

How to support children and young people when they are struggling

There are things you can do as a parent or carer to help children and young people navigate these strange and often difficult times. Here are some tips from [Tanya Byron](#).

Introduce a good routine and stick to it as much as possible.

As far as possible keep routines going so that days have rhythm and structure and are not spent in bed or bored. Keep healthy habits going for the whole family: sleep, mealtimes, exercise, play, creative activities and work, relaxation. Endless time without structure, meaning and purpose is unhealthy for body and mind.

If you are working from home and juggling work alongside childcare and home-schooling, try to plan things the night before. Write a list together of things kids can do when you are working, set things up if needed beforehand. It will give your kids some ideas to choose from and will make them feel they are back in control as it would be their choice what they do at the time.

Talk about it.

Talking about how a child or a young person is feeling is very important as is acknowledging the recent changes in their behaviour. It may take time for them to open up. Tanya suggests to start the conversation with open questions and ideally in an open space, during a walk for example, where there is no direct eye contact or a sense of being trapped and pinned down. How about '*Tell me about your day*' or '*You seem fed up/down, tell me about it.*' This can really help facilitate conversation and avoid conflict. For more tips on communicating with teens [click here](#).

Very young children may display their distress via play and Tanya suggest to use play and art to help children communicate. [Click here](#) for advice on how to talk to young children about their feelings and how to look for clues in their play.

Avoid making assumptions and judgement.

Significant changes in behaviour can be distressing for a parent or carer at the best of times, let alone during a pandemic when adults equally often feel anxious and stressed out. You should never assume you know what's wrong and don't judge the way that the child is behaving. Judgement and anxiety will close down meaningful communication. Tips for you as a parent or carer:

- Pick your battles and walk away from conflict. Rational dialogue will not happen when emotions are high.
- Don't take insults personally: they are projecting their helpless rage at you as it's the only place they safely can.
- Be gentle and direct and don't be afraid to set some boundaries around risky behaviour - it may not be welcomed but does make children and young people feel safe.
- Be their role model - how are you managing your stress, unhappiness?

Help them build resilience.

It is so easy as a parent or carer to tell the children and young people what to do and how to behave, which in challenging situations often leads to them pushing back. Help them think through their behaviour choices and develop their reasoning skills. Remind them of times when they have shown resilience and good judgement. This way you are helping them develop their skills and build resilience so they can help themselves in the future.

As Tanya says “we need to be resilient and adaptable to cope and to grow”