

March 2020

Dear SENCOs,

As the coronavirus epidemic continues, we are aware that many of you may be encountering children and/or family members who are experiencing high levels of anxiety, confusion, and a sense of uncertainty. As a result, we wanted to provide some information that might be helpful, including:

- Information on potential risk factors for experiencing particularly heightened levels of anxiety
- Resources that might be helpful for children and their families
- A suggested model for ideas for having discussions with children about coronavirus
- Some tips for staff, children and family members who are hoping to reduce their levels of anxiety
- Ideas for disseminating resources that might help children and their families.

These areas are discussed in further detail below.

Information on potential risk factors for experiencing particularly heightened levels of anxiety

This specific pandemic is very new, meaning that we are still learning about psychological responses to coronavirus and the measures being put in place to manage risk levels associated with coronavirus. However, psychological theory might suggest that the following groups of individuals might be at greater risk of experiencing high levels of anxiety as a result of the threat of coronavirus:

- Individuals who experience high levels of anxiety more generally, or who experience health-related anxiety
- Individuals who have experienced the death of a key attachment figure (e.g. a parent, carer, or other close relative), particularly if the figure died of a similar condition
- Individuals with close family members who are at high risk (either through age or a pre-existing condition), or who are at high risk themselves
- Individuals who 'over-expose' themselves to concerning and potentially inaccurate information about coronavirus.

Behaviours associated with high levels of anxiety or perceived threat might include:

- Carrying out extensive research into coronavirus (to the extent that this interferes with other daily activities)
- Compulsive handwashing
- Being unable to sleep
- A reluctance to attend nursery/school
- New heightened anxiety on separating from the primary caregiver.

Resources that might be helpful for children and their families

The following resources may be helpful in supporting children and their families:

- MIND publication: <https://www.mind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ResponseCoronavirusENG6.2.2020-.pdf>
- A story written for young children to help explain the upcoming over-70s isolation – Cosy Time (see attached)
- A [Newsround clip](#)
- The Unicef website, in particular the [section on how to talk to your child](#)
- The [YoungScot website](#)
- The British Psychological Society website <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus>

A suggested model for ideas for having discussions with children about coronavirus

The attached Word document entitled 'Talking to children and young people about coronavirus' includes a model that may provide a useful framework for talking to children about coronavirus.

Some tips for staff, children and family members who are hoping to reduce their levels of anxiety

The following tips may be useful for people who are hoping to reduce their anxiety around coronavirus:

- Try reducing your exposure to media coverage of coronavirus, particularly if the information is likely to be misleading, inaccurate or sensationalising. Try restricting yourself to particular sources of key information (e.g. [UK Government Response](#) and [NHS advice](#))
- Be mindful of what children might be overhearing on the news or from adults and other children, and let children know that they can talk to you about anything they might be worried about
- Try the BBC's '[Seven Techniques for Helping Kids Keep Calm](#)'

Ideas for disseminating resources that might help children and their families

The following ideas may be useful for considering how to disseminate the resources within this email to children and families:

- Holding a whole class discussion with children
- Adding this information to the section of your website that addresses coronavirus
- Holding a parent/carer session about coronavirus and including this information in the session.

Please feel free to get in touch with your school/college's named Educational Psychologist and/or School Wellbeing Worker (where applicable) should you wish to discuss these resources or any next steps in further detail.

With best wishes

CYC Educational Psychology Service