

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH ANXIETY THROUGHOUT COVID-19

Created by Psychology Services – Catholic Education Services Cairns

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has impacted people in varying ways on a global scale. During times like this it is normal that people are feeling afraid, worried, anxious and overwhelmed. While physical distancing continues, students are spending more time working and studying from home. This may present some additional challenges for children with a diagnosed Anxiety disorder. It's important to remember, however, that there are some positive steps you can take to help your child make their learning less stressful and more productive at home. Also remember that you are not required to be your child's teacher or counsellor during this time, but rather to help them engage optimally with the new learning platform.

It is helpful to know that when a child is anxious, the part of their brain required for learning is essentially offline. Help them to switch this part back on by doing some relaxation exercises, by maintaining your own calm, and by not expecting them to be able to work optimally (or maybe even at all), until they are calm again.

**Please note that as anxiety often presents differently in different age groups, some of the following suggestions may not apply to your child.

- ✓ If your child is receiving **professional help** for their anxiety, it is important that this is maintained as much as possible. It would be helpful to seek advice from their clinician to add to these suggestions.
- ✓ **Pay extra attention to your child's emotions and needs.** You may recognise signs of increased anxiety, stress or worry; or observe changes in your child's behaviour, sleep, mood or eating habits. Noticing and responding with care and support can help your children to feel better.
- ✓ **Maintain daily routines.** As well as providing the structure necessary for learning, it also provides a sense of predictability and consistency which is helpful in reducing anxiety, for example, set times for sleep, eating, exercise/walk with the family as well as specific learning times.
- ✓ Begin each day or learning session with some **relaxation or grounding exercises.** There are several apps for this (including Smiling Mind and Headspace).
- ✓ Be aware of **triggers.** You may already be aware of some of your child's triggers for their anxiety. Discuss with your child's teacher ways of reducing learning environment stressors and have a discussion with older children and teens about ways to limit the impact of outside stressors.
 - » In younger children it may be trying new tasks, older children may avoid presenting their work to others, and teens may benefit from limiting their exposure to upsetting news about the pandemic.
- ✓ Younger children may benefit from the use of 'social stories.' This is when a short story of the actions involved in learning is written out on a poster or in their book, with drawings or photos to help them understand what is to be done.
- ✓ **Limit news and social media exposure.** It's normal for people to want to stay informed, however, this can unnecessarily intensify worry and agitation. Suggest having scheduled times for checking in with news or connecting via social media.
- ✓ **Answer your children's questions and talk about how they are feeling.** To manage anxiety in children of all ages make certain to provide accurate information from reliable sources. Don't be afraid to talk about coronavirus with children in an age appropriate way.
 - » Some tips: speaking calmly, asking what they already know; normalising their worry; and not overwhelming them with all the information.

(Continued overleaf)

Available supports:

- If it is an emergency or you have immediate concerns, contact 000
- Your child's treating specialist (e.g. Psychologist, Psychiatrist, counsellor)
- Your child's school counsellor
- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Headspace Cairns (40413780) or [ehespace](#)
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
- See our list of [support services](#) for further options

Further information can be found at:

<https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/headspace-Fact-Sheet-Coping-with-COVID-19-Stress-v1.pdf>

<https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/03-Anxiety-headspace-fact-sheet-PRINT2.pdf>

<https://childmind.org/article/supporting-teenagers-and-young-adults-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>