

# TIPS FOR PARENTS DURING SCHOOL CLOSURE

Term 2 creates a shift of focus for your child as they prepare for and engage with distance learning activities provided by their school. Depending on your home situation, this may be a welcome change or an additional source of stress as you juggle the competing demands of home, work, and wider whānau.

Whenever possible, be kind to yourself and try and not add additional pressure to an already challenging situation. Your wellbeing and that of your whānau is important as everyone adapts to this new situation. Do not try to become a teacher. Short-term school closures are not an academic crisis. There will be opportunities after the restrictions are lifted to catch up on any formal academic learning. COVID-19 and school closures present new and diverse learning opportunities in a home environment. Do not underestimate the fertile environment of your home and whānau for rich and important learning. Your child will remember this time in the bubble as a significant moment in history, personally, nationally and globally, a time where they contributed towards collective action in response to COVID-19 by staying home and observing physical distancing guidelines.

Many parents are feeling uncertain and under pressure dealing with the impacts of COVID-19. The wellbeing of parents is vital to the whole of the community and especially their children. Parents need to take time to look after their own mental health and to be a role model to children in this regard. Useful sources of support include:

- Ministry of Health webpage on [wellbeing at Alert Level 4](#).
- Getting through together – [Whāia E Tātou Te Pae Tawhiti](#) hosted by All Right? provides guidance and advice on wellbeing
- The World Health Organisation fact sheet: [Coping with Stress](#) during COVID-19
- This Maggie Dent article provides [guidance on managing your own worries](#).

If you're working from home, these blogs from [Aha Parenting](#) and [Allright](#) have useful suggestions about managing the pressures of this. If you have more than one child, this [blog from Aha Parenting has tips and advice for families in quarantine](#) that relates to helping siblings get on with one another.

## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S WELLBEING

All of us will be experiencing a level of worry during these uncertain times and it is normal for children to experience a range of feelings. Children often show signs of struggle through their behaviour and again this is normal and expected. The tip sheets within each module offer support to your child by providing information, understanding and positive coping strategies.

## TURNING ANXIETY INTO ACTION FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

**Use metaphor** to explain social distancing and staying at home. Children can be taught how to be **social butterflies**, keeping a distance of two wingspans from others when on walks in the neighbourhood.

Kindergarten and school closures can be likened to **hibernating** like a winter animal. If you have access to them, read hibernation stories, for example, *Frederick* by Leo Lionni.

**Sing along** with children to help them learn and carry out healthy behaviours. Here are some examples:

- [Hand Washing Song](#) (Music From Michal)
- [The Wiggles handwashing song](#) (UNICEF)
- [Every Little Cell](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE6jnezy1MU) ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE6jnezy1MU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE6jnezy1MU)) (YouTube)

**Build a routine** for the day, with mealtimes, self-care, time outside, school work, chores, reading, learning, movement, music, pretend play, social connection and art.

**Explore** ideas being shared online for activities that involve sensory play, stories and crafts, for example, [Sparklers](#) and [Read Aloud Stories](#).

**Create pictures of the day** to remind children of protective actions (for example, handwashing) or to help children be involved with creating stay-at-home routines. Use a blackboard, white board or other visuals to create a picture of the day (using drawings rather than words with smaller children).

**Be creative:** Art, music, dance and sensory play can help everyone, not just young children, to be calmer and more hopeful.

**Offer choices** to include the children in decisions about activities or food choices.

**Grow kindness and care for others** by reading or listening to stories such as *Oat the Goat* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX50BXNrMRU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX50BXNrMRU)) (Ministry of Education video, available on YouTube). Talk with children about how we can be kind and explore ways to give to others at home and in the community. Use ideas on the [Sparklers](#) website to extend on these conversations. Assign children age-appropriate tasks they can do to help at home.

**Include** your children in doing chores to build upon their pro-social skills and provide opportunities for practical learning.

**Grow gratitude** with a daily gratitude practice. Share together what you are grateful for or keep a diary of gratitude. Talk about people, places, and situations you each appreciate, supporting your child in expressing their thanks, for example, writing a letter to our essential workers or others in the community.

## TURNING ANXIETY INTO ACTION FOR OLDER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

**Spot fake news** by discussing where to get information about COVID-19, determine reliable sources of information and discuss critical thinking skills. Read and discuss the Newsroom article: [Critical thinking in an age of fake news](#). Help your child turn anxiety into action.

**Develop limits** together on exposure to media and conversations about COVID-19. Share your strategies with your child and explore together which COVID-19 conversations are helpful.

**Learn** together about how to wash hands effectively. Useful resources include *Nanogirl discussing how to teach handwashing* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eqhw6yZk-c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eqhw6yZk-c)) and the *UNICEF global handwashing dance* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=825gGELjB98](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=825gGELjB98)). Involve children in developing plans for effective and fun hand hygiene at home.

**Explore and act** on ways children would like to take to support others at home or in the community. Learn the phrase: **He waka eke noa – we're all in this together**. Discuss ways that other people around the world are taking actions, for example, *Kindness Matters*.

**Use the opportunity** to develop your child's social conscience by reading about and discussing stigma, for example, this UNICEF webpage *on social stigma associated with COVID-19* and the UNICEF webpage *the UNICEF webpage Covid-19 your voices against stigma and discrimination*.

**Build on their community mindedness** by discussing economic, political, cultural and health impacts of COVID-19 and potential solutions to these.

**Discuss** online safety and screen use. The Netsafe website can provide you with guidance on keeping your children safe online, including this *list of top 10 online safety tips*. Feel empowered to set limits on device use even for older children because extremes of device use (either too little or too much) have been associated with negative impacts. Evidence suggests that **type and quality of device use is an important consideration** for parent(s)/caregivers. For older children, well-managed and paced use of devices for learning, creativity, social connection and community engagement is likely to be beneficial up to a point. Careful management of solitary device use, as well as gaming (especially gaming that is addictive or promotes stereotypes and poor behaviour) is required because of the greater potential harms associated with these types of device use. Keeping an eye on game quality and content, along with parent mediation and support, can help students access potential benefits of gaming, including skill development and social interaction, whilst minimising harm. For further information see *Netsafe (Gaming)*. Even for older students, be mindful that they require help with their management of devices, and be aware of the activities your child is doing online and keep your eye on the quality of content. Provide guidance to your child/ren through a mixture of role-modelling positive digital habits, monitoring, discussion and joint engagement around media. Discuss with your child/ren what they are learning and help them grow the skills they need to be safe and effective in the digital world. Talk and listen about safety and responsibility and openly discuss cyberbullying, sexting and other risks. Help your child select good content and use media creatively. Encourage community engagement and civic action through online means.

**Create space** by discussing with your child how different spaces in the house can be used, how everyone can have some alone time, and what individuals can do on their own.

**Consider your family culture** and discuss with your older children how your family can live with meaning, purpose and connection. Hold a family meeting each week to check in with individuals. Discuss individual strengths, as well as expectations, concerns and hopes.

**Check in** with your child to find out how they are feeling and coping. Read and discuss together this *Spinoff article on how teenagers are responding to lockdown*.

**Encourage positivity and resilience** by highlighting strengths they have already displayed when managing other challenges and explore how these skills could be used now.

**Keep the future in mind** by engaging in conversations about personal growth and community change, for example, read and discuss this Stuff.co.nz article *A test of national values*.

**Know where to find help when you need it** by talking with your child about support options and exploring them together. For more information, see Module 1: Tip Sheet 1.

For more information on supporting the wellbeing of your child, see **Module 1: Hauora/wellbeing in uncertain times**.

## ADDITIONAL MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESOURCES

If your child is experiencing significant anxiety or distress during school closures, see these resources for additional guidance and support.

- This Sparklers resource provides *information about how to help kids manage worries*.
- The GoZen website provides a *series of videos on helping kids manage anxiety*.
- This UNICEF webpage provides *tips for teenagers protecting their mental health*.
- For children with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), the International Foundation of OCD provides information on *talking to children about COVID-19*.

**For more information about Help for Wellbeing see Module 1: Tip Sheet 1.**

*If you are concerned about a marked change in your child's mood or behaviour such as extreme withdrawal it is important to contact your usual health providers or contact Need to talk? 1737 or text 1737 for information about support options. For Mental health emergencies call Healthline for details of the Crisis Team in your area: 0800 611 116 or call 111.*



## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING DURING TERM TIME

Your school and the [Ministry of Education](#) will provide you with regular information and advice about learning during school closures. Curriculum-based learning opportunities and materials will be made available by the Ministry of Education in digital and hardcopy packs. For those who don't have access to internet and/or devices, the Ministry of Education is also available to work with you and your child's school to determine individual needs.

The Ministry of Education has set up two online platforms to support teachers, parent(s)/caregivers and whānau with home learning:

- [Learning from Home](#)
- [Ki te Ao Mārama](#)

Other useful resources for younger children include [Sparklers](#), [Read Aloud Stories](#), and [RNZ guide to online learning resources for kids](#). While school closures are different from home schooling, many parent(s)/caregivers are drawing on the experience and knowledge of people who do teach their children at home, for example, see this [Spinoff article](#) on what all parents can learn from NZ homeschoolers.

### Here are some general tips you can use to support your child's learning while schools are closed.

**Safety first:** Create a calm and happy space for your child to learn in, one that provides a sense of security and stability. A positive relationship with your child is the most important foundation for learning and wellbeing.

**Create a routine:** Together with your child, create a routine for the day, with regular downtime, times for physical exercise, and mealtimes. Allow room for flexibility.

**Reduce expectations:** Everyone is working out how to live in these unprecedented times. Try to be easy on yourself and your child, letting go of outcomes with a focus on process, connection and fun. During this time, mental health is more important than academic progress.

**Your child is the learner:** Think of yourself as facilitator, support crew, coach or cheerleader.

**Educate yourself:** Be aware of school requirements and familiarise yourself with any curriculum or digital platforms being used. For younger children, find out what your child is interested in and match any learning tasks to their curiosity

and interests. For older children, explore together what they are hoping to achieve during the period of school closure.

**Atmosphere is critical:** Create an environment where children can share, ask questions, play, be active and solve problems.

**Create space for learning:** If possible, create a specific space that is different from their usual activities.

**Mix it up:** Alternate sedentary activities with active movement and academic learning with creative pursuits. If possible, alternate screen time with other learning mediums such as books and pen and paper.

**Keep in touch:** Encourage your child to keep in touch with friends using phone calls and/or video chats. Face-to-face interactive formats provide benefits over and above more passive social media and texting.

**Allow boredom:** Creativity and initiative can emerge from boredom.

**Be and play:** For younger children, time with family and child-directed play provides the best learning context. This can include household chores and projects, arts and craft, and other creative pursuits.

**Step back:** If things become tense, take a moment to observe how you are all feeling, take a break and return to the issue later.

**Turn off tech:** A significant amount of learning and socialising during this time of school closure requires the use of devices. Together with your child, identify times away from the device, perhaps outside, in nature, connecting with your 'bubble', engaged in movement, reading or creative pursuits. Aim to reduce additional screen use where-ever possible. If device use is new in your family or you have concerns about safety, the [Netsafe website](#) can provide you with guidance on keeping your children safe online, including this [list of top 10 online safety tips](#).

**Set and review goals:** Have regular conversations with your child about their interests, goals and learning, providing them with encouraging feedback and affirmation.

**A wellbeing agenda:** korero with your child about their feelings and experiences. This can strengthen their emotional literacy, coping skills and critical thinking skills. Learn from your child, and look for opportunities for your child to share their learning with you or to teach you something.

**Keep moving:** Exercise is great for body and mind. Useful online resources that encourage physical activity include:

- [Home Exercises by This Girl Can](#)
- The New York Times [Scientific 7-minute Workout](#)

