



Brussels, March 2020

Dear parents,

The events we are experiencing at the moment are, for most of us, unprecedented. Never have we been so massively confronted with a global phenomenon of this magnitude. The measures are impressive but should not make us forget that individual responsibility is the key to success. The situation must be taken with the utmost seriousness.

This Covid-19 crisis impacts our habits, family life and questions us about our concept of solidarity.

This document, produced by the psychologists from the four European Schools in Brussels, aims to help you answer certain questions from your children and offers you concrete recommendations.

Remember: the psychologists of the European Schools remain at your disposal, within the limits of the measures put in place by the authorities, to support you, share their ideas and resources, answer your questions and support the students, parents and school staff who express the need for it. Specific procedures are implemented in each establishment: at a minimum, we check emails and often offer other communication methods which will be specified by your contact person.

**The psychologists of the European Schools of Brussels**

## 1 / Inquisitive Children and Teenagers

➔ *As with any unpredictable media event, it is best to accompany, explain without lying and not wait until the child or teenager is anxious.*

In the wake of recent news events, you may have already been or will be confronted with the many questions children have. Here are a few recommendations that should help you formulate your answers in the best possible way.

First of all, it is important to acknowledge to the children that the situation is exceptional. Television reports, social networks, precautions taken at school followed by the closing of schools and gathering places, parents worrying... Children feel the anxiety and general worry linked to the Covid-19 epidemic. Hence the importance of reassuring them and explaining the situation.

### ***How to talk to your children about the virus?***

**Explain using simple words.** Choose simple words according to their age and maturity. We're likely to hear about this virus for some time to come... We can therefore begin by saying that a new disease has spread in the world and describe the symptoms so that the child can alert an adult if they feel them.

You have to stay positive in your message; it's an aggressive virus, but most people don't die from it. Insist on the fact that scientists and doctors are trying to find a solution, a vaccine. *"If you or mommy gets sick, they'll take good care of us." "Our country has a good health care system, there's nothing to worry about".*

It is also advisable to build on what your child and teenager has understood, to ask them what they have heard at school. It is essential to correct misinformation, to reassure them when their anxiety level is high, but also to answer all of their questions... And to dare to admit when you don't know the answer...

With older children, try to watch or listen to the official media together and discuss it with them in a sensible manner. Discuss how they feel about the situation, their perception and understanding of the measures taken, etc.

**Take the child's age into account.** We advise you to talk about the situation only to children of school age (from 3 years old), since they have *already heard about* the epidemic at school, with their friends, etc. For young children, just remember to apply preventive measures (washing hands, blowing your nose, etc.) and explain that these will protect them from diseases.

**Tell the truth.** Children pick up a lot more than we can imagine. They see the news on TV, hear other children talking on the playground and hear their parents' discussions. You are a key person for your children; being honest nurtures the trusting relationship you build with them now and in the future.

**Curbing "fake news".** All kinds of information circulate in playgrounds and on social networks. Your child has probably heard strange stories about the coronavirus and is wondering about them; it is useful to help them learn how to separate facts from false information. **Explain in a rational way and make sense of what you are putting in place.** Help your child to distance themselves, instead of creating or accentuating everyone's anxiety. The virus threatens in particular the elderly and people who are already weakened (by another disease, for instance). There is therefore no immediate danger to our own health, as long as we observe the preventive measures.

While cutting off continuous sources of information may be useful, let us remember, however, that keeping ourselves informed regularly is very important in adjusting our behaviour. Research by professionals will allow us to adapt our family life to the measures taken and to fully understand the issues at stake and the reasons why these measures are sometimes proposed, sometimes encouraged, sometimes imposed; it will also give you tools to better answer your children's questions.

## **2/ Limit anxiety: talk about something else; keep them busy!**

→ *Parents must keep a cool head (at least in front of their child). Indeed, children's development occurs through mimicry and they are emotional sponges. Don't talk about it all the time, don't listen to the news all the time.*

We advise to switch off the continuous news channels that increase the level of anxiety. The home should be a safe and reassuring place for the child, especially since the risk of encountering the virus at home is lower than outside.

Ordinarily, psychologists remind us that children should be taught to be bored, to do nothing and to let their imagination run wild. But nowadays, some may have more frightening thoughts than others. So in this particular context and to prevent your child from developing too much anxiety, help him or her to concentrate on concrete things. The busier a child is, the less anxious they will be about the situation. That's why it's important to engage your child on a regular basis.

Keeping children busy in a confined space can be a challenge. Remember to be supportive: exchange ideas, share resources with friends and other parents in the class. There are no limits to creativity. Individual or group (family) activities, there is no shortage of examples on the Net. Cooking, arts and crafts, gardening (if you have a garden), whatever the age of the children, are particularly suitable occupations.

### 3/ Remind the rules of hygiene and the most appropriate behavior

→ *The butterfly effect... This is an opportunity to remind people why hygiene is important.*

Don't forget to set an example and put into practice what you ask of your children and teenagers. For example, you can set up rituals and habits focusing on these gestures, in addition to individual necessities (after blowing your nose, for instance).

All of these gestures have a particular context: it can be interesting to make the connection between "my own gestures" and the consequences for others around me / others I don't know / health care workers and other front-line services.

*Reminder of hygiene measures at the end of the document.*

### 4/ Home schooling: structuring your child's day

→ *Structuring your child's life and day will be crucial.*

In addition to the importance of putting them to work, this proposed structure will act as a reassuring element and contain the anxieties and questions raised by this singular situation. Proposing a structure to the children is also a reminder that it is not the holidays.

For each level of schooling (nursery, primary and secondary), instructions have been given to teachers, pupils and families to ensure the continuity of learning.

This confinement is an exceptional opportunity to review and revise your family organization. Decide in advance what is negotiable and what is not. Next, your presence will make the difference: quality time, emotional presence, time during which you're available. Being attentive to the way your children live through and "endure" this Covid crisis is particularly important. In practical terms, to structure your child's day, think about the following points:

- Sleep (and schedules), hygiene, eating
- School work, breaks, homework
- Leisure, games, reading
- Screen time, types of screen activities, smartphones
- Help with housework, participation in tasks
- Physical activity
- Individual versus family time, discussions
- Bonding moments (story-reading, discussion...),

Be sure to assess with your child how this is going and adjust as you go along.

## 5/ Fears, worries, anxieties? How to help those around you.

➔ *There is no age to be afraid. Children as well as teenagers and adults can at any time develop fears, whether these are specific or a more vague and generalized anxiety.*

No reason to panic! All of this is temporary and you can help your child or anyone around you to cope with it.

Remember that fear should not frighten us! Sometimes it is helpful: it helps us to make the right decisions, to be alert and to act intelligently. Use it at its best.

### ***Act preventively***

The current context is conducive to children developing fears or anxiety.

As a preventive measure, you will certainly contribute to calming them down by :

- Reducing exposure time to the media
- Putting right and proportionate words on the situation AND on their possible feelings,
- Keeping them busy with activities,
- Using this opportunity to develop new forms of creativity and ways of being together,
- Offering proven techniques such as relaxation or mindfulness.

### ***School issues and your child's future***

It is essential to remember that our students, especially at the secondary level, often express some form of family pressure around academic achievement and their future. The closing of the school will inevitably bring into question the educational path of the students and, as a result, increase the risk of panic more than necessary.

Your stance in this regard will be decisive: let's be reasonable, all of us together. Let's have confidence in the school, which is already taking all possible measures to limit the negative consequences related to this crisis. The only priority today is to keep your whole family healthy.

Of course, being reasonable does not mean putting schooling aside: keeping your child at work is important, as we have already stressed.

### ***What to do in case of a panic attack or an expression of anxiety?***

➔ *Don't panic; by helping your child to **breathe properly**, you'll certainly be able to bring him out of his panic state.*

Your reassuring, soothing words are important. Gradually, changing the focus of their attention will help them to think about something else... you will be able to tell when to suggest that they do something with you, then alone (a concrete activity: cooking, setting the table, folding laundry, helping their siblings, solving a puzzle, building something...). Soothing words and reassuring advice are important for your children.

Stay in touch with your environment to maintain some form of normality. With children who've reached a certain age, use remote (telephone) and online (skype) communication as much as possible to stay close to your loved ones. In a general sense and in case of anxiety, your child's friends and other family members are also important resources for calming them down. Don't hesitate to ask for their help in talking to your child. Their role as a resource person is often downplayed.

*Resources and contacts available if the panic attack continues or if you are concerned about your child's anxiety: see at the end of the document (appendices).*

## **6/ Raising awareness of the role of each person in stopping the spread of the virus**

Each of us, each of our children has a crucial role to play.

As members of the educational staff, our role is also to raise awareness about the urgency of an immediate collective mobilization of each and every one of us. In this respect, parents have a fundamental role to play with their children, especially adolescents and young adults.

# PARENTS, TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES!

***On airplanes, we are requested to put on our own mask before helping the child or another person; it is also important that we take care of ourselves in order to be available for our children.***

## **Keep yourself informed...**

... but avoid compulsive listening to/reading the news. You feed your anxiety. Keeping yourself regularly informed 2 to 3 times a day should keep abreast of recent developments. If you are afraid of missing something crucial, you can organize a contact circle with friends in the event of "urgent questions". In this way, you and your friends avoid constantly checking the news.

## **Keep in touch with your social network**

Isolation is never a good solution! Sharing and supportive discussions will give you a sense of community and of being surrounded in order to get through difficult times. Be aware that compulsively seeking **comfort** only relieves you for a short time and reinforces the need for it.

## **Be aware of your catastrophic thinking**

We tend to construct scenarios in our minds about worrisome events... and these are usually worst-case scenarios. Contrary to what we think, this way of functioning does not "prepare" us for every possibility... but rather induces more fear. Stick to a reliable source of information and facts. Try to rationalize your catastrophic thoughts: counter the anxiety-provoking ideas of your mind with more down-to-earth and factual content.

## **We strongly advise against checking symptoms on Google.**

Dr. Google is not and never will be your friend and certainly not your doctor! Relevant information about coronavirus symptoms can be found here:

EN <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/COVID19-symptoms.pdf>

FR <https://www.info-coronavirus.be/fr>

**Remember: Avoid going directly to the doctor/hospital - call your doctor first.**

## **Be kind to yourself**

After all, the situation we're in now is unlike any other in our life experience. Naturally, we care about our children, our loved ones and ourselves. It is important to keep in mind that **feeling anxiety and fear is a natural reaction to the unknown**. There is no point in denying the seriousness of the situation or putting yourself in a state of panic.

**If necessary, seek professional help:** notice if you are overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety and fear and if these are disrupting your life or your sleep. Psychologists remain accessible by phone. Psychologists from the European Schools can help you and, if necessary, refer you to other colleagues.

Stick with the facts and breathe!

## *To summarize*

The psychologists of the European Schools remain at your disposal, within the limits of the measures put in place by the authorities, to support you, to share their ideas and resources, to answer your questions and to support pupils/students who express the need for it.

- ➔ Fear shouldn't frighten us!
- ➔ As an adult, make sure you stay informed about the situation and the most useful measures to be able to communicate them to your children in a way that is adapted to their age and emotional state.
- ➔ Be available to your children, whatever their age : answer questions, organize family activities at home; disconnect and be there to be able to feel as closely as possible how they are doing and respond to them in the best possible way.
- ➔ Offer other topics of conversation and activities.
- ➔ Help your children structure their day.
- ➔ Maintain social contact (by phone, Skype or other means) with friends and family.
- ➔ Services and resource people remain available, be creative: calling on (or phoning) friends or family for advice, calming your own anxieties or speaking to your children is always possible. Use health services only if it is really necessary. Never go to them without first calling them.
- ➔ Remember that no expert knows your child better than you do: you will find the right words to help them through this particular situation better than anyone else.
- ➔ Remember: the priority today is to work together to stop this virus and to provide a guidance framework that allows everyone to feel serene and at peace.



## APPENDICES - USEFUL RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

- **Official website of the Federal Public Service (Belgium):** <https://www.info-coronavirus.be/fr/>
- **Referral site of scientific experts:** <https://www.sciensano.be/fr>
- **Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools:**  
[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=baf81d52\\_4](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=baf81d52_4)

### ***Communicating with children***

We strongly advise you to consult these tools before using them with your children to see if they are suitable for them:

- <https://ptitlibe.liberation.fr/coronavirus-virus,101199> (French)
- <https://www.1jour1actu.com/monde/coronavirus-mieux-comprendre-pour-mieux-se-proteger> (French)
- <https://www.1jour1actu.com/info-animee/cest-quoi-le-coronavirus-venu-de-chine> (French)
- <http://theconversation.com/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-covid-19-133576> (English)
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html> (English)
- <https://www.unicef.org> (several languages)
- [https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR2Q1LI0rfIOKIZ6yseEvc7L7D\\_ynq1ig3l05gU-OA-cNLnC2oiSnJ8iOrU](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR2Q1LI0rfIOKIZ6yseEvc7L7D_ynq1ig3l05gU-OA-cNLnC2oiSnJ8iOrU) (English)

### ***Stress and anxiety: what to do in case of a panic attack or an expression of anxiety?***

- <https://adaa.org/tips> (several languages)
- <https://childmind.org/article/what-to-do-and-not-do-when-children-are-anxious/> (English)
- <https://www.psychom.net/help-kids-with-anxiety> (English)
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/> (English)
- <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1662788/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemie-anxiete-enfants-psychologue> (French)

If the panic attack persists, don't hesitate to call specialized services and/or members of these teams. They will certainly be able to give you soothing advice, without necessarily meeting the child. Please do not overburden them for minor cases.

- Your general practitioner
- Centre for Anxiety and Stress Management: <https://www.cgas.be/contact>
- Stress Anxiety Centre: <https://stress-anxiete.be/vos-experts/>
- CHU Brugmann Stress Clinic: 02/477.27.76
- <https://www.iris-hopitaux.be/index.php?page=hopitaux-bruxelles&lg=fr&service=Clinique+du+stress&hopital=all>
- Emergency Services: Crisis and Psychiatric Emergency Unit of St. Luc hospital: 02/764 21 21

# Gérer le stress durant COVID-19

**CROIX-ROUGE**   
de Belgique



**C'est normal** de se sentir triste, stressé, désorienté, en colère ou effrayé lors d'une crise.

Parler à quelqu'un en qui vous avez confiance peut vous aider. Contactez vos amis et votre famille.



**Vérifiez ce dont vous entendez parler sur le Coronavirus.**

Tenez-vous informés et à jour; utilisez des sources d'info de confiance comme les autorités publiques ainsi que l'Organisation Mondiale de la Santé (OMS)



**Pas d'inquiétude ni d'agitation inutiles !**

Réduisez le temps que vous et votre famille passez à lire ou à regarder des informations que vous trouvez pénibles.



**Utilisez les techniques qui ont déjà marché pour vous lors d'événements passés.**

Utilisez ces compétences pour vous aider à gérer vos émotions durant cette épidémie.



**Si vous devez rester à la maison, maintenez un mode de vie sain.**

Des repas équilibrés, un bon sommeil, de l'exercice et un contact social avec votre famille et vos amis à la maison et à distance.



**Gérez sainement toutes vos émotions.**

Si vous vous sentez submergé, parlez-en à un professionnel de santé. Il vous orientera vers un soutien psychologique ou médical en fonction de vos besoins.

Source: OMS

# RÉDUIRE LES RISQUES DE CONTAGION LIÉS AU 2019-nCoV

## BONNES PRATIQUES ET RECOMMANDATIONS

### LE 2019-nCoV, C'EST QUOI ?

Le 2019-nCoV est un coronavirus. Les coronavirus forment une vaste famille de virus présents chez l'être humain et chez l'animal. Ceux qui touchent l'être humain peuvent entraîner des manifestations diverses allant du simple rhume à des maladies plus graves.\* Il est apparu en Chine en décembre 2019.



### TRANSMISSION

Le virus se propage principalement par contact avec une personne infectée par le biais de gouttelettes respiratoires produites lorsqu'une personne tousse ou éternue.

La période d'incubation s'étend de 1 à 14 jours.\*

### SYMPTÔMES\*

- Troubles respiratoires
- Fièvre
- Toux
- Essoufflement
- Fatigue



### PRÉVENTION

Afin de réduire les risques de contamination :

- Je me lave les mains régulièrement avec du savon ou une solution hydroalcoolique
- J'évite de toucher mon visage (yeux, bouche, nez)
- Si je tousse, j'utilise un mouchoir à usage unique ou le creux de mon coude
- Si j'éternue, j'utilise un mouchoir à usage unique et le jette dans une poubelle
- Je glisse dans mon cartable un petit flacon de solution hydroalcoolique
- Je limite les contacts physiques avec les autres



### REPAS

- Je me lave les mains avant chaque repas
- Je ne partage pas mon repas ou mon sandwich
- Je ne partage pas mes couverts ou ma gourde

### COURTOISIE

J'évite les baisers, accolades et poignées de mains pour saluer les autres.



### VIGILANCE

Si des symptômes tels que de la fièvre, de la toux ou des troubles respiratoires apparaissent, je garde mon calme et ne panique pas. J'en informe mes parents et consulte un médecin pour agir de manière adéquate. Même si je n'ai pas été diagnostiqué positif au 2019-nCoV, je ne reviens à l'école qu'après disparition de tous les symptômes pendant minimum 48 heures (température inférieure à 37,5°C).

Toute absence est communiquée à l'infirmerie : [list-lae-infirmary@eursc.eu](mailto:list-lae-infirmary@eursc.eu)

\* SOURCE: Organisation mondiale de la Santé

# How to Handwash?

WASH HANDS WHEN VISIBLY SOILED! OTHERWISE, USE HANDRUB



Duration of the entire procedure: 40-60 seconds



Wet hands with water;



Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces;



Rub hands palm to palm;



Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;



Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;



Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;



Rinse hands with water;



Dry hands thoroughly with a single use towel;



Use towel to turn off faucet;



Your hands are now safe.



**World Health Organization**

**Patient Safety**

A World Alliance for Safer Health Care

**SAVE LIVES**

Clean Your Hands

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May 2009

