

# Talking to Children About Worries

ADVICE FOR PARENTS



Sometimes it can be hard to know what to say to children when they talk about their worries. This handy guide is here to help you know what to do if your child/ren do want to talk about things that are worrying them right now.



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# Common Questions

## Is My Child Worried About Coronavirus?

Children can find it very difficult to recognise and name how they are feeling. Instead children can complain of physical feelings, or you may observe changes in their behaviour that could be suggestive of your child feeling worried or anxious. Below are some of the behaviours that you may notice and some of the physical feelings that your child may tell you about.

<i>Behaviours</i>	<i>Physical Feelings</i>
Difficulty concentrating	Tense
Difficulty falling asleep	Fidgety
Waking during the night	Tummyaches
Having bad dreams	Feeling unwell/sick
Crying more than usual	Headaches
Changes in eating habits	
Angry outbursts	
Being clingy	



## How Should I Respond? What Can I do?

When children talk to us about worries it can be hard to know what to do. Our first instinct can be to reassure them, but without really listening to what they are telling us. It is important to make sure we take the time to listen to children and really try and understand their worries before trying to offer comfort. For example:

“I can hear that you are really worried about this, thank you for telling me. Sometimes I worry about things too, it’s OK to worry. Is there anything we can do to help with this worry right now? If there isn’t that’s OK, maybe we can talk about it again in a few days and see how you feel then?”

Sometimes it can be easier for a child to talk to you about worries when you are distracted with something else, for example whilst driving or cooking dinner. This gives them time and space where they have a chance to collect their thoughts. If your child does open up whilst you are doing an activity, then keep doing it and (if appropriate) invite them to join you whilst you listen. Having a practical activity to do whilst talking about worries can help keep a child calm and focussed.

# Activities to Try

Here are some activities you can do to help children talk about, and process their worries.

## Worry Box

A worry box is a place children can store their worries so that they don't have to keep them in their heads. Worry boxes don't have to be fancy, any box will do. If you do not have a box handy then any empty jar/large bottle would work. Allow children to decorate their worry box however they would like (google has plenty of examples).



The idea is that children write down their worries and put them in the box. Every few days the child can go through the box and rip up ones that no longer worry them and keep ones that do safely in the box. This helps children to learn that they don't have to always hold onto worry, and that it can go away.

If a child feels comfortable, they can share the worries from the worry box with you, or the box can hold the worry until they are ready to share them. For children who can't write yet an adult can help, or they could whisper their worries into the box.

## Worry Time

Sometimes it can seem as though children worry all the time and dealing with a constant stream of worry can be hard for both them and you. For children who struggle with constant worries it can be helpful to set some time aside as "worry time". You could use a sand timer, or phone timer, to measure this time.

During this time the child, with help if needed, can make a list of their worries and talk about them. Let your child know when worry time is scheduled for, and if they bring up worries outside of this time gently encourage them to hold onto them until "worry time". Once the time is up it might be helpful to schedule something fun/calming to help wind down from talking about worries. There are some helpful ideas at the end of this sheet.

## My child misses their friends, family and teachers.

### *How can I make them feel better?*

It is important to recognise that this is a very difficult time for your child and validate their feelings towards this.

Example: 'I can see that you are feeling sad and I wonder if this is because you can't see your friends? Perhaps together we could think of other ways you can talk to them?'

It is important to encourage your child to keep in contact with those who are important to them during this difficult time. Here are some ways that you can encourage your child to interact with these people, whilst still staying safe:

- Telephone or video calls
- Text messaging
- Writing and sending letters
- Walking to a friend or loved one's house and waving/talking to them through a closed window

If you are unable to do any of these things, encourage your child to keep a diary or make a photo journal that contains all of the things that they want to share once they return to everyday life.

# Help Them Sleep

Worry and anxiety can make it hard to fall asleep. Often this is due to thoughts children have that can keep going around in their heads, keeping them awake. There are a few tips and tricks to help children during these times.

## The Alphabet Game

When thoughts are keeping your child awake this can be a nice way to distract the mind from them. Give your child a category (for example animals, or names) and ask them to silently in their heads think of something for each letter of the alphabet. You can practice the first few together if needed. For example:

**“A is for ant. Can you think of something for B? Well done! Now C is for cat. Can you think of something for D?”**



## A Calm Sleep Routine

Having a calming routine before bed can help sleep. This could be having a warm bath or shower before bed or reading a story together.

Some people listen to a calming piece of music or do some colouring to wind down. Experiment with some ideas and find the thing that helps your young person to relax before bedtime.



## Doing Some Deep Breathing

Encourage your child to practice breathing deeply. To help them understand how long the breaths should be you could say the following:

“Pretend to smell a flower for three seconds, then breathe out onto a leaf for three seconds.”

It will help your child to watch their own breathing while they are counting. They could place a leaf on their tummy and watch it float up and down or even use a toy like a teddy or car if not too heavy.

**Ready? Lets breathe in... 1...2...3... and out...1...2...3...**

**Shall we do it again? Lets breathe in... 1...2...3... and out...1...2...3...**

**Lets do it once more. Lets breathe in... 1...2...3... and out...1...2...3...**

**Whilst we are breathing, I wonder where we can feel our breathing? Is it in your fingers, toes or tummy? Is it somewhere else?’**

Some helpful apps for sleep include Headspace and Calm. These can be downloaded on both android and iOS. They can have helpful sleep stories, breathing exercises or soothing background noise to help children sleep.

# Stay Mentally Happy and Healthy

Here are some free ideas for keeping busy in lockdown from the Young Minds list of 20 ideas, which can be found on their website:

## Build a Fort

Use blankets, bedsheets, cushions, chairs and fairy lights to create your own cosy little fort. Be warned: it will take several attempts to keep it all up, but so worth it once you're inside!



## Cook Together

Ask your child if there's something they want to learn how to cook and make it with them.

### TOP TIP

If cooking a meal together might be a bit too tricky, decorating pizzas with your own toppings could be an easier alternative



## Draw Cartoons of Each Other

Sometimes, all you need is pen and paper. Create cartoon drawings of one another, and other family members, cats, dogs, fish – have fun!

### TOP TIP

Try drawing with your eyes closed or not taking your pen off the paper to add an extra challenge.



## Look After Yourself

Children pick up on adult stress, so make sure you are taking some time to do things you find relaxing and that boost your mental health. This could be having some time to read, taking a quick walk, or checking in with a supportive friend or family member.





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