

SUPPORTING CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 UNCERTAINTY

Many people are facing stress and uncertainty due to COVID-19. It can be especially stressful if you are supporting a loved one who is using alcohol and other drugs, such as crystal methamphetamine ('ice'), and their children. You may be experiencing many new challenges if you have found yourself at home spending more time caring for and supporting children.

This factsheet will provide you with tips, practical strategies and support options if you are caring for children during uncertain times. It's important to remember you are not alone and there is help available. For example, Family Drug Support has a 24-hour support line for families and friends affected by alcohol and other drugs (phone: 1300 368 186).



Photo by August de Richelieu from Pexels

For many people who care for children, the spread of COVID-19 has led to a shift in reality and having to cope with a 'new normal.' This can present new challenges when it comes to caring for young people. It can also exacerbate existing difficulties if you are supporting someone misusing alcohol or other substances. It is important to take care of yourself too – look after yourself by eating a healthy diet, sleeping well and exercising. You may also need the support of your family and friends. Seek extra support if you need help ensuring that the children you are supporting stay safe and well.

As a parent or caregiver, you may be coping with the increased demands of trying to educate and entertain children as some schools close in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This can be even more difficult if you're a single parent, are taking care of children with complex needs, or are experiencing financial hardship, stress or other difficulties. It can also be challenging if you find yourself in the position of caring for other children who are not your own. You may also be worried about how the virus and its consequences will affect your loved ones, and the children you are caring for, or how you will be able to juggle these caring responsibilities amidst certain restrictions.

For children, life has also changed dramatically. Some have been staying home from school or day-care, with no certainty as to when they will permanently return. Children who live with people who are using alcohol and/or other drugs might become exposed to increased risk if not well supported. It is important to remember that children are resilient and there are many steps you can take to adequately support them.

SPEAKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19



Speak with them calmly and honestly

You don't need to shield children from everything, but it is important to choose your words carefully and talk about the pandemic in a way that they understand. Statements such as 'this is a pandemic never seen before in our lifetime' are likely confusing and will not help calm or settle children.



Encourage them to ask questions

Children's curiosity during this time is important and offers an opportunity for you to support them. Children may ask if they will get sick or if you will get sick. You can reassure them that you're doing everything you can to keep them healthy and that hospitals are working really hard to make sure everyone who gets sick, can get better again.



Ask them questions

Find out what they want to know or what they are worried about. Reassure them that it is normal to be worried and that adults feel that way too. Try not to minimise or disregard their feelings when responding to their distress.



Provide reassurance

Current data suggests that children are not greatly impacted by the virus. You can tell them that most people who get sick will be healthy again soon. Remind them that staying home and staying well is about protecting people we love as well as people in the community.



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES



1. Stay active

It is important to encourage physical activity in children and young people. Try to find creative ways to add activities into your daily routine. This could involve online exercise videos or going outside for walks or other activities if you are not in mandatory isolation.



2. Create a Safety Plan

If you are concerned about the possibility of a loved one becoming violent or aggressive due to their use of ice, it is important to have a safety plan. Making a safety plan does not prevent a crisis but it will help you to respond to crises and get to safety faster. For more information about how to create a safety plan please click here.



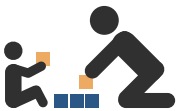
3. Maintain a routine and open communication

Talking openly to children and answering questions will help reassure them. For school aged children, you will likely need to plan their schooling in collaboration with their teachers. Structure and routine are reassuring for children, even if the plan needs to be adapted as you go.



4. Remain connected

Encourage children to communicate with their friends and other family members. This can be through video and phone calls when they cannot see each other in person. There are also some fun apps that allow you to call and play games together.




5. Try to have fun

Try to remember that children are looking to you for guidance on how to respond and behave. If you can, show them there is still time for fun.

IF THIS HAS RAISED ANY CONCERNS, PLEASE CONTACT ONE OF THE SERVICES BELOW:

This factsheet has included a list of services and resources to support you. Seek professional help if you are feeling overwhelmed or as though you cannot cope.

Lifeline

 13 11 14

 www.lifeline.org.au

National Alcohol and Other Drug Information Service

 1800 250 015

For more evidence-based information, resources and links to support services relating to crystal methamphetamine please visit Cracks in the Ice. The Family and Friends Support Program also provides more information/resources and support for families concerned about a loved ones AOD use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES VISIT CRACKS IN THE ICE AND/OR THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT PROGRAM

GAMES FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

While suitable for children, these are games that can be enjoyed by the whole family – not just young people!



Would You Rather

In this game, players go around a circle asking each member of the group a variety of hypothetical questions starting with 'Would You Rather'. Players only get 2 options to choose from. When they choose, they should explain to the group why they chose that answer.

For example

1. Would you rather only eat yellow or red foods for the rest of your life?
2. Would you rather swap lives with Beyonce or Billie Eilish?
3. Would you rather give up TV or music?

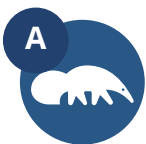


If You...

This game also involves posing hypothetical scenarios to players, but the questions remain open-ended so the players can come up with their own answers.

For example

1. If you could spend a day with any celebrity, who would it be?
2. If you could go back to any period in history, which one would you choose?
3. If you had a superpower, what would it be?
4. If you could bring an animated character to life, who would you choose?



Category Game

In this game, a different person from the group chooses a category for each round. Players then take turns naming an item from that category. In the alphabet version of the game, the first item must start with the letter 'A'. The following item must then start with the letter 'B', then 'C', and so on. The round ends when players run out of things they can name.

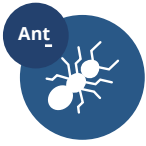


For example

If the category was 'Animals'...

A = Anteater, B = Badger, C = Cat, D = Dingo etc.

In the more difficult version of the Category Game, we drop the alphabet rule and now each player must name an item that begins with the last letter of the previous item.



For example

If the category was 'Animals'...



Echidna → Ant → Tiger → Raccoon



Other example categories include artist names, colours, places, technology, sports, hobbies, things in the kitchen/bathroom/yard/garage, things found on a beach/in the forest/under the sea etc.