

A note to parents, from the Macdonald Valley Public School Counselling Service

Leonie - School Counsellor

It is understandable that you may feel overwhelmed by the information, conversations and the increased levels of stress in your community from the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and we can all be affected differently.

It can be hard to know what information to trust especially in a situation where things are changing so quickly. It can be helpful to keep up-to-date but it is also okay to switch off from the 24-hour media cycle if this is getting too much. Following is some useful strategies, resources and services that may assist you to support your family's mental health as this situation continues to unfold.

Importantly, should you wish to contact myself for further support, please email the school (macdonaldv-p.school@det.nsw.edu.au) with a request and I will be in contact during school hours. At Macdonald Valley Public School, we will endeavour to support you and your families during this period of rapid change, uncertainty and adjustment.

How to talk to children about Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

1. Keep it simple and be honest

Children are often savvy enough to know if adults aren't being honest (they can sense our hesitation and anxiety) and they can get overwhelmed with lengthy explanations.

We know the Coronavirus is similar to a cold, so our approach to prevention is the same; frequent hand washing with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds (especially after using the bathroom and playing outside and before eating), keeping your hands away from your face as much as possible, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue or into their elbow instead of their hands.

It's anticipated that only a small percentage of people would require hospitalization and the news highlights those people. The majority will be okay.

2. Validate any concerns

We want the children to feel the "4 S's"; Safe, Seen, Soothed, and Secure. We do that by active listening, helping them to label their feelings, supporting them in asking the questions they need to ask, and validating whatever it is they are experiencing. When they feel seen and heard, they are more likely to have a sense of safety and security.

3. Allow children the space to talk further

For any child who appears to need to talk about these concerns or ideas further, let them know they can always ask more questions or re-open the conversation. The "Name It to Tame It" approach helps the child to calm the emotional right brain by talking about their concerns and telling their story using left-brain words and logic.

If your child is upset and shares that she/he is anxious and worried that he might get sick with the virus and miss school and will get behind on his work, it's important that your child's experience of sharing that with you is a positive one, so that they know that coming to you and talking to you is a good thing!

Try to avoid a "dismiss and deny" response that shows your child you're not that interested in their feelings about it, or that you're not able to handle their big feelings.

4. Manage your own big feelings

Adults really do set the emotional tone for our children. As mammals, our brains are held captive to one another. Our chaos or calm are contagious, especially to those we spend the most time with. If you're panicked, chaotic internally, and obsessive about the news, you will dial up your child's anxiety and they will focus on what they can't control. If you are informed, calm internally, and share bits of information about what we can control, you will dial down your child's anxiety. You can say something like "It's great news that the doctors know how this virus gets spread. That means we know some things we can do to be healthy. What do you think we need to do to be healthy?" This can also lead to a great conversation about food, sleep, hygiene, etc.

Resources to support Covid-19 discussions at home

For primary school aged children:

Social Stories & Comics:

- 'Coronavirus story':
<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Childrens-story-about-coronavirus.pdf>
- 'Hello, my name is Coronavirus':

<http://www.millfields.hackney.sch.uk/uploads/2019/Corona%20Virus%20Info%20for%20Young%20Children.pdf.pdf>

- 'Let's talk about Coronavirus':
<https://shonainnespsychology.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Lets-talk-about-Coronavirus-.pdf>
- 'A comic exploring the new coronavirus':
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

Handwashing:

- Singalong with the Wiggles:
<https://www.facebook.com/unicef/posts/10157942700399002>
- 'Top 5 Handwashing videos for children':
<https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-top-5-handwashing-songs-children>

For secondary school aged children:

- Headspace factsheet:
<https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-cope-with-stress-related-to-covid-19/>
- Reach Out- links to a variety of factsheets:
<https://au.reachout.com/collections/coping-during-coronavirus>

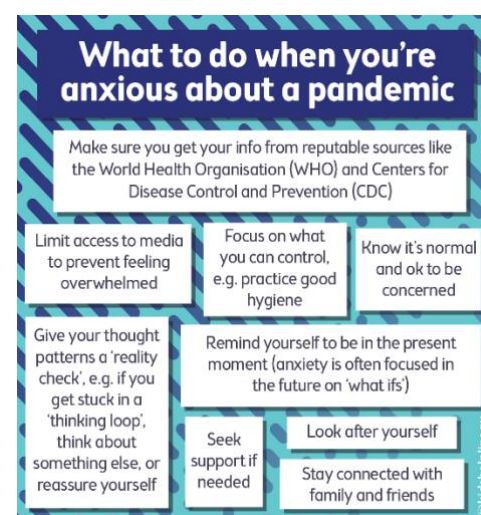
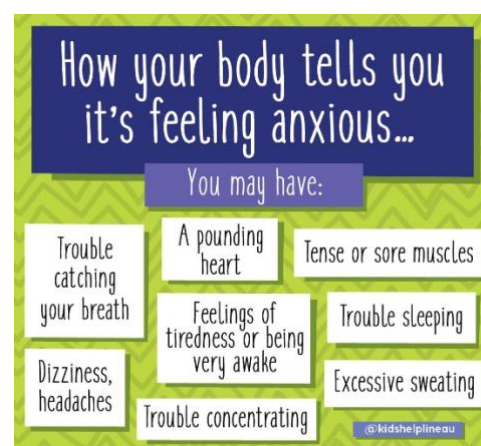
For parents:

- Beyond Blue factsheet:
<https://www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians>
- Australian Psychological Society Factsheets:
<https://www.psychology.org.au/COVID-19-Australians>

Further mental health resources, strategies and support

Coping strategies to consider when times are tough for children, adolescents and their parents:

- ✓ Create a **routine** and plan your day around your routine.
- ✓ Do things that make you feel **safe**; **connect** to people who are helpful to your wellbeing.
- ✓ Do things you've done in the past to help manage challenge and stress; reflect on your own **coping strategies** and write them down, put them in a place you can access daily.
- ✓ Engage in activities that promote a sense of **calm** and feeling **grounded**; **mindfulness**, **meditation** or **breathing** exercises.
- ✓ Ensure you are getting enough **sleep** (9 hours), eating a good variety of **healthy foods** each day, plenty of **water** and aiming for at least 30 – 60 minutes of **exercise** a day.
- ✓ Find ways to **relax**, spend 10 minutes a day breathing slowly and calmly or use one of the breathing apps.
- ✓ Learn something new or get **creative**; check YouTube for more ideas. Watch or read something **uplifting**.
- ✓ Limit exposure to information from social media and the news. Source **positive news** pages and uplifting stories instead.
- ✓ Listen to **music**, choose something that makes you feel good and make a playlist.
- ✓ Make a list of **activities** that you can do at home with your family or by yourself.
- ✓ Practice **gratitude** and write a list and draw 10 good things in your life and the world. Or you could start a journal and write down 3 things you are grateful each day.
- ✓ **Talk** to someone you trust if it all feels a bit too much.





If you or your child needs to speak to someone during these challenging times the services below are a great place to start. Alternatively, speak to your General Practitioner (GP) who will be able to help you make a plan to support you and your child's wellbeing.

Name	About	Phone	Online
Kids Help Line 	For anyone 25 or under - Kids Helpline is a free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.	1800 55 1800 24/7	Webchat 24/7 https://kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling
Lifeline 	For all ages - 24-hour crisis support telephone service. Lifeline provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.	CALL: 13 11 14 24/7 TEXT: 0477 131114 6:00PM - Midnight	Crisis Support Chat 7:00PM – Midnight https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/online-services/crisis-chat
Youth Beyond Blue 	Beyond Blue provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live.	1300 22 4636 24/7	Chat Online 3:00PM - Midnight https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/
SANE Australia 	SANE Australia supports people living with complex mental health issues and the people that care about them	1800 187 263 10:00AM – 10:00PM	Webchat 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM https://www.sane.org/about-sane
Headspace 	ehespace provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 - 25 and their families and friends.	N/A	Group Chat 24/7 1 on 1 Chat 9AM - 1AM https://headspace.org.au/ehespace/
QLife 	QLife provides anonymous and free LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talking about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships	1800 184 527 3PM - Midnight	Webchat 3PM – Midnight https://www qlife.org.au/resources/chat
1800RESPECT 	Confidential information, counselling and support service, open 24 hours to support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse	1800 737 732 24/7 Interpreter: 13 14 50	Online Chat 24/7 https://chat.1800respect.org.au/#/welcome
Mental Health Line 	A mental health professional will answer your call about mental health concerns for you or someone you are concerned about, including children, teens, adults and older people	1800 011 511 24/7	https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/Mental-Health-Line.aspx