weeks after the changes because of COVID-19 or a loved one becoming ill from COVID-19, you may find that you:

- Cannot sleep, or when asleep you dream a lot and have nightmares
- Feel very tired
- Have poor concentration
- Have memory problems and have difficulty thinking clearly
- Suffer from headaches
- Experience changes in appetite
- Have aches and pains
- Feel that your heart is beating faster

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- **Give yourself time**. It takes time - weeks or months - to accept what has happened and to learn to live with it. You may need to grieve for what (or who) you have lost.
- **Find out** what happened. It is better to face the reality of what happened rather than wondering about what might have happened.
- **Your support network**. If you go to funerals or memorial services, it can help to spend time with others who have been through the same experience as you.
- **Ask for support**. It can be a relief to talk about what happened. You may need to ask your friends and family for the time to do this - at first they will probably not know what to say or do.
- **Take time** for yourself. At times you may want to be alone or just with those close to you.
- **Talk it over**. Bit by bit, let yourself think about the trauma and talk about it with others. Don't worry if you cry when you talk, it's natural and usually helpful. Take things at a pace that you feel comfortable with.
- **Get into a routine**. Even if you don't feel much like eating, try to have regular meals and to eat a balanced diet. Taking some exercise can help - but start gently.
- **Physical exercise**. Some young people find moving about and playing sports can provide some temporary relief and occupy your mind with other thoughts.
- **Relaxing activities**, such as hobbies, drawing, writing or listening to music.

You could also contact one of the following for support:
Your GP / Childline (0800 1111) / Winston's Wish (08452 030405)