

SUPPORTING CHILDREN DURING TIMES OF STRESS AND UNCERTAINTY

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

Times of crisis and uncertainty such as environmental disasters and global pandemics can present new challenges when it comes to caring for young people. They 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 there may be disruptions to regular schooling. 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.

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 UNCERTAINTY



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 what is happening in the world around them in a way that they understand. Be mindful of the language you use when speaking about stressful or uncertain events - overly depressing or pessimistic statements 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 want to know more about things happening around them, particularly if there are changes to their routines or they are no longer able to do something they could before. You can answer their questions as honestly as you can and provide clarity on the changes they are experiencing.



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

It can be helpful to provide the reassurance that even as things around you may seem different for a while, that you will always make sure they are safe and loved. Maintaining some constants in children's lives is important and can be as simple as continuing to comfort and do fun activities with them as usual.



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 playing a sport together.



2. Create a Safety Plan

If you are concerned about the possibility of a child being in danger, becoming distressed or self-harming, 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 may 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, play, and creativity.

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.

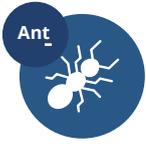


For example

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.