

Supporting young children during COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 novel coronavirus is a worldwide pandemic. Luckily few young children have fallen ill. Most of the sick children have had mild cases. However, young children are highly affected by the isolation and the anxiety of their parents, carers and other adults.

Adults may think that children will not notice all the changes and stress, but they are very sensitive to what is going on. This info sheet describes some ways children react to stress and some things you can do to help them.

Common Emotional Reactions in Young Children

- Crying
- Restlessness
- Sleep problems
- Nightmares
- Being clingy
- Fear of being alone
- Easily upset or angered
- Withdrawn

They may also engage in repetitive play activities with themes about fear and protective behaviours, such as caring for dolls and toy animals.

You may also see behaviours such as bed wetting and thumb sucking in children who had previously outgrown these activities.

Concerns for family

If you're a parent or primary carer for a child or children and need to be separated for any length of time during the pandemic, talk to the children using electronic means as often as possible during the day and at bedtime. If possible, do this via Skype, Messenger, Zoom or Facetime so they can see you.

Children in care may have additional concerns about family members, or their past trauma may be triggered (e.g. food uncertainty). They may need additional regulating activities (physical and sensory).

ROUTINES are very important for young children.

Creating new routines or re-establishing usual routines can help children feel safe. Keeping regular mealtimes and bedtimes, setting a daily time to play games together, read to them, or singing songs together all help.

SUPPORT from parents or caregivers is very important during periods of stress. Parents may be physically present but not available emotionally because they are so stressed themselves. It's important to make time to reassure young children and spend time with them. Even young children can benefit from seeing playmates or family members on video conferencing.

How you can help

EXPLAIN why things are different. Young children may not understand why things have changed (like why they cannot go outside or play with other children) but talking with them will help them feel supported by you. Keep explanations simple.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

This is very important. Even if young children are not directly exposed to the trauma, they can recognize stress and worry in older children and adults in the house. Reach out to your support network and remember social distancing and even physical self-isolation does not mean social isolation.