

# Children, young people and Coronavirus



Covid-19 is a widely reported on and a frightening event which can cause children and young people to worry. All children and young people have questions about the virus but for those who have already had someone die, anxiety is likely to be heightened. Parents and carers of children have contacted Cruse to ask how to help bereaved children and young people, so here are some tips on supporting children through these difficult times.

## ► TALK

Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus with children. Most children will have already heard about the virus or seen people wearing face masks, so parents shouldn't avoid talking about it. Not talking about something can actually make children and young people worry more. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. It may be helpful to restrict the amount of media/social media coverage they are exposed to and balance it with other positive activities.

## ► BE HONEST

Give children and young people honest and factual information which is developmentally appropriate. Don't volunteer too much information, as this could be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer the child's questions. Answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if everything can't be answered; being available to children is what matters. Children and young people's understanding of death is different. Help children feel informed and get fact-based information that is likely to be more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from their friends or on the news. It may be helpful to explain things that affect them directly such as:

- Why they are being asked to wash their hands
- Why school is closed
- Why they can't visit a grandparent
- Why people are working from home

## ► ACKNOWLEDGE CONCERNS

Be reassuring. Hearing about the coronavirus on the news may be enough to make them worry that they'll catch it, bereaved children and young people may be concerned about someone else they know becoming ill or dying. Take cues from the children. Invite the child to tell you anything they may have heard about the coronavirus, and how they feel.

Give them an opportunity to ask questions. Be prepared to answer (but not prompt) questions. It may be helpful to reassure children and explain that:

- Some people will have no symptoms
- Most people will have a mild form of the virus and will get better
- Some people are vulnerable and we need to make sure they are protected
- Be honest and explain that some people may die; children and young people need to trust you and be assured that you are honest with them
- Focus on what you're doing to stay safe. An important way to reassure children and young people is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking, children feel empowered when they know what to do to keep safe so explain about the importance of washing their hands.
- Keep talking, tell them that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more, let them know that the lines of communication are going to be open and even though you may not have the answers to everything, once you know more you will let them know.

## ► CREATE ROUTINES

Keeping rooted in routines and predictability is helpful, routines are reassuring particularly when everything else seems to be disrupted. Structured days with regular mealtimes, school work, breaks, playtime and bedtime are an essential part of keeping younger children happy and healthy.

## ► GET SUPPORT

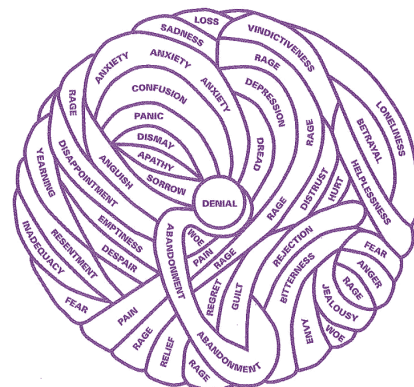
Acknowledge and deal with your own anxieties. If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer children's question, children and young people can pick up the distress of others.

Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to grieve just as adults do. Avoiding or ignoring children's grief is not protective, in fact it can prove to be damaging as the child enters adulthood.

Children and young people regardless of their age need to be encouraged to talk about how they are feeling and supported to understand their emotions. Losing someone important is one of the hardest things to experience in life and if you are young, bereavement can be more difficult.

Support and advice is available to parents and carers on our website:

- Our new Cruse website resources are available here: [www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus)
- You can find specific information for children and young people here: [www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/children-and-young-people](http://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/children-and-young-people)
- There are free booklets available here: [www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/publications/free-booklets](http://www.cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/publications/free-booklets)
- There are free booklets for children, young people and their carers here: [www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/parents/free-booklets-children-young-people-and-their-carers](http://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/parents/free-booklets-children-young-people-and-their-carers)
- Cruse Hope Again resources are available here: [www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk)
- Cruse Helpline is available on **0808 0801677**
- Or contact your local branch



For people who have experienced loss, they may recognise some of the tangled ball of emotions. Knowing that these emotions are part and parcel of the process is in itself very beneficial in helping us understand that what we are experiencing is normal as we try and come to terms with our loss.