



Managing Worries
About
Covid 19
(A workbook for
parents/carers/students)



Step 1: Understand how you are feeling.

How might Uncertainty affect us?

Vicious Cycle of Uncertainty

Trigger: Uncertain Situation or not knowing the outcome

Thoughts & Images:

- Worry
- The future is unknown: there's always a risk, even if miniscule
- The worst could happen
- I have to be 100% sure
- I can't tolerate not knowing
- Uncertain events are almost always negative
- I won't be able to cope when the uncertain event happens
- I must be prepared, in order to reduce risk and increase my ability to cope when the worst happens

Behaviours:

- Try to increase certainty
- Make lists
- Plan ahead/over-prepare
- Seek reassurance from others
- Do things myself rather than ask others
- Check
- Over-protect others
- Over-inform self (internet etc)
- Avoid/make excuses
- Put things off
- Distract/Keep busy
- Decisions: make impulsive decisions/ask others to make decision/reconsider decisions already made

Emotions/Feelings:

- Uneasy
- Anxious
- Nervous
- Uncomfortable
- Stressed

Physical Sensations:

Hot, sweaty, shaky, butterflies in stomach, tingling in hands/feet, heartbeat quickens,

(adapted from <https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk//docs/ViciousCycleUncertainty.pdf>)

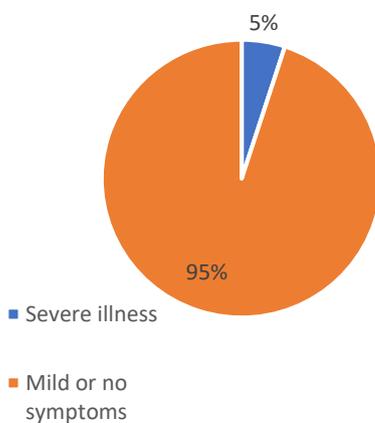
Look at the information and discuss with a loved one which thoughts and images you have experienced. Which emotion best describes how you feel?

What behaviours have you noticed, or have they noticed from you?

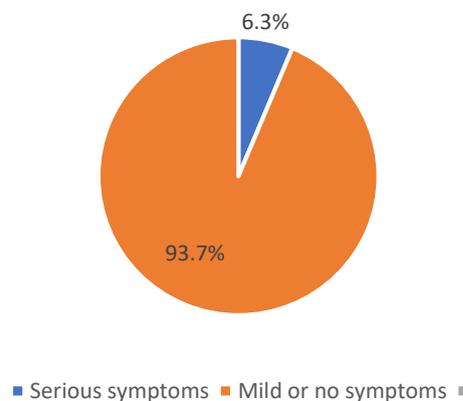
Step 2 : Read the positives and look for more!

- There are a lot of frightening facts and statistics in the News at the moment, but it can help to look for the positives and track the survival rates! Did you know that:
- **115395** people in the United Kingdom have recovered from Covid-19 so far
- **97%** of current cases are considered to be **mild**.
- **4/5** people only experience very mild symptoms
- Globally it is expected that **96%** of people who have caught Covid-19 will recover.
- A **94-year-old** Grandmother was recently released from hospital having made a full recovery.
- A **101-year-old** man who survived WW1 and the Spanish Flu pandemic was recently released from hospital having made a full recovery.
- The risk of having severe symptoms of Covid-19 is very low unless you are over 70:

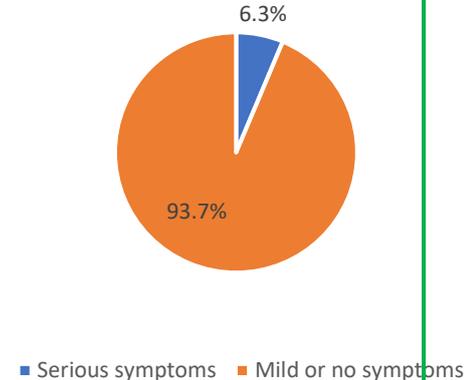
Age 0-40 years



Age 40-49 years



Age 50-59 years



Step 3 Make a “What if...” plan:

One of the most worrying things about the current situation is worrying “What if...?”

The best way to stop worrying is to find the answer to your “What if...?” question. With an adult or sibling go through the “What if...?” plan to make a plan for your biggest worries:

Complete the sentence below with one of your biggest worries:

What if...

How does thinking about this make you feel?

How can we try to prevent this situation happening?

What will happen if this situation does happen?

How will I be looked after in this situation?

Who can help me in this situation?

Practice controlling emotions

Adults can do a significant amount to monitor when a student is feeling anxious and how to support the student in calming down. An important life-long skill, however, is to teach the student to independently recognise the signs that he/she is becoming anxious and what strategies to access in order to return to a calm state. This is called self-regulation. There are 3 stages when teaching self-regulation:

1. Teach
2. Rehearse
3. Prompt

Teach:

Self-regulation can be taught in a number of different ways, using a variety of different supports. **It is important to teach these skills when the student is in a calm state and in a quiet one-to-one setting.** The student is taught 3 skills:

- How do I know I am becoming anxious?

Teach the student to recognise the signs of anxiety relevant to him/her (e.g. breathing more quickly, feeling flushed or warm, sweating, loss of concentration, irritability, desire to escape the situation, nausea). This is often best taught using a diagram of the body and labelling the physiological signs of stress in different parts of the body. It is likely to be easier for a student with autism to recognise these concrete signs of anxiety than to understand the emotions.

- What triggers my anxiety?

Support the student to identify the triggers for his/her anxiety (watching the news, leaving the house, school work etc). The student then knows to be alert for signs of anxiety in these environments/activities and to be prepared to use calming strategies.

- What reduces my anxiety

Allow the student to try different strategies and then select what makes him/her feel calm.

Rehearse

Give the student time to practise anxiety management strategies in a safe environment and when he/she is calm.

Prompt

When the student is transferring skills to real scenarios, he/she is likely to at first require prompting from an adult to access the anxiety management strategies. Adult support can then be gradually phased out over time.

Step 4 Create a Calm Down Plan

Working with an adult or loved one fill in the boxes below with ideas about how to calm yourself down when you start to worry or feel anxious. You could draw pictures in the boxes to help you remember!

When I start to worry, I can help myself by....	When I am overwhelmed with worry I can help myself by...

Calming Routine

1. Take 4 deep breaths



2. Clench fists 4 times



3. Count to 10

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Step 5: Ask Questions!

In times of crisis, the big worries can get even bigger. The unknowns can become almost unbearable, let alone for a child who is still trying to figure out the basics of why people do what they do, or why they make the decisions they make. Most of you will agree that we are living in a very surreal and scary time. Assume this is going to weigh heavy on your child.

If you are stressed, you can safely assume your child is 10 times more so. One behavior that can actually make anxiety worse is rumination. Rumination is when you think about a disturbing incident or situation over and over. The thought can get “stuck” in your brain. Research suggests that the more you ruminate, the more the cortisol (stress hormone) is released into your body. A constant release of cortisol can make you or your child physically sick (the classic example is feeling sick to your stomach).

One sign of rumination is repetitive questioning about a particular topic. If your child is asking a question over and over, assume the issue is causing significant stress and consider developing a consistent routine regarding *how* you deliver your answer. Simply ignoring the repeated questioning is not a good idea, and probably won't solve the problem. I recommend you give simple, honest and clear answers, avoiding elusive analogies. I also suggest you write the question and the answer in a notebook. You can even name the notebook, something like *The Book of Good Questions and Answers*. When your child asks you the same question again, direct him to the book (check the book of answers) rather than repeating yourself. Teach him where to go to find the answer.

If there is not a good answer to your child's question, you can write down that the answer is being studied by the smartest people in the world. You can assure your child that you will read the news and let her know the answer as soon as the experts know. Consider having a Q&A time on the daily schedule. Consider naming those worldly perseverative questions, “Big Questions” (as opposed to every day ‘where is the remote’ questions). Then, when your child asks you a ‘big’ question, write it down and show your child where on the schedule you will answer big questions.

The basis of this strategy is that repetitive routines can help to calm anxiety. The system also allows you some time to think through the answer.

Other useful websites, apps and videos:

- Headspace App
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/coronavirus-advice-support-children-families-parents/>
- <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>
- <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/managing-your-anxiety/>
- <https://www.theottoolbox.com/mindfulness-for-kids-youtube-video>



