



Following the declaration of a worldwide pandemic and as the number of coronavirus cases rose across Australia, the level of anxiety within the community increased. For many people, the feeling of anxiety was increased by the restrictions put in place by the government to actively manage the spread of the disease.

Feelings of worry, unease and fear can be expected following a stressful event, such as the declaration of a global pandemic, however, it is important that we learn to manage our distressing feelings before they become overwhelming.

This information sheet outlines some useful strategies which can help both adults and children cope with the stress or anxiety experienced as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and the associated restrictions.

Learn the facts

It helps to be informed of up-to-date facts from reliable sources such as the Australian Government's health alert or other trusted organisations such as the World Health Organization. Being informed about the facts helps us to be more aware of when we are exposed to myths or misinformation.

Limit media exposure

Our potential exposure to constant media coverage about the coronavirus can keep us in a heightened state of anxiety. Learn to recognise when you are feeling vulnerable or overwhelmed and limit related media exposure at these times. Perhaps incorporate your media exposure into your daily routine, and limit listening to or reading from a reliable source to 30 minutes or so.

Keep things in perspective

When we are stressed, it is common for us to see things as worse than they really are. Rather than imagining the worst-case scenario and worrying about it, ask yourself:

- *Am I getting ahead of myself, assuming something bad will happen when I really don't know the outcome?* Remind yourself of the facts and that the actual number of confirmed cases of and deaths related to coronavirus in Australia is extremely low.
- *Am I catastrophising how bad the consequences will be?* Remember, illness due to coronavirus infection is usually mild and most people recover without needing specialised treatment.
- *Am I underestimating my ability to cope?* Remind yourself of what you have done to cope with extremely stressful situations in the past. Also, thinking about how you would

cope if the worst were to happen, can sometimes help you put things into perspective.

Take reasonable precautions

Being proactive by following basic hygiene principles can keep your anxiety at bay. The World Health Organization recommends several protective measures against the coronavirus, including to:

- wash your hands frequently
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- stay at home if you begin to feel unwell until you fully recover
- seek medical care early if you have a fever, cough or experience breathing difficulties.

Practise self-care

To help encourage a positive frame of mind, it is important to look after yourself. Everybody practises self-care differently with some examples including:

- maintaining good social connections and communicating openly with family and friends
- making time for activities and hobbies you enjoy
- keeping up a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting quality sleep and avoiding the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs to cope with stress
- practising relaxation, meditation and mindfulness to give your body a chance to settle and readjust to a calm state.

Managing during self-isolation and/or other restrictions

Employees being required to work from home and children studying from home has created the potential for increased stress, as parents juggle work and family responsibilities. In addition, the requirement for physical distancing and concerns about exposing at risk populations (including grandparents and those who are immunosuppressed) also contribute to additional stress. Some ideas for managing these unusual restrictions include:

- Developing a routine that incorporates work, study, exercise, as well as fun activities such as games, puzzles, story-telling or reading together.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities of each family member under these new arrangements.
- Ensuring that you find ways to maintain communication for all members of the family with the significant people in their life.
- If the circumstances are feeling overwhelming, identify what is the cause of the stress and try to come up with some solutions. For example, if you are missing some 'me' time, try to find ways of reclaiming it (perhaps by exercising alone, or escaping for an hour to a room to read).
- Finding some positives in the current situation may reduce

your feeling of being overwhelmed (e.g., you may now have time to do some things you previously haven't had time for).

- If the current restrictions are exacerbating existing problems for you or within the family and you are feeling at risk, seek help, either from a trusted friend or relevant professional service.

For more tips on maintaining your mental health during social isolation, visit the [APS website](#).

Tips for talking with children about the coronavirus

Children will inevitably pick up on the concerns and anxiety of others, whether this be through listening and observing what is happening at home or at school. It is important that they can speak to you about their own concerns.

Answer their questions

Do not be afraid to talk about the coronavirus with children. Given the extensive media coverage, the increasing number of people wearing face masks in public, and the significant restrictions in place, children will be aware of the virus. Providing opportunities to answer their questions in an honest, factual and age-appropriate way can help reduce any anxiety they may be experiencing. You can do this by:

- speaking to them about coronavirus in a calm manner
- asking them what they already know about the virus so you can clarify any misunderstandings they may have
- asking them if they have any questions about the virus, how it is being managed and/or its impact on their family and friends. Listening to their answers will assist you to know how you can best support them. They may need some basic facts (only provide enough information to answer their specific questions), reassurance about what is being done to manage the virus, they/you may need to limit their exposure to the media or they may benefit from some stress management strategies to help manage their feelings.
- letting them know that it is normal to experience some anxiety when new and stressful situations arise
- giving them a sense of control by explaining what they can do to stay safe (e.g., wash their hands regularly, stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing)
- not overwhelming them with unnecessary information (e.g., death rates) as this can increase their anxiety
- reassure them that coronavirus is less common and severe in children compared to adults
- allowing regular contact (e.g., by phone) with people they may worry about, such as grandparents, to reassure them that they are okay.

Talk about how they are feeling

Explain to your child that it is normal to feel worried about getting sick. Listen to your child's concerns and reassure them

that you are there to help them with whatever may arise in the future. It is important to model calmness when discussing the coronavirus with children and not alarm them with any concerns you may have about it. Children will look to you for cues on how to manage their own worries, so it is important to stay calm and manage your own anxieties before bringing up the subject with them and answering their questions.

Limit media exposure

It is important to monitor children's exposure to media reports about the coronavirus as frequent exposure can increase their level of fear and anxiety. Try to be with your child when they are watching, listening or reading the news so you can address any questions or concerns they may have.

More information

Australian Government Department of Health

The Department of Health has developed a collection of resources for the general public, health professionals and industry about coronavirus (COVID-19), including translated resources.

<https://bit.ly/38OOWHe>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides reliable information about the coronavirus such as its symptoms, steps you can take to protect yourself, and what to do if you are affected.

<https://bit.ly/39MEml8>

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization provides information and guidance regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease.

<https://bit.ly/3cQUwCw>

Seek additional support when needed

If you feel that the stress or anxiety you or your children are experiencing as a result of self-isolation is getting too much, a psychologist may be able to help. Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns, including stress. A psychologist can help you manage your stress and anxiety using techniques based on the best available research.

If you are referred to a psychologist by your GP, you might be eligible for a Medicare rebate. You may also be eligible to receive psychology services via telehealth so that you do not need to travel to see a psychologist. Ask your psychologist or GP for details.

There are number of ways to access a psychologist.




You can:

- use the Australia-wide [Find a Psychologist](https://findapsychologist.org.au)TM service. Go to findapsychologist.org.au or call 1800 333 497
- ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.
- Investigate other mental health services, including domestic violence services via the link: <https://mhaustralia.org/need-help>

The APS has a number of resources available to assist Australians in managing their mental health during the coronavirus outbreak.

Visit psychology.org.au for more.

The Australian Psychological Society Limited
PO Box 38, Flinders Lane, VIC, 8009
Telephone: (03) 8662 3300 or 1800 333 497
Fax: (03) 9663 6177
Email: membership@psychology.org.au
Web: psychology.org.au

Find us on social media   

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