

Top tips to help families work together and support one another during the coronavirus outbreak



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

Families play a hugely important part in supporting each other at times of uncertainty or concern.

Be alert to how each other is feeling. You might show your worry in different ways to one another – so, if one of you is not feeling worried right now, that's fine too. With changes to daily and weekly routines, keep sight of what family life feels like and what you can continue to do. These can be the things which make life feel 'normal', so they're important.

You will probably be spending more time together because of home working, school closures, and other public health measures.

Keep your days varied. Think about how you can make the most of the space you live in. If possible, work together to organise your days – perhaps via a family timetable (attached to the fridge door!). It may help to create time slots for mealtimes, homework, friends (even if via social media), TV, exercise, etc., and do make sure you all maintain good sleep habits. This routine can shape family life. But remember to be realistic about what you can achieve and don't put added pressure on yourselves.

Children's emotions, including anxiety, are well regulated by the structure in their lives.

Try and create consistency, even in unpredictable circumstances. With young children (aged 3-7), playing together may be your best way of identifying what their concerns are. Often, what they play is what they are thinking about. You could introduce a playful element into these discussions, and making other children (or even pets) the focus may make it easier for your child to share what worries them.

With older children, openly talking may help bring worries to the surface. Worries are important to label and, where possible, to normalise. Sharing your own worries may be helpful, as long as you are also clear about how you manage your feelings. For example, if distracting yourself helps you, then it

is also likely to help your child. But be aware that something you find distracting (e.g. reading) may not be so helpful to them.



Living with anxiety over a period of time can impact on the wellbeing of us all. Explore ways in which you – as individuals but also as a family group – can take care of yourselves. Think about what you have as self-care strategies, and how you can use these. Obvious examples are taking exercise, watching a film, listening to music, and enjoying a meal together. But also remember the ones which are special to you as a family.

Take advantage of being together, but also make sure you have time of your own. Maintaining our routines, so the world has its familiar things as well as its uncertainties right now, feels helpful to us all.

For more information and advice about looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak, visit www.annafreud.org/coronavirus