



Educational Psychology Services

COVID-19 Support

Talking to Children and Young People: Using the CONNECT model

Bringing positive change and growth from the application of psychology through innovation and excellence

CONNECT

Check-in (with the moment and with your feelings)

It is important to be aware of the different emotions you may be feeling before responding to the child. Take a moment to '**check-in**' *with yourself*, your emotions and your bodily reactions. You may be noticing feelings of increased anxiety and worry due to the uncertainty about the virus. You might also notice that your body is reacting to this too. For example, you may notice your heart rate increasing or you may even experience palpitations. This is understandable given the daily changes and information that we are receiving. It is also important to notice and observe the behaviours that you are engaging in. For example, obsessively watching the news. You may want to adjust your behaviour accordingly in order to reduce your own levels of anxiety.

Opportunity for teaching

It is important not to dismiss or avoid the emotions the child is feeling. Instead notice emotional reactions as an opportunity to connect with the child about their feelings and help them to learn new ways of coping (the latter being addressed later in the process). Adults need to understand that emotions are innate but our skills to cope with them are not. Children need opportunities to learn how to cope with their 'big feelings'. *Here the adult will consider how the child can best learn strategies for managing their emotions.* At this time, many children and young people will be experiencing an increase in anxiety, worrying about themselves or loved ones who may become unwell. This outbreak is an opportunity for adults to demonstrate resilience and to teach children the skills to be able to respond to stress and uncertainty. This does not mean pretending that everything is ok but providing children and young people with reassurance, providing age appropriate information about the virus but also about helpful coping strategies.

Notice their bodily reactions and feelings

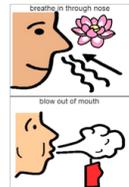
It is important to be aware of the different emotions a child or young person may feel. At this point the adult should *observe, listen, and learn* how the child expresses different emotions and to *watch for changes in facial expressions, body language, posture, and tone of voice.*

Consider: *is the child ready and able to listen to me right now? Or do they need to engage in an activity to help calm them down with the help of an adult (e.g. having a cuddle, having a run around, playing catch or batting a balloon back and forth).* Grounding techniques such as breathing, can allow children and young people to tune in to their bodies and how their body is feeling and actively work on managing their bodily responses to anxiety. For example using the following techniques:



5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding technique

-  5 things you can see
-  4 things you can hear
-  3 things you can touch
-  2 things you can smell
-  1 slow deep breath



Dr. Kirsten Krawczyk and Dr. Sarah Modi

Normalise, label and validate

Normalise the emotional experience with the child or young person by talking about it. Here the adult can label the emotion (e.g. “*I wonder if you are feeling **worried** about this virus and people getting poorly?*”) while validating this experience as normal (e.g. “*I can understand that you feel that way. It’s normal to worry about ourselves as well as others we love and care about. It is difficult for all of us when we don’t know what is happening next*”). Naming an emotion helps to soothe a child’s dysregulation and supports the development of emotions vocabulary.

Empathise

Here it is important to take time to listen carefully to what the child is saying and showing by observing their behaviour, body language, tone or voice, and words. Adults should avoid judging whether the emotion is ‘reasonable’ in the given situation and instead **accept the emotional reaction** and **support** the child to find ways to cope with their ‘big feelings’, with support from the adult (e.g. showing concern through the adult’s body language and facial expressions, getting down to the child’s sight line, and making supportive comments like “*I understand that you are feeling anxious or maybe even a bit scared and I can see this is making you feel very upset. I am not surprised you feel like this, I think a lot of people are feeling this way, me included. It is important for us that we remember that there are lots of things we can do together to reduce the risk of becoming unwell and to take care of each other, like washing our hands singing the happy birthday song? Shall we try that now?*” If the adult is finding this difficult then they might want to review the ‘opportunity for teaching’ section.

Consider setting limits

For some children this outbreak and the uncertainty surrounding this including changes of routine, adults engaging in social distancing, changes to shopping habits and possibly spending more time at home. “*I understand that things are a little bit different at the moment but it is not ok to hurt others as I want to keep you all safe*”.

Team-work-problem solve together

Here the adult and the child explore solutions to problems together. The adult demonstrates an understanding of the explanations for misbehaviours but seeks to help the child to consider alternatives the next time they experience similar emotions. This should be an *open discussion where the child can be encouraged to generate good, safe and healthy ideas for dealing with the emotion when it arises in the future*. These should always be **realistic** and **achievable** for the child. For example by saying to the child “*next time your feelings of worry get bigger and bigger, what can we do to help you with this? Could we create our own routine and timetable that we use at home together? Could we try some different breathing exercises? Could we have some time-in together to do something you enjoy? Could you write about your feelings to share with me? Could we watch your favourite TV show?*”

Developed by Dr Kirsten Krawczyk and Dr Sarah Modi, Educational Psychologists

Informed by the work from Emotion Coaching UK <https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/>

Other Useful Links:

- Social Stories that help explain about Coronavirus:
[Coronavirus Social Story by KeshetChicago - Flipsnack](#)
[Social Story for children aged 7-11](#)
- Talking to children about COVID-19:[Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus | Child Mind Institute](#) [BPS highlights importance of talking to children about Coronavirus | BPS](#)
- Child-friendly cartoon resource from Mind Heart:
[Cartoon style workbook about Coronavirus for young children](#)
- Useful book for older children: <https://axelscheffler.com/books-for-older-children/coronavirus>

help

observe

consult

assess

focus

advise

encourage

develop

appreciate
