

# Supporting Children & Adolescents during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Dr David Moseley, 7 October 2021

# Pandemic Mental Health

## *Stressors*

Health anxiety  
Intolerance of uncertainty  
Loss of faith in institutions to solve all issues  
Invisible threat (panic, avoidance, rage)  
Disruptions to routines and activities  
Threat to livelihoods  
Reduced confidence (value, purpose)  
Moral injury (acting differently than usual/values)  
Quarantine, lockdown fatigue and dysthymia  
Over reaction / Under reaction  
Chaos across life contexts (no escape/respite)  
Marginalisation of vulnerable groups & individuals

## *Effects*

Increased post traumatic anxiety and depression for months after SARS CoV-1  
Psychiatric symptom exacerbation  
High distress in youth and parents of young children in UK lockdown, variable findings from Australia  
Quarantined children developed acute stress disorder, adjustment disorders, and grief in previous pandemics  
Hikikomori (pseudo-agoraphobia)  
Increased alcohol use = increased trauma  
Health workers and infected patients elevated levels of distress  
Unknown neuropsychiatric effects of COVID-19

Psychology of Pandemics (2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgihJhETM-Q>

Pierce et al. (2020) Mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Lancet*.

Vindegard & Eriksen Benros, (2020) COVID-19 pandemic and mental health consequences: Systematic review of the current evidence. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*.

Impacts of lockdown on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people (2021) <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/MHF%20Scotland%20Impacts%20of%20Lockdown.pdf>

Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on mental health in Germany. *Translational Psychiatry* (2021) 11:392 <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41398-021-01508-2>

Guardian (2021). Is there a mental health crisis? What Australian data reveals about impact of Covid lockdowns. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/datablog/2021/sep/03/is-there-a-mental-health-crisis-what-australian-data-reveals-about-impact-of-covid-lockdowns>

# COVID-19

## Challenges for young people and families

- Longest lockdown in the world
- Disruption to routines of home and school life
- Disrupted contact with friends
- Less confidence and support with school work
- More difficulty with motivation and mood
- More health anxiety, vaccine anxiety, and separation anxiety
- Less physical activity affecting physical and mental health
- More screen time
- Less activities and enjoyment
- More family stress and vulnerability
- More ambivalence in thoughts and feelings about family, school, friends, illness, self, ...



## Signs of increased stress

All more common during pandemic

### *Watch for persistent:*

Distress

Unusual  
behaviour  
changes

Impaired  
functioning

- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Less taking care with their appearance or personal hygiene
- Eating more or less than usual
- Withdrawn, avoiding friends, family and activities
- More outbursts of anger or irritability
- More tense and restless
- Engaging in risky behaviours
- Self-critical (e.g. they refer to themselves as 'worthless' or 'stupid')
- More reactive and emotionally intense (direct and indirect)



**What can we do  
to help?**



# Many ways to help

## Family first

Reassure your child that your family is your top priority, switch off from work

## Take care of yourself

We are also feeling more stressed than usual. Self care is as important for our children as it is for us. Kids worry about us

## Make sure they know when you are ready to talk

We are juggling multiple demands. We don't have to be available constantly. Let your child know when it a good time to talk

## Maintain everyday routines

Structure contains distress. Be clear about knowns and unknowns. Use verbal and visual prompts



# Many ways to help

**Allow available  
distractions  
and pastimes**

Activity choices are very limited and stale. There is a lot of time to be filled. It's OK for kids to zone out and distract themselves (as long as they are safe)

**Back to basics**

Reduce expectations. Focus on key priorities. Interim plans are OK

**Help children  
learn to  
tolerate  
anxiety**

Acknowledge and normalise uncertainty. Model getting upset, settling, and moving on.

**Reach out and  
connect with  
loved ones**

Help children find ways to connect with family and/or friends. Identify other adult support people for when you are not available



# Many ways to help

**Be honest**

Children feel more contained when we can be honest and give clear information about what's happening at their developmental level

**Accept and validate their feelings**

It's OK to be sad, worries, angry, and happy. This is an intense time. Connect and then gently help them to move on

**Create time for rest and for active play**

Create calming and mindful times. Engage in active movement

**Help children understand the big picture**

Look to history and to the local and global community for a sense of getting through this together.



# Many ways to help

**Expect and  
allow variable  
behaviour**

They will be more up and down, need us more, push us away more, this is more normal when dealing with chronic stress. They'll get back to normal once life gets back to normal

**Focus on  
blocks of time**

The lockdown seems endless. Break time up into blocks of days or weeks

**Rupture and  
Repair**

It's normal to be more grumpy with each other. Focus on the repair rather the rupture.

**Invest in local  
communities**

Local connections and communities are important in pandemic recovery. Invest in schools, clubs, etc to support recovery.



# Many ways to help

## Light at the end of the tunnel

Be genuinely positive about the future. For kids, the end is near. School is returning soon. Help them to focus on the short time left and the coming end of long lockdowns

## Use visuals to show the plan

Print off a calendar and mark the days that school returns, special events, holidays start

## Desensitise to spaces and people

Isolation reduces our tolerance of noise, people, and environments. Normalise this and find ways to and support desensitisation

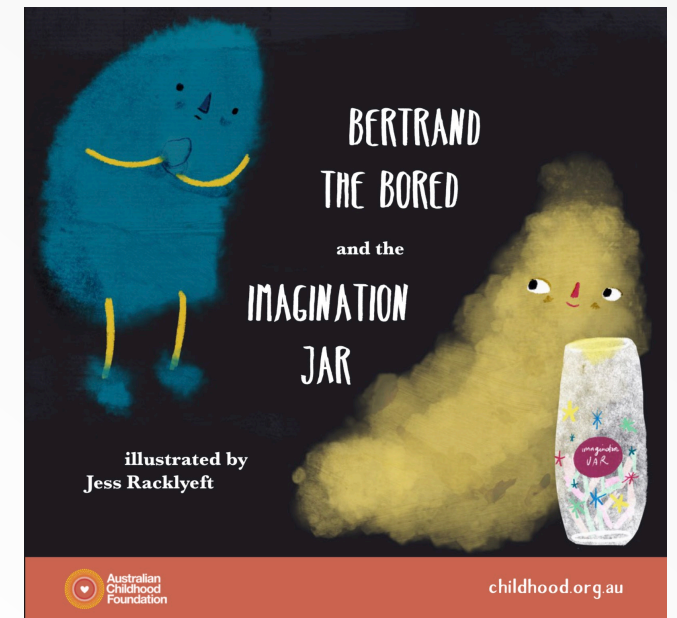
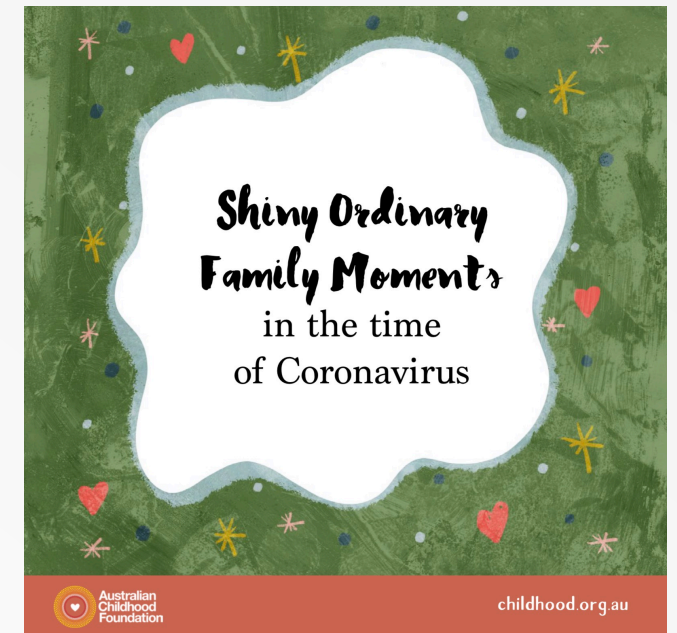
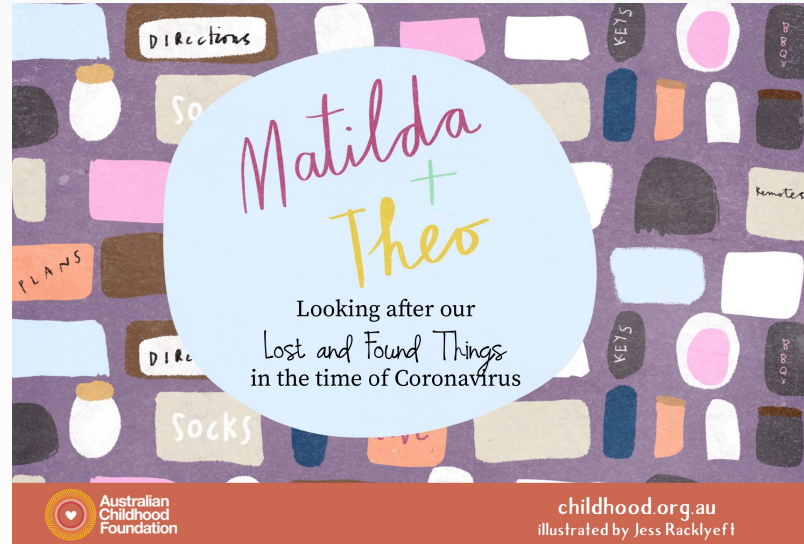
## Gaps in development

Kids have missed two years of development, a whole stage. Gaps in what they would have learned socially. Respect their actual age, support them to build younger age social skills



# Books and Resources for Younger Children

childhood.org.au



# Resources for Adolescents

## Supporting your teen during coronavirus

It's been a stressful time all around the world as we deal with coronavirus (COVID-19) and the uncertainty it brings. Here are some resources to help you support your teenager through it all.



How to manage your own wellbeing during



Your teen, mental health challenges and coping



Helping your teen to stick to a routine during COVID-19



What to do if your teen is stressed about the future

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has resulted in huge changes to school and work. We've created a planner template...

It's not unusual for teens to experience stress about their future, especially if they are nearing the...

## screen-smart parenting

How to Find Balance and Benefit in Your Child's Use of Social Media, Apps, and Digital Devices



Jodi Gold, MD

Foreword by Tory Burch



Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service  
1800 512 348  
Chat online



Home > I am supporting others > Children and young people >  
[How to help your teenager transition back to on-site learning](#)

## How to help your teenager transition back to on-site learning

As secondary school students across Australia returning to on-site classrooms, Professor Brett McDermott, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, offers advice for parents and carers on how to best support teens making the transition.

# Helpful Resources

University of Queensland Parenting & Family Support Centre  
<https://pfsc.psychology.uq.edu.au/covid19-resources>

SEPHN Head to Health & API Counselling  
<https://www.semphn.org.au/resources/access.html>

Australian Childhood Foundation (includes books to support talking with younger children)  
<https://www.childhood.org.au/covid-19/>

Reach Out  
<https://parents.au.reachout.com/collections/supporting-your-teen-during-coronavirus>

Beyond Blues – *Helping teens return to school*  
<https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/i-am-supporting-others/children-and-young-people/how-to-help-your-teen-transition-back-to-school.html>

Gold, J. (2014) *Screen-smart parenting: How to find a balance in your child's use of social media, apps, and digital devices*. Guilford Press. <https://www.guilford.com/books/Screen-Smart-Parenting/Jodi-Gold/9781462515530/reviews>

