

Supporting children during times of change and uncertainty



In times of uncertainty, it is natural to feel overwhelmed by the changes to our daily lives and to worry about the impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of our children and young people. It can sometimes be easy to focus on the aspects of our lives where we have little control. However, consistent evidence from around the world shows that there are things we can do as parents or carers to support children's resilience and wellbeing during uncertainty or when they adapt to big changes, whatever they are.

How may children respond during times of uncertainty?

- worried, clingy and uncooperative
- sad and angry one minute, okay the next
- frightening thoughts and nightmares
- regression to earlier behaviours
- stomach aches and headaches.

Young people may react in similar, but different ways:

- mood changes
- tired and distracted
- retreating from social networks
- engaging in risky behaviours
- sleep problems and headaches.

"The only thing in life that is permanent is change. Change is the one constant in life."

– Fallin, 2013



Help your child or young person

At least one caring and consistent adult carer who is coping as best as they can and supports open and positive relationships is key. Check in regularly with their child. Listen carefully: their concerns might be different to what you expect.

- **Offer** your attention, patience and love
- **Calmly** listen
- **Acknowledge** and affirm your child's feelings and help your child to identify helpful ways to manage feelings (try out the handprint tool on the following page)
- **Encourage** your child to ask for help from trusted adults
- **Involve** your child in decisions that affect them
- **Respond** to your child's questions with clear and factual but age appropriate information
- **Problem-solve** together around worries or difficult issues, look for the things you 'can' control or do
- **Model positive ways** to cope, gratefulness for what you do have and healthy self-care
- **Take time** out to play and have fun together.

Talking things through together, sharing in positive coping activities, creative problem-solving and shared decision-making help your child focus on what they 'can' influence. This builds important resilience skills, for now and for life.

Helpful hint: children and young people respond in unique ways. It can be helpful to recognise if your child is behaving differently but not compare them to others.

Managing big feelings: a helping hand

Worried? Upset? Bored? Frustrated? These are normal feelings during times of change and uncertainty. Sometimes, feelings take over our behaviour. Other times, we can get stuck in our thoughts and feelings. This handprint tool offers a 'helping hand' for managing feelings in a positive way. It can be helpful for children (and parents or carers) for learning emotional literacy and lifting our spirits.

The power is in your hands

1. Draw around your hand and choose an emotion that's bothering you.
2. Think of 5 things you like to do and that you can do by yourself where you are. Choose a mixture of relaxing and fun activities – be creative! Draw or write them on the fingers of your handprint.
3. Place your handprint somewhere you can find it easily.
4. Now the tricky part ... notice when you are feeling the emotion. Don't try to stop or ignore it, just spot it. Then choose one or more of the helpful activities from your handprint.
5. Make a new handprint as often as you like. Draw or paint on paper, old cardboard, make a handprint in the mud or sand, or use chalk outside.

Top tip for parent/carers: help younger children by laying out any activity resources so they can find these themselves when they need to.

Top tip: It's not always easy to know how you feel, example, if you are whining, feeling grumpy, looking for a snack or bugging others you might be feeling bored. That is a good time to look for, or draw, your handprint.



Other ways to help

- **Maintain daily routines** as much as possible
- **Stay social** – connect with others, give and accept help
- **Keep active** – go for a walk, dance to music, sing, play with a pet
- **Dream and plan** – fun activities to look forward to
- **Self-care** – it can be hard to be patient and creative when you're feeling overwhelmed. It is important to find a few moments (or more) when you can take a break, rest, breathe deeply and care for yourself.

**You can't pour from an empty cup.
Look after yourself so you are better
able to look after the children in
your care.**

