

## Tips for parenting your child whilst on treatment during Covid-19

This is a challenging time for parents and children. In this document we have outlined some tips around talking to your child about Covid-19 and managing stress and uncertainty within the home. Many of the linked resources listed are aimed at primary school aged children, yet tips can be applied and adapted by parents of children across the age range.

### Talking about covid-19

#### Be open and listen

Allow your child to talk freely and ask questions. Try to ensure that your child feels comfortable talking to you about coronavirus as you will likely be their most reliable source of information and best source of reassurance.

#### Be honest

Answer questions truthfully. Consider the age of your child and how much they can understand.

#### Validate their feelings

Let your child know that it is OK to be scared or confused. Allow them to have a space to share how they are feeling and let them know that you are there for them.

#### It's OK to not know all the answers

'We don't know' may be the most truthful response. Sitting with and tolerating uncertainty is a huge challenge at this time. Structure and routine can be helpful in reducing this sense of uncertainty in other aspects of your child's life.

### Links for further material

Short video clip 'coronavirus explained for children' for younger children:  
<http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/3267.htm>

Illustrated book for older children:  
[https://nosycrowcoronavirus.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Coronavirus\\_ABookForChildren.pdf](https://nosycrowcoronavirus.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Coronavirus_ABookForChildren.pdf)

'Talking to children about illness', including advice for children across age groups:  
<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Talking%20to%20children%20about%20illness.pdf>

Downloadable book 'Dave the dog is worried about coronavirus' to help guide conversations with your child about worries they may have about coronavirus:  
<https://nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2/>

Examples of breathing exercises to try together can be found at the end of this leaflet.

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### Your child's cancer treatment during covid-19

#### Ask questions

Depending on the type of cancer your child has and the type of treatment that they are receiving, they may be considered to be within an at risk category. This means that further precautions around physical distancing and cocooning may be required. Your child's doctor will be best placed to answer questions regarding this.

#### Change to how care is delivered

In many cases there is a move to telephone and telehealth consultations with members of your child's health care team. This is to minimise hospital visits and maintain adherence to physical distancing guidelines.

#### Preparation and reassurance

It is important to talk to your child about how things may be a bit different in hospital for a while. Remind them of the reasons why these changes and restrictions are in place and that they will not last forever.

#### Hospital visits may look different

Many staff members will be wearing masks, gloves and aprons.

Adherence to physical distance guidelines means that there will likely be more space between chairs in the waiting areas and people walking along the corridor.

There may also be restrictions on who can attend hospital appointments with your child. Hospital staff will be able to provide up to date information regarding these guidelines.

#### Links for further material

Child friendly explanation regarding staying home and staying safe:

<https://www.olhc.ie/Children-Family/COVID-19-Message-for-Families-/Advice-for-Oncology-Haematology-Patients-COVID-19/Social-Distancing-Staying-Home-and-Staying-Safe.pdf>

Preparing children for how hospital staff may look different wearing PPE:

<https://www.olhc.ie/Children-Family/COVID-19-Message-for-Families-/Advice-for-Oncology-Haematology-Patients-COVID-19/Superheroes-and-Masks.pdf>

## Tips for parenting your child whilst on treatment during Covid-19

### Structure and routine

#### Reducing uncertainty

The more structured and predictable the daily routine is, the less uncertainty there is for a child.

#### Setting a daily routine

This can include set times for meals, school work, physical activity and free time for games and creative activities. Some children may benefit from a visual reminder of the schedule where they can tick off each activity as it is completed.

#### One-to-one time

Make time for one-to-one time each day to promote a sense of connection. Try to make this a TV, phone and virus talk free time.

#### Stick to the normal bedtime routine

Ensuring your child has enough good quality sleep during this time is important for their health and well-being.

### Links for further material

Department of Education and Skills advice on supporting children and young people with daily routines while schools are closed:

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/guide-for-parents-supporting-children.pdf>

Example of a plan for the home school day

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/plan-your-day.pdf>

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### Prepare to self-care – looking after yourself

#### Someone you can talk to

Uncertainty can make us all feel anxious. Identify other adults that you can talk to about your own worries and questions.

#### Apply your own coping strategies

Use coping strategies that you have used in past times of stress. Take a pause, practice some deep breathing, mindfulness or yoga, get some exercise, and look after your own nutrition.

#### Talking when feeling calm

Where possible, try to talk to your child about things they are worried about when you are feeling calm, this will help to reassure them.

#### Staying connected

Stay connected with friends and family using phone and video calls.

### Links for further material

Guided relaxations sound files:

<https://www.stlukesnetwork.ie/patients/patient-support/relaxation.html>

### Breathing exercises

Lead your child through a breathing exercise:

- Let's practice a different way of breathing that can help calm our bodies down.
- Put one hand on your belly, like this (demonstrate).
- Next we are going to take a big breath in through our noses. When we breath in, we will feel the air going up our nose, and all the way down to our belly so that our belly rise up and stick out like this (demonstrate). Just like a balloon.
- Then, we breathe out through our mouths. When we breath out, our belly are going to fall back down, like this (demonstrate).
- We are going to breathe in really slowly while I count to three and then breathe out really slowly while I count to four.
- Let's try five big breaths together.

For younger children, make it a game

- Blow bubbles.
- Blow small paper or cotton balls across the table.