

Parent Pack

Anxiety ASC

&

COVID - 19



The outbreak of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has created a lot of anxiety and uncertainty for all of us, including children and teens. During stressful times, no matter what their age, children want to know three basic things:

Am I safe?

Are you, the people caring for me, safe?

How will this situation affect my daily life?

As parents and caregivers, we need to talk with our kids about COVID-19 to address these concerns.

Below are seven tips on how to engage with kids of all ages to help them maintain emotional stability during the crisis, followed by guidance on how to tailor conversations for kids at of different ages.



1. Control Your Own Anxiety

Many of us are worried about the current situation and living with uncertainty isn't easy. Yet, anxiety is "contagious." Your kids will know that you are nervous even if you try to hide it. So how can you keep your cool, despite your own worries?

Here are some things that may help:

Get the most credible information you can.

Focus on fact-based, helpful information about the virus.

Avoid endless social media streams, which can be filled with misinformation, and constant breaking news headlines, which can fuel your concerns.

- Stay up to date with notices from your child's school.
- Talk with people who support you.
- Take care of your physical health. Get a good amount of sleep and exercise and use other ways to reduce anxiety, such as meditation, yoga, listening to music, or watching a TV show.
- If your child asks if you are worried, be honest! They will know if you are not telling them the truth.
- You can say things like: "Yes, I'm worried about the virus, but I know that there are ways to prevent its spread and take care of the family if one of us gets sick."



2. Approach Your Kids and Ask What They Know

Most children will have heard about COVID-19, particularly school-age kids and adolescents. They may have read things online, seen something on TV, or heard friends or teachers talk about the illness. Others may have overheard you talking about it. There is a lot of misinformation out there, so don't assume that they know specifics about the situation or that the information they have is correct.

Ask open ended questions:

What have you heard about the coronavirus?

Where did you hear about it?

What are your major concerns or worries?

Do you have any questions I can help you answer?

How are you feeling about the Coronavirus?

Once you know what information they have and what they're concerned about, then you can help to fill in any necessary gaps.



3. Validate Their Feelings and Concerns

Kids may have all sorts of reactions to COVID-19. Some may be realistic, while others exaggerated.

For example, if grandma is in a nursing home, they may have heard that older adults get sicker than healthier, younger individuals.

You need to be able to acknowledge this valid concern, but can reassure them that grandma has the best medical care to manage the illness. Alternately, a child may be terrified that animals will get the virus such as a beloved pet. Again, take these feeling seriously, but then reassure them that dogs and cats don't get the virus, so there is no need to worry about this.

4. Be Available for Questions and Provide New Information

This outbreak is likely to last a long time, so one conversation won't be enough. At first, your child's emotional reactions will outweigh their thoughts and concerns. As the outbreak continues and your kids get new information, they will need to talk again.

Let them know they can come to you at any time with questions or worries. It's also a good idea to have regular check ins, as they may not approach you with their fears.

When you update your kids with new information, don't assume that they fully understand everything you say. Ask them to explain things back to you in their own language. This is an excellent way to know if your kids understood what you meant.



5. Empower Them by Modelling Behaviour

An important part of prevention is hand washing, coughing or sneezing into your sleeves, wiping your nose with tissue then discarding it, trying to keep your hands away from your face, not shaking hands or making physical contact with others.

Be sure to demonstrate these behaviours first, so your kids can have a good model. It's a great idea for you to wash your hands with young children singing "Happy Birthday" twice (about 20 seconds) so they know what to do on their own. Wiping surfaces as a family, after dinner, helps everyone feel part of the prevention effort.

When you see your teen practicing good hygiene praise them for it! Reinforce that they are not only taking care of themselves, but also helping to prevent the spread of germs to others.

6. Provide Reassurance

Your kids may worry about how you're going to get through this. Remind them of other situations in which they felt helpless and scared. Kids love family stories, and these narratives carry a lot of emotional weight.

Try something like: "Remember that hurricane when a tree fell on the apartment?" or "Remember when the pipes burst in the house and we were flooded?"

Remind them that you have been through challenging times before, and though everyone was distressed, everyone also worked together and got through it.

Reliving these kinds of narrative helps the whole family to build resilience and hope.



7. Focus on the things you can control

We're in a time of massive upheaval. There are so many things outside of our control, including how long the pandemic lasts, how other people behave, and what's going to happen in our communities. That's a tough thing to accept, and so many of us respond by endlessly searching the Internet for answers and thinking over all the different scenarios that might happen. But as long as we're focusing on questions with unknowable answers and circumstances outside of our personal control, this strategy will get us nowhere—aside from feeling drained, anxious, and overwhelmed.

When you feel yourself getting caught up in fear of what might happen, try to shift your focus to things you can control. For example, you can't control how severe the coronavirus outbreak is in your city or town, but you can take steps to reduce your own personal risk (and the risk you'll unknowingly spread it to others), such as:

- Washing your hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds) with soap and water.
- Avoiding touching your face (particularly your eyes, nose, and mouth).
- Staying home as much as possible, even if you don't feel sick.
- Avoiding all non-essential shopping and travel.
- Keeping 6 feet of distance between yourself and others when out.
- Getting plenty of sleep, which helps support your immune system.
- Following all recommendations from health authorities.

Teens and young adults have likely heard a lot about COVID-19 and its potential danger. They are old enough to understand how it spreads, preventative measures, and future risks. Have open conversations, beginning with open-ended questions about what they know, what they are worried about, and how they are feeling.

Kids this age are mature enough to watch the news with you or go online and explore trusted sites to learn more about the disease. Sit with them while viewing and have conversations about what they see and read, and how the illness may impact their lives.

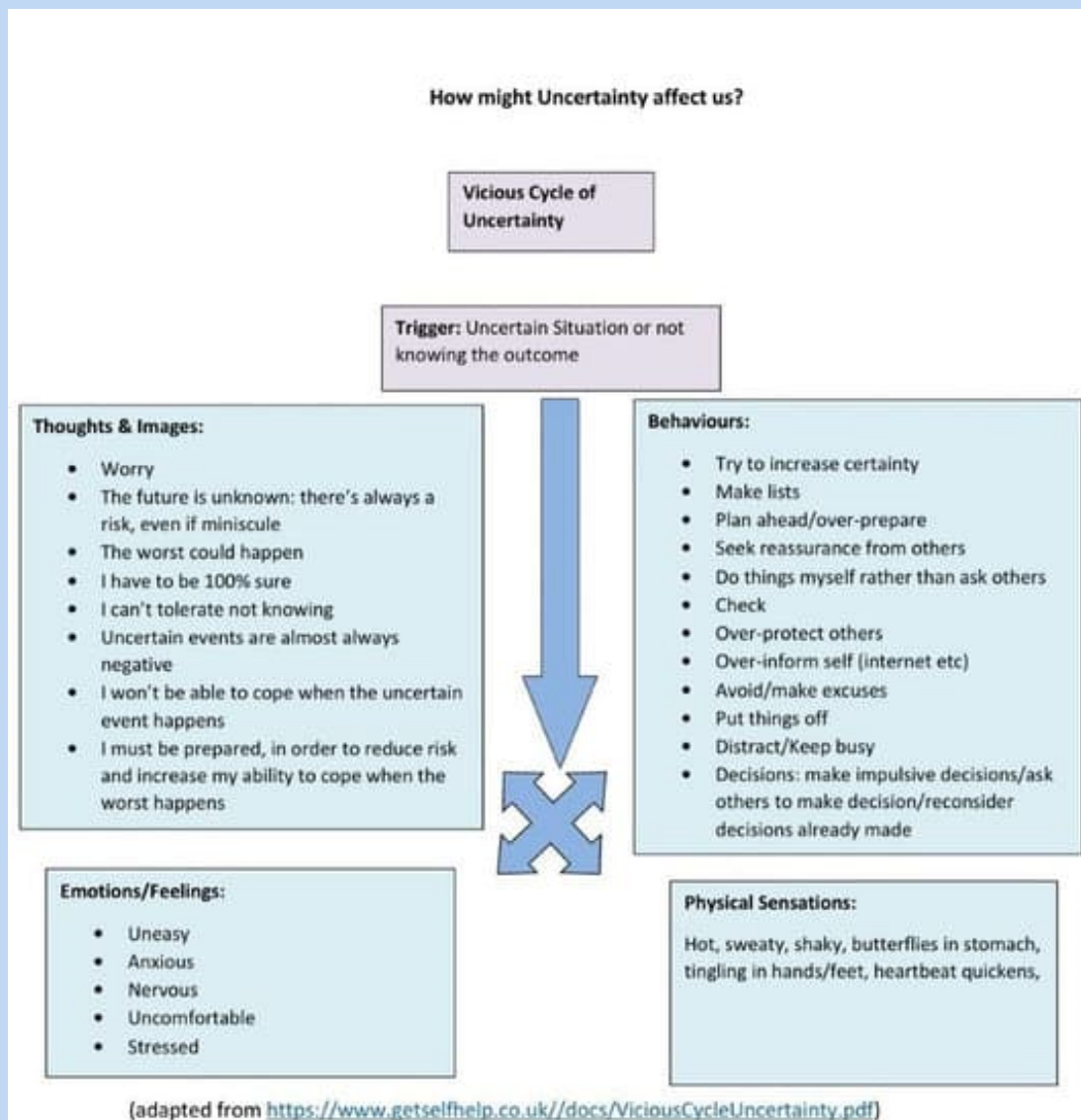
Teens and young adults may help you shop for supplies, play with younger siblings, prepare meals, and do other tasks to prepare for possible quarantine. Including them in the effort to protect the family helps them feel valued, and this empowerment lessens anxiety.



Ways anxiety might impact your teenager

We have listed some common ways that anxiety might affect your teen. You might find it helpful to write a list of the things on these lists that are familiar to you or tick off things on these lists that you recognise.

Thoughts & images
Behaviours
Emotions or feelings
Physical sensations

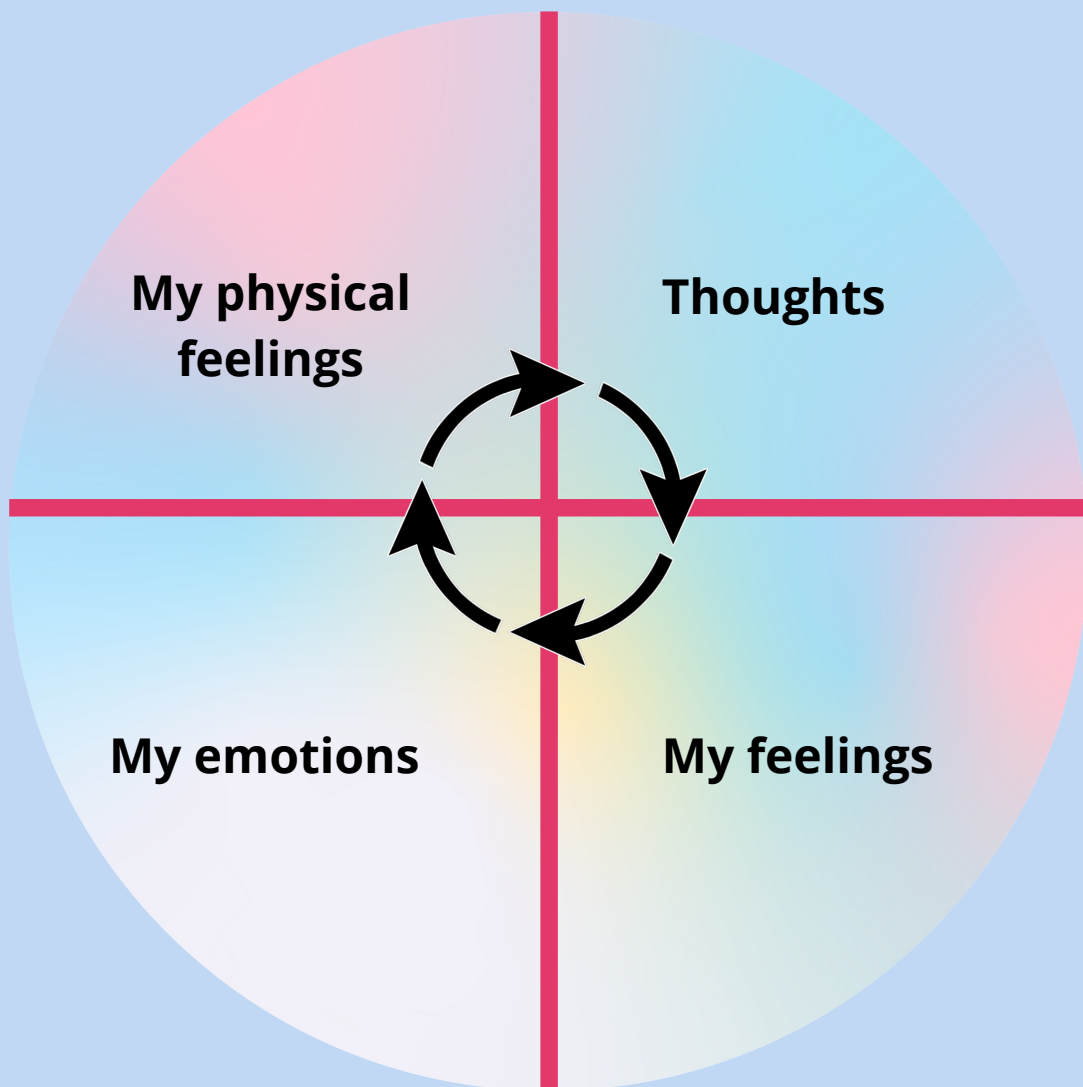


My vicious circle worksheet

MY SITUATION

IMPACT

Now using the vicious cycle worksheet below, write down the emotions, physical feelings, behaviours and thoughts you are experiencing, thinking about how these impact on your life.



Notice the Worry

Ask yourself "What am I worrying about?"

Ask: "Is this a hypothetical situation or a current problem?"
and/or "Can I do something about this?"

If the worry is a hypothetical situation:
Let the worry go or postpone your worry until later
Change your focus of attention - NOW

Notice, right now, your focus of attention

Observe and say to yourself (and notice) whatever you are doing,
e.g.

5 things I can see
4 things I can hear
3 things I can feel or touch
2 things I can smell
1 slow deep breath

RELAX

If the worry is a current problem:

Make an action plan:

What to do

When to do it

How to do it

Schedule it

Let the worry go in the meantime

Worry Time

1.) Schedule worry time each day for one week. Put it in your calendar. Start by setting aside 15-30 minutes during the morning or afternoon. That will be your worry time. It's best not to schedule worry time right before you go to bed, for obvious reasons.

2.) During that 15-30 minute window, write down all of your worries that you can think of. Don't put pressure on yourself to solve them during that window, but if your mind naturally goes there, that's fine.

Writing the worrisome thoughts down can be therapeutic in and of itself, as it often lends perspective over what's troubling, in a way that can be more powerful than internal reflection alone.

3.) Between worry times: if you start to worry, tell yourself to let go of those thoughts until the next designated worry period. This will feel hard at first, and may require a lot of reinforcing self-talk (e.g., telling yourself over and over to let go of thinking about your worries until it's the appropriate time).

Try not to worry about worrying outside of your worry time! You won't be perfect with this exercise, nobody is.

4.) At the end of the week, take a few minutes to look at what you wrote down over the course of that week. Do you notice any patterns? Any repeat worries? Any changes in the content of your worries?

5.) After doing this for one week, consider trying it for another. As you practice this more, you'll start to notice an increased ability to control when and where you worry; it's akin to strengthening your muscle of thought control.

How to deal with negative thoughts?

Recognise

Negative thoughts

Identify

What triggered the emotion?

Reality check: are you ignoring, minimizing or exaggerating?

Challenge

Where is the proof? Are my thoughts accurate?

Are there any other explanations

Reframe

Reframe so your thoughts are no longer negative

Relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques can often be a very helpful strategy to use when you are sitting with uncertainty. It can be helpful to identify some relaxation strategies to use when you are trying to accept the feeling of uncertainty.

These could be

Do some exercise (e.g. go for a walk, cycle, do some yoga)

Read a book

Watch your favourite TV show/film

Listen to some music

Do something creative (e.g. draw, paint)

Talk to a friend or family member

Have a bath

Cook

Add some of your own ideas to this list. It can also be useful to review any mindful strategies as you try them out and see what is helpful about each strategy and what is unhelpful. You can then tailor the strategy to make it as helpful as possible.



Useful resources

Mindfulness techniques:

<http://psychologytools.com/technique-mindfulness.html>

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk//mindfulness.htm>

Relaxation techniques:

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk//relax.htm>

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/relaxation.asp>

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/how-to-do-progressive-muscle-relaxation/>

Websites:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

<https://ticplus.org.uk/>

<https://www.ghll.org.uk>



This booklet was created by Young Minds Matter Gloucestershire, part of the School's Mental Health Support Team.

