



How to Respond to Children's Emotions?

A response to COVID-19

Parents' Role under the Pandemic

Many people have been staying at home to avoid infection since the outbreak started. Facing a life with limitations, bombarded by information about the pandemic and a sense of an uncontrollable situation may lead to various emotions, including **boredom, anxiety, worries and panic, or even physical symptoms like body aches, chest congestion and insomnia.** All of these are **normal reactions.**



At this critical time, family members have to **support each other** and make sure everyone **feels safe** at home in addition to physical protection. It is important to maintain a **healthy mind.**

At the same time, children are a **witness** to everything that is happening. They too feel relieved if parents respond to the pandemic **calmly and confidently.**



Taking care of children

Also, taking care of **YOURSELF**

DOs

Recognize and accept your emotions

Get rest and find a quiet place
for the peace of mind

Keep a consistent sleep schedule

Exercise regularly

Keep in touch with
relatives and friends through
messages and social media



DON'Ts

Suppress or run away
from emotions

Lack of sleep

Overload with
information about
the pandemic

Picture credit: © UNICEF Viet Nam

Source: UNICEF, 'Keep a strong, healthy body and mind', UNICEF,
<<https://www.unicef.cn/en/what-we-do/unicef-emergencies/covid-19/how-to-keep-a-strong-healthy-body-and-mind>>, accessed 23 March 2020

Family Life in the Outbreak

How to explain the outbreak to children?
How to respond to children's emotions?
How to maintain harmony in the family?



How to Explain the Outbreak to Children?



Explain in an age appropriate way that children can understand

A pandemic is completely new to most children. They rely on their parents to provide the facts and build up the correct understanding on pandemic.

Parents may explain the current situation and how to reduce the risk of infection in an age appropriate way.

Parents can help young children understand the pandemic by **playing games, storytelling, role-playing** or other **artistic ways**. For example, **drawing a picture of a virus** and searching for **videos about hygiene tips** are both good examples that can help children understand and practice personal hygiene.

More Tips

When listening to your children, you may bend over or crouch down to **reach their level of sight, and speak softly** to comfort them.

If you are hospitalized or quarantined, make sure you **contact your children regularly** via phone calls or messages.

Health Tips for Parents (Chinese only)

The booklet supports parents to explain the outbreak to children in an interesting and healthy way.



Source: Department of Health

Source:

1. UNICEF, 'Keeping your home healthy and safe', UNICEF, <<https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/stories/keeping-your-home-healthy-and-safe>>, accessed 23 March 2020
2. WHO, 'Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCov', WHO, <<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>>, accessed 23 March 2020
3. 衛生署兒童體能智力測驗服務，身心抗疫(家長篇)，衛生署，香港，2020

How to Respond to Children's Emotions?

19

Keep your daily routine

Try your best to keep your daily routine, or establish a new one with your children in a changing environment, e.g. make a study-at-home timetable.



Encourage children to express their feelings

When your children are experiencing some emotions, you may encourage them to draw a picture of what they are feeling as a process of awareness on their own emotions. When they calm down, you may invite them to review their **"Emotion Diary"**.

You may use the **"Emotion Cards"** on the back cover of this booklet, and ask your children with open-ended questions, like "How are you feeling today?," "Which card can represent your feeling?"

Play at Home

This site suggests many games that can be played at home. Just relax and play with your children!



Source: Playright Children's Play Association



Help children relax with games

Playing games is an effective way to relieve stress and build resilience in children. Playing with parents can reduce their pressure and anxiety.

Source:

1. UNICEF, 'Keeping your home healthy and safe', UNICEF, <<https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/stories/keeping-your-home-healthy-and-safe>>, accessed 23 March 2020
2. WHO, 'Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCoV', WHO, <<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>>, accessed 23 March 2020
3. UNICEF China, 'How are you feeling today?', UNICEF, <<https://www.unicef.cn/en/what-we-do/unicef-emergencies/covid-19/how-to-keep-children-emotionally-healthy>>, accessed 8 April 2020

How to Maintain Harmony in the Family?

Maintaining a harmonious family atmosphere is paramount for family members to feel emotionally safe. Supports and communication within the family will help you relieve stress and relax to protect yourself from the pandemic.



Family Activities and Exercises

Arrange at least one activity or exercise for all family members every day. It helps you and your family **keep healthy** and builds up a **stronger relationship**, for example:

- Fitness games
- Aerobic exercises
(e.g. rope skipping, running in place, etc.)



Invite your children to do housework

Besides being cared for, children can also contribute to the family. Simple housework like folding laundry and picking up toys will improve their **self-competence**.



Involve your children in family affairs

Children can be involved in planning different family affairs, like preparing activities or discussing family rules, depending on their age. This will enhance their **planning skills** and make them feel their life is **under control**.

Health Tips for Fighting the Virus (Chinese only)

The tips provides various parent-child activities, exercises and games for fighting the virus.

Source: Department of Health



For Parents



For Students

Source:

1. UNICEF, 'Keeping your home healthy and safe', UNICEF, <<https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/stories/keeping-your-home-healthy-and-safe>>, accessed 23 March 2020
2. 衛生署學生健康服務，身心抗疫小貼士(家長篇)，衛生署，香港，2020

How are you, young friends?

With the suspension of classes, young people are worried about their learning progress, and spend less time with their friends. They may simply answer “I’m OK” when parents ask them how are they, but is that the right way to cope with emotions? Parents may refer to adolescent psychologist, Dr. Lisa Damour’s 6 tips on how to practice self-care and look after youth mental health.

1. Anxiety is completely normal

Anxiety can be positive in some ways, as it can help you make the decisions to protect yourself and others, like keeping social distancing and washing hands frequently. It shows you care for the people around you.

However, please make sure the information you get is from reliable sources.



2. Keep in touch with friends

Young people may use social media like Instagram and Telegram more often during the outbreak for keeping in touch with friends.

However, excessive use of social media is not healthy and may amplify the anxiety. Parents can try to work out an appropriate screen-time schedule with children.

Picture credit: © UNICEF Indonesia

Source: UNICEF, 'How teenagers can protect their mental health during coronavirus (COVID-19)', UNICEF, <<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teenagers-can-protect-their-mental-health-during-coronavirus-covid-19>>, accessed 26 March 2020

3. Create distractions

Problems can be divided into two categories:

1st category: Things I can do something about, and
2nd category: Things I can do nothing about.

There is a lot that falls under that 2nd category right now, while creating distractions can be a solution. Doing what you enjoy, for example, will help you seek relief and find balance in the day-to-day.

4. Focus on yourself

Life can move forward during class suspension. Make use of the time, read a book you have not finished, or try out a new hobby.



5. Feel your feelings

Dr. Damour believes that the best way to deal with disappointment is to feel it. "When it comes to having a painful feeling, the only way out is through. Go ahead and be sad, and if you can let yourself be sad, you'll start to feel better faster."

Different people have different ways to feel their feelings. No matter it is drawing or talking with friends, it is important to find a way that suits you best.

6. Be kind to yourself and others

Some teens are facing bullying and abuse at school due to coronavirus. If you witness a friend being bullied, reach out to them and try to offer support. Doing nothing can leave the person feeling that everyone is against them or that nobody cares. Your words can make a difference.

At this difficult time, it is normal to have emotional distress. You can seek help from the one you trust, e.g. parents, teachers, social workers or professionals. You are not alone.

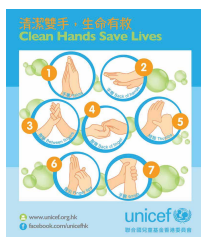
More Resources



Health Hygiene Resources

Poster on Hand washing

Parents may print out the poster and post it in the bathroom to teach children the steps of handwashing.



Leaflet on Health Hygiene

The leaflet provides personal hygiene information for fighting virus in a simple and interesting way.



Play at Home

Little Guide on Play

The guide suggests the benefits of playing in early childhood development, games for children at different ages and parenting information.



Early Childhood Development Leaflet

The leaflet provides tips for teachers, parents and child care workers to boost children's brain development



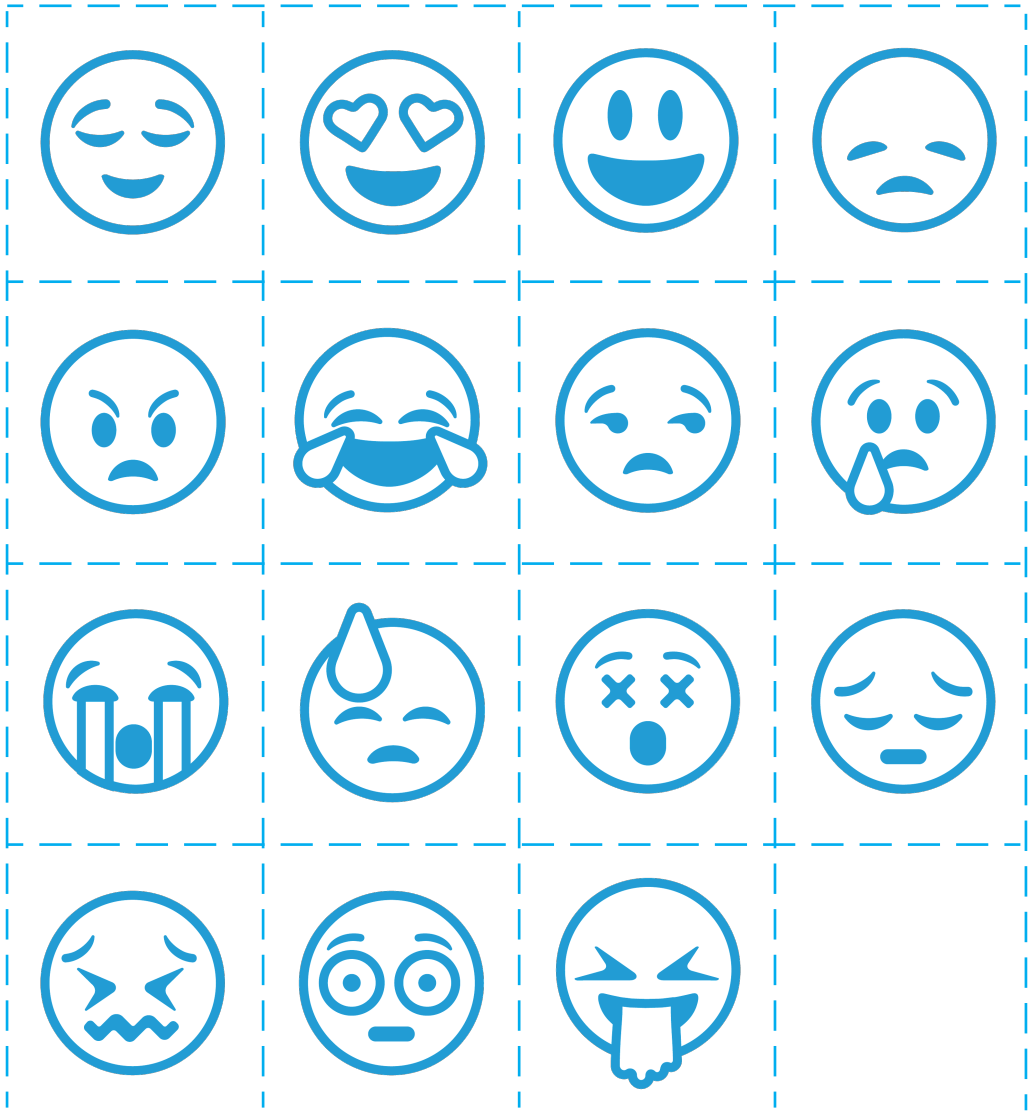
For assistance, please call:

Centre for Health Protection Hotline (8 a.m. to 12 a.m.)
Social Welfare Department Mental Health Hotline (24-hour hotline)

2125 1111 / 2215 1122
2343 2255

Emotion Cards

1. **Ask children how they are feeling:** How are you feeling today?
Which card can represent your feeling? You may draw a picture of your emotion on the blank card.
2. **Understand their experience:** What makes you choose this card?
3. If the described experiences and emotions tend to be negative, you may guide children to find out the **coping ways**, like:
 - What did you do to make yourself feel better at that time?
 - How you would do it differently if it happened again?





Support 'for every child, hygiene'

UNICEF HK launched an emergency action entitled 'for every child, hygiene', aiming to strengthen grassroots families' awareness on hygienic home environment, to prevent and control diseases and safeguard their health. Please support us by **BEING A VOLUNTEER** or **DONATION!**



UNICEF Hong Kong

Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF
7 th Floor, SUP Tower, 75-83 King's Road, Hong Kong

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for every child