

Helping children manage in unsettling times

This advice was compiled by Tim Conroy-Stocker, an Educational Psychologist working in Hong Kong, where schools have been closed for some weeks already.

The Coronavirus outbreak has led to a high degree of worry, uncertainty, concern and disruption to everyday life. The issue has been very present in the news, and all adults and children will have some degree of awareness of events so far and will have had their lives disrupted now that the closure of schools has been announced.

During these times both children and adults might feel anxious and unsure about their safety. Alongside school, parents can help provide opportunities where feelings can be discussed within a safe context, as well as maintaining a sense of normality, routine and calm. Supporting children will enable them to process and manage their feelings and build resilience.

The following suggestions may be helpful:

1. **Reassure children that they are safe:** Children will need to be reassured regularly they are safe, and that adults will faithfully try to keep them safe.
2. **Let children know that it is alright to be upset:** Tell children all feelings are OK, but it is important to still behave in a polite and respectful way to others.
3. **Maintain a normal routine:** Set up a work/leisure/exercise routine for students at home. Make extra time to listen to what your children need to tell you.
4. **Place an emphasis on resilience and strengths:** Focus on the child's skills, in terms of their daily life. Help them see they have many strengths to help them cope if feeling anxious or upset.
5. **Look for opportunities to help others:** Acts of benevolence, charity and humanity help to restore positivity about the world.
6. **Provide opportunities for children to be honest about their feelings:** Sharing worries or feelings of upset with other family members reduces a sense of vulnerability and isolation, raises optimism and self-esteem. Checking in with your children to see if they have any worries can help them start these conversations.
7. **Provide opportunities for physical exercise:** Exercise is valuable in developing natural chemicals in the brain to help us cope with feelings such as shock or worry.
8. **Look after yourself:** A time of stress can mean less energy and more potential for illness for you, as well as others. So please take care of yourself.