

What you should know *As a parent*

during Covid-19

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Children and young people tend to model behaviour they see from their parents or caregivers. When parents and caregivers respond to COVID-19 calmly and confidently they can provide the best support for their children. It is important to create a safe and calm environment that allows for time and space to adjust to the “new norm”.

Activities

Being anxious or fearful in new or unknown situations is expected and a totally valid response. It is important to express your feelings but base your words on facts and truths and respond to these situations as you would want kids and young people to respond. Be aware of how your actions and responses can impact on others, especially children and young people. Reliable sources of information can include:

- [Unite Against Covid-19](#)
- [Ministry of Health](#)

Not everyone responds the same to stressful situations, this includes children and young people. The CDC has identified these common changes to look out for in your child or young person¹.

- Changes in mood or temperament, becoming more irritable and tearful.
- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Disruption in sleeping patterns.
- Difficulty in concentration and paying attention.

- Regressing behaviours. This is when your child reverts to behaviours it has outgrown for example bedwetting or thumb sucking.
- Changes in their eating habits. This can be an increase or decrease in their appetite and can include unhealthy eating.
- “Acting out” behaviours, especially in young people or teens.
- Decrease in school performance or avoiding school related tasks.
- Avoiding activities they used to enjoy in the past (note: this is not because they are not able to partake in these activities as a result of social distancing)
- Unexplained physical complaints e.g. headaches or body pains.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.

What can you do to help?

Support your children by remaining calm and reassuring.

Your child will follow your lead. Take the time to talk to your children about Covid-19 and answer any questions they might have in a way that they would understand.

You can follow these tips from [Ministry of Education](#)².

- Say yes, there are some people in NZ who have Covid-19

As a nation we are working together to help each other. We do this by staying at home and not going to school or work. In this way we stop the spread of the virus.

The virus initially entered New Zealand from overseas and is now spreading within the community.

That is why, we as a country are now self-isolating to make sure as few as possible people get sick. Remember to treat each other with respect and do not assume someone has COVID-19.

- Limit your family’s exposure to news coverage, including social media.

It is easy, especially for children to misinterpret information they might not be able to understand.

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Check in with the news once a day for the most recent, accurate information.

Online activities

[Sparklers](#) and [Headspace](#) have calming activities you can encourage your children to do. Give permission for your children and young person to be on-line but set some limits. Visit [Netsafe](#) for more information and guidance.

Structure your days

It is to be expected that routines have changed given that schools are now closed and as most parents/caregivers need to work from home. It is therefore recommended to structure your day with you children and young people, as this is reassuring and promotes physical and mental well-being. Encourage them to partake in on-line learning as set out by the schools, doing physical exercise and going for walk in your local area while “staying in your bubble”. Below is some helpful websites that focus on physical exercise:

- [Glo](#)
- [Nerd Fitness](#)
- [Yoga with Adriene - Youtube](#)
- [Workouts - New York Times](#)

Make the most of spending time together as a family. Consider

writing the things down you as a family would like to do the following day before going to bed. This will give you a daily sense of direction and achievement.

Practice and model basic hygiene and cleanliness

- Practicing good hygiene as a whanau is critical in limiting the spread of Covid-19.
- Model frequent and correct handwashing - [watch how](#).
- Practice the appropriate coughing or sneezing etiquette – coughing/sneezing into the bend of your elbow.
- Foster a strong immune system to fight off illnesses by eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep and exercise regularly.

Additional resources

[NASP - Helping Children Thrive](#)

Helplines for children and adolescents

Youthline 0800 376633 or text 234
What's up 0800 9428787

Parent support

Parent Help Line 0800 568856
[Maggie Dent](#) - quietly improving lives

Helplines and resources for everyone

- Need to talk 1737 or text 1737 for counselling or support
- Lifeline 0800 543354 or free text 4357 for counselling and support
- Anxiety line 0800 111757 or free text 4202

By working together as a nation, we can limit the impact on COVID-19 on New Zealand.

Kia Kaha!

About Kahn Higgs



Kahn is a clinical psychologist who specialises in working with clients who might find coping with everyday life challenging – depression, anxiety, loss and grief, relationships and adjustment.

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References:

- 1: Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19). Retrieved from www.cdc.gov
- 2: Ministry of Education. Talking to children about Covid-19 Coronavirus. Retrieved from www.education.govt.nz