

WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

This tip sheet suggests ways to support your child during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regardless of whether you have been directly affected by the respiratory illness caused by COVID-19, the broader impacts of the virus are creating widespread uncertainty. Children and young people are soaking up information from the media, family, peers and other adults. It is therefore normal and legitimate for them to have a degree of worry.

It's important to note that most children and young people are adaptable and resilient in the face of uncertainty and even more so with your support. There can even be benefits for the development of prosocial behaviours, personal resilience and community unity. As an example of youth inspiration and contribution, refer to the **Student Volunteer Army**, which was established in response to the Ōtautahi Christchurch earthquakes.

Children and young people often take their cues from adults on how to respond to unusual or stressful circumstances. Parents and caregivers have an important role to play in enhancing children and young people's wellbeing at this time. This includes providing developmentally-appropriate and accurate information that contributes to both their understanding and wellbeing and identifying ways for children and young people to take constructive action in response to the pandemic.

Like you, we want to protect your child's hauora/wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Credible sources of information provided by medical and science professionals include:

- *Unite against COVID-19 – New Zealand government information on COVID-19*
- *Ministry of Health COVID-19 updates and latest information*
- *World Health Organization Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*
- *World Health Organization Health Alert, available on WhatsApp*
- *UNICEF Social stigma associated with COVID-19*
- *Newsroom: Critical thinking in an age of fake news*
- *Stuff article: A test of national values.*

WHAT WILL THIS LOOK LIKE?

The COVID-19 Wellbeing Guide has been developed to provide teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand with information and resources that can help them to navigate discussions about COVID-19 with their students and the wider community and support the hauora/wellbeing of their students. The lead author of the resource is Julie McCormack who is a clinical psychologist with over 20 years of experience working with children and families in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

The COVID-19 Wellbeing Guide comprises **three independent modules**.

MODULE 1: HAUORA/WELLBEING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

General wellbeing guidance; responding to challenging conversations and behaviours; identifying and referring children at risk; services, support networks, and resources for supporting children and young people's wellbeing; tip sheets for teachers, parents, and young people.

MODULE 2: COVID-19: SCHOOL CLOSURES AND LEARNING FROM HOME

Background information and support; tip sheets and activities that teachers and parents at home can use to support children and young people's understanding and responses to Covid-19 while building their skills in wellbeing; ideas for young people to make the most of their time in staying at home.

MODULE 3: PREPARING FOR AND RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Background information and support; tip sheets and activities that teachers and parents at home can use to support children and young people prepare to return to school and integrate back into the school community.

An important way for you to support your child is to keep up to date with relevant, reputable COVID-19 information.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Children and young people may experience a range of emotions including fear, frustration and confusion around events such as COVID-19. **Using and building on existing cognitive, social and emotional skills is the focus of supporting student wellbeing.** You can help by providing a relationship that allows your child or children to describe their experiences and feel supported. During conversations, show interest, ask questions, communicate acceptance, and normalise emotions, for example, by saying: "Everyone feels worried sometimes". Help your children to see emotions as a continuum using the metaphor of an "Feeling Thermometer" to help track the intensity of different emotions. Feelings come and go, change, and vary in intensity, and different coping strategies may be useful for different levels of feeling. Our reactions to events relate to how we think about situations, what we can do in response, and what environment or situation we are in. Our experience of emotions is made up of:

- our physical reactions and sensations (including heart rate, body tension, tiredness)
- the thoughts we have about ourselves, other people, and the situation
- action signals or motivations (such as the desire to run, hide, fight)
- what we describe as feelings, for example, sadness, joy and anger.

Together, look for opportunities to provide support, and encourage taking part in collective action, looking after whānau and contributing to the community.

Ministry of Education resources to support conversations about COVID-19

- *Ministry of Education: Talking to children about COVID-19*
- *Ministry of Education: Tips and tools.* Note that these factsheets were developed in response to the 2011 Canterbury earthquakes, but the advice they contain is useful when responding to any major traumatic event.

NO ONE SAID IT WOULD BE EASY

It can be difficult to see your child struggling. With any unpleasant feeling your child has, it is tempting to want to “fix it”. However, the most important response is acceptance and acknowledgement of feelings within a caring relationship. Being with your child while they come up with their own solutions and ways of dealing with things is harder – and more important – than it seems.

LEVEL 4: STAYING AT HOME

MODULE 2 COVID-19: School closures and learning from home provides information and guidance to support you and your children during school closure and/or isolation. For more information see the Ministry of Education webpage [Learning from Home](#) and for wellbeing tips to help you feel good and get through [Ministry of Health Wellbeing Alert 4](#). For some children and families, self-isolation may be required and advice is available [Ministry of Health Self-Isolation Advice](#). Remember, while most children and young people will cope well, some children and young people with pre-disposing vulnerabilities will be more susceptible to the impacts of school closure, including those who experience anxiety, perfectionism or psychosocial stress.

IS MY CHILD AT RISK?

It is normal for children and adults to feel worried about COVID-19. Children who have pre-disposing vulnerabilities such as an anxious temperament, previous experiences of trauma, or reduced social support, may require additional support at school and at home.

Parents and whānau can watch out for:

- worsening anxiety or behaviours over time
- withdrawal from or avoidance of usual activities or social relationships
- excessive reassurance seeking or limit testing
- changes in sleep, appetite and weight or physical complaints such as headaches and tummy aches
- anxiety or behaviours that are interfering with functioning.

GETTING HELP EARLY

Children and young people can respond better if they access support early. Being aware of the signs of mental health distress is a key so action can be taken early if a problem arises. Picking a mutual time to talk with your child, communicating openness, acceptance and a willingness to listen and help is vital. Let your child know that you will be there for them, and that professional help is available by helping them access support if needed. During COVID-19 there may be a need to access services online. Useful Mental Health apps include [Mindshift CBT Anxiety Canada](#) and [Moodgym](#).

HELP FOR MENTAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Resources for children and young people

- [Youthline](#) 0800 376 633 or text 234 (free)
- [Kidslines](#) 0800 543 754 (0800 KIDSLINE)
- [The Lowdown](#) text 5626
- [Barnardo's 'What's Up?'](#) or 0800 942 8787
- [Aunty Dee](#)

Resources for whānau and friends

- [Supporting Families New Zealand](#)
- [Common Ground](#)
- [Skylight](#): 0800 299 100
- [Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand](#)
Looking after health and wellbeing during COVID-19
- [Health and wellbeing of Pasifika: Le Va](#)
- [Parent Help Line](#) 0800 568 856

Helplines and resources for everyone

- [Need to Talk? 1737](#) or text 1737 for counselling and support
- Depression Helpline: 0800 111 757 or free text 4202
- Anxiety Line: 0800 2694 389 or [www.anxiety.org.nz](#)
- Lifeline: 0800 543 354 or free text 4357 or [www.lifeline.org.nz](#) for counselling and support
- Suicide Crisis Helpline: 0508 828 865 - for specialist suicide prevention support and counselling
- Samaritans: 0800 726 666 or [www.samaritans.org.nz](#) for general support

Self-help resources for improving mental health

[Just a Thought](#) (free online learning to improve mental health)

[Beating the Blues](#) (evidence-based online cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety and depression)

[Sparx](#) (online e-therapy tool provided by the University of Auckland)

[This way up](#): online self-help courses focused on wellbeing.

If a child is self-harming, or thinking of suicide, get help immediately: Contact Healthline for details of the local Mental Health Crisis Team 0800 611 116 or call 111 or take the child or young person to the nearest hospital emergency department. Stay with your child and ensure safety (remove any means for the person to hurt themselves). Stay calm and listen (without judgement) to anything they may want to talk about.

SELF-CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR PARENTS

Parenting is a demanding role, and even more so during a community crisis. Parents and whānau members may neglect their own needs because they are busy, and/or taking care of others. Looking after your own wellbeing is vital to your own health and also provides an important example to your child, encouraging them to engage in self-care too. Parenting advisor Maggie Dent has some useful tips on [self-care for parents](#). If you are worried about your own mental health, call [Need to Talk? 1737](#) to discuss your needs and options.

COVID-19 resources for coping with stress

World Health Organisation fact sheet: [Coping with Stress](#)

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand: [Coping With COVID-19](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Stress and coping](#)

Ministry of Health: [Wellbeing at Alert Level 4](#)

Supporting Neuro Diverse Children:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXPtqmHKNoE&feature=youtu.be](#)