

# Managing Children's Fear

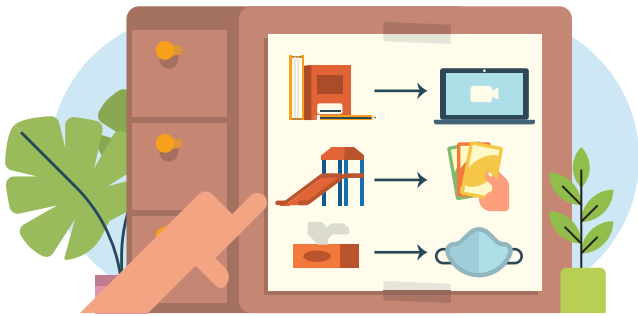
and anxiety during COVID-19



Children may become anxious as a result of changes in routines, family members' anxieties or tension in the home due to stress. School closures and social distancing measures have also limited their access to friends and hobbies, thus adding to their anxiety.

**Dr Aishworiya Ramkumar**, Consultant at the Child Development Unit, National University Hospital shares how caregivers can help children feel safe.

## Acknowledge how COVID-19 has changed their lives



With younger children, create a list of what has changed and what has not changed.

This helps children feel validated and less alone when they know that others also notice the changes.

## Provide regular opportunities to discuss your child's feelings



### Be honest and calm about the COVID-19 situation

Use a calm tone. Provide accurate information tailored to his or her age and be honest about questions that cannot be answered.

It is important that your child trusts you to be a reliable source of information so that they can verify information with you.



### Ask your child how he or she is feeling

How a child makes sense of the news can result in feelings of fear, confusion, anger and even guilt.

Provide opportunities for your child to talk about how he or she feels. You may need to correct your child's perspectives gently and provide a more accurate understanding of the situation.



### Limit exposure to news about COVID-19

Monitor the media information your child is exposed to at home.

Avoid using scare tactics as it may increase your child's paranoia.

## Empower your child

### Equip them with coping strategies when worry becomes overwhelming

- Allocate about 15 minutes of 'worry time' per day for the child who worries constantly and is unable to focus on the task at hand to write and talk about his or her worries.
  - Provide outlets for them to express their feelings such as through writing and drawing.
- During this time, be a good listener and allow your child uninterrupted time to share.
- When the child begins to feel anxious at other times in the day, remind him or her that it isn't 'worry time' yet and redirect their focus.
- For the child who is withdrawn, parents can start the conversation by asking them about their creations.



### Keep things the same as much as you can and give them control

Predictability is important for an anxious child as it helps him/her feel safe.

Anchor a child's routine via activities like mealtimes and focus on what your child can do, e.g. practising good hand hygiene and taking care of their health by exercising. Allow choices when possible.

### Help them understand that steps are being taken to keep them protected

Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of the current situation, shift the child's focus.

For example, explain to them that the measures are meant to keep them safe during the pandemic.

## Parents, take care of yourselves

Set aside some time for hobbies or methods of relaxation.



Seek professional help if you need to especially if there is significant tension or violence in the family.

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