

Dear Parents,

We recognise the many pressures that are facing you as a family at the moment. This is a time of huge anxiety and an unprecedented situation we find ourselves in. The constant barrage of information and updates on TV, radio and social media as well as the changes to everyday life are impacting on us as adults and on our children, who take their lead from us. It is difficult for us all to manage our anxiety at this time. This is a normal and understandable response when we face an unknown situation and one that has impacted on our lives as significantly as this.

You might well be seeing changes in your child's behaviour as a result of this. Some children may become clingy, tearful and easily distressed, others might become more challenging, demanding or display tantrums. Fear can show itself in many different ways, interrupting sleep and needing to sleep with you or having nightmares. It may disrupt appetite and some children may regress in their skills, returning to dependency for getting dressed, feeding or return to bedwetting. All of these are understandable and normal responses to high stress and anxiety

One of the most important things we can do to support our children at this uncertain and ever-changing time is contain their emotions by being steady for them - they take their lead from us. It is really important to answer their questions as honestly as you can at a level that won't increase their fear. It is fine to say "I don't know the answer to that at the moment" if they ask a difficult question. Children's fear rises more if they feel there is something we are hiding from them and this can lead the to imagine that what we are not saying is far worse than it actually is. It's also important we don't

give them too much information. It can be helpful to have balance and focus on some of the more hopeful aspects such as recovery rates, the number of cases that are mild (95% of active cases) and that the gene sequence has already been identified and work is underway on a vaccine.

Structure is important and routines certainly help to maintain a sense of normality, but there is powerful evidence of the buffering impact of play and social delight - the time that you have to really enjoy and connect with your child whilst having fun together. Don't focus all your time on Maths and English

- the most effective way of managing stress levels in your child, bringing down their sense of fear and anxiety is to just play. It has the same impact on us adults too!!

It's very important that this is 'play with' your child rather than them playing alone. It increases the sense of emotional connection and safety, reduces stress hormones and is a wonderful opportunity to talk about your child's worries at the same time. Play creates a body and brain state of social engagement which supports

our body systems to work at optimal levels - including our immune system.

Anything counts as play as long as it is together, enjoyable and fun!!! This is time to be face to face or side by side and totally focused on each other. From hide and seek, chasing bubbles and popping them with different parts of the body, to word games or drawing - as long as they are done together!

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