

In response to the potential threats of current epidemic, many people may feel overwhelmed, worried, distressed or even terrified. As a caregiver, while you may be pre-occupied with preventive measures to protect the health of yourselves and your family, taking care of the emotional needs of yourselves and your children should not be neglected.

Possible Reactions of Caregivers to the Outbreak

In face of the sudden epidemic, you may take note of the following responses in addition to the behavioural ones (such as reinforcing personal and home hygiene):



Possible Reactions of Children to the Outbreak



Infants and toddlers do not understand what is happening around them, but their **feeling and behaviour** may be affected by their caregivers' emotional changes.

Pre-schoolers do not fully comprehend the epidemic situation and may be **puzzled** by changes in family members' behaviours. They may feel **anxious** that their family members could be infected. Given changes in usual routines like school suspension and reduced outdoor activities, they may feel **bored** or **miss their relatives, teachers and classmates**. They may also be **frustrated** or **become non-compliant** when caregivers impose stringent hygiene measures on them.



Psychological Care Tips

Caregivers may refer to the suggestions below to enhance your coping skills as well as that of your children in response to the outbreak.

(I) For Caregivers

- **Try to express understanding, acceptance** and respect when family members have different views and feelings in response to the outbreak.
- Be aware of your emotions; **when feeling anxious**, remind yourself that **the outbreak will pass eventually** and try to focus on **adopting feasible and realistic ways to cope with the situation**.
- **Take care of your basic needs to boost your immunity**, e.g. maintaining a balanced diet, having adequate rest and sleep.
- **Spare time for leisure or interesting activities**, e.g. listening to music, simple stretching exercise, reading, or connecting with friends.
- **Avoid being overwhelmed by too much information**. Verify if possible, or access accurate information from reliable sources.
- **Reach out for support from other family members** on household chores and/or childcare whenever possible.
- **Practise relaxation exercise**, e.g.



diaphragmatic breathing
& progressive muscle relaxation



mindful breathing



guided imagery
(only available in Cantonese)

(II) For Children

In general, caregivers' attitudes and feelings towards the outbreak may affect your children's perception of the situation. While you try to introduce or remind your children of the hygiene measures, be mindful of your tone and avoid being pushy.

Besides, in face of changes, young children often struggle to verbalise their feelings and needs. Caregivers need to pay attention to children's behavioural manifestations and changes, explore their underlying needs and feelings, and respond appropriately and promptly in order to facilitate their coping.

1. Regulate emotions

Principles

- i. Reinforce sense of safety

 - Ensure children feel loved, cared for and protected
 - Instil sense of predictability

- ii. Support expression of emotions

 - Listen attentively and patiently
 - Provide opportunity to express emotions
 - Avoid pressing children to talk

- iii. Explore concerns with empathy and respond appropriately

 - Use language appropriate to children’s age and needs to enhance understanding
 - Be factual without excessive details
 - Stay calm and make it fun

Suggestions

Infants and Toddlers

- ☺ Provide extra comfort through touches, cuddles and let children stay close to caregivers
- ☺ Engage in familiar activities such as singing and reading stories together

Pre-schoolers

- ☺ Provide verbal reassurance on top of physical comfort
- ☺ Provide prior notice and explanation on changes in daily routines. E.g. “We will stay home tomorrow as school is still closed.”



Infants and Toddlers

- ☺ Name the emotions directly, provide children with aids (such as feelings cards) to talk about feelings

Pre-schoolers

- ☺ Reassure children their feelings are normal and acceptable. E.g. “Staying home all day is so boring.”
- ☺ If children seem uninterested to talk about the situation, just keep observing and monitoring them for any signs of distress.

Infants and Toddlers

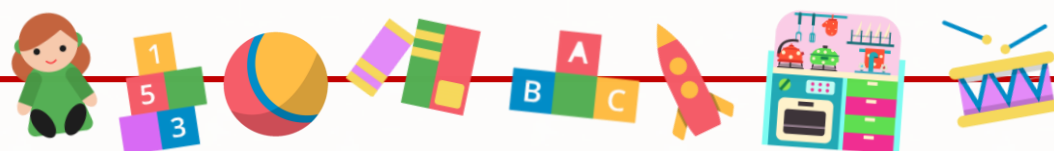
- ☺ Explain in simple terms, e.g. “Wash your hands to keep them clean”, “To protect ourselves from germs, wear masks when going out.”
- ☺ Playfully introduce the hygiene practices, e.g. sing songs when washing hands together
- ☺ Use distractions when children show resistance

Pre-schoolers

- ☺ Have conversational exchanges. E.g. Child feels annoyed when asked to put on a mask. Caregiver may respond, “You don’t like wearing mask. Guess why I keep asking you to do so?” Child says, “To keep us from getting sick.” Caregiver says, “Yes! You’re right! I love how you remember what I’ve told you. More people are getting sick, so we need to wear masks when going out. Let’s help each other to put the mask on?”
- ☺ Child talks about his worry to Dad, “Will you get sick when you’re out to work?” Dad replies, “You’re worried Dad will get sick. I’d protect myself by washing hands and wearing mask. It’ll be fine.”
- ☺ Adults may share own feelings, but don’t forget to share ideas for coping as well. E.g. Mom tells her child, “I’m also a bit worried when I hear that more people are getting sick. But it’d be fine if we’ve good hygiene practices.”

2. Maintain daily routine and arrange activities

- Maintain daily routines as much as possible
- Discuss with and arrange age-appropriate activities for your children, like creating with play dough, building blocks, and reading, etc. Activities to facilitate back-and-forth interaction such as singing songs with movement, playing cooking set or make believe play, etc. This can be a great time to play with your children and enhance the parent-child relationship.
- Arrange simple household chores according to the children’s ability, such as putting toys away, clearing table after meals, sorting clean clothes, etc.
- Praise the children concretely if they can follow the routine and encourage the behaviour by using simple reward plan.



Seeking Professional Help

If significant and persistent distress or unusual behavioural change are observed in the children or caregivers, you may consult family doctor or approach the following community resources.

Hotline／Organisation (listed in arbitrary order)	Contact	Service Hours
Social Welfare Department	Hotline: 2343 2255	24 hours
Hospital Authority	Mental Health Direct (hotline): 2466 7350	24 hours
Hong Kong Red Cross	"Shall We Talk" Psychological Support Service: 5164 5040 Website: https://www.redcross.org.hk/en/covid_pss.html	Make appointment via WhatsApp