



DIRECTORATE: INCLUSIVE & SPECIALISED EDUCATION SUPPORT | SPECIALISED SUPPORT SERVICES – APRIL 2020

DEALING WITH **ANXIETY** DURING COVID-19 SCHOOL LOCKDOWN

The Coronavirus pandemic is unlike any national disaster that South Africa had to face, let alone the world. This COVID-19 pandemic forced South African schools to go into emergency lockdown that confront kids and their parents to cling onto the scary tidbits of information and become anxious. Anxiety is a natural human response to any situation that presents the person with a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.



Child psychologists warn that our brains and the brains of kids are wired to be Velcro to the negative and Teflon to the positive — it's called the negativity bias and exists as nature's way to keep us safe. So, we are often overwhelmed by the negative and miss the vital truths that facts present.

This leads us to catastrophize things by inflating the possible consequences as an impact. Anxiety amid the coronavirus pandemic must be a friendly-partner that ensure felt safety and also empower kids and parents to take control of their situations.



Here are some Tips to calm some of the fears during COVID-19 lockdown:

1. **Validate your children's feelings** by allowing them to feel scared. Actively listen to them with empathy. Especially **pre-school kids** need this affirmation. You can say something like, "It's really scary to hear of all the people becoming sick and some of them even dying. I can absolutely imagine how this makes you feel and the thoughts you might be having. All of this is very normal for kids to feel and you are allowed to feel that. Remember, I love you and I am here for you."





Primary school kids are privy to much more information due to social media and chat groups that ensure contact with their peers. The constant news reports on the various platforms bombard them with overload-information. As parents we must get in front of this and be the main source in terms of information sharing about COVID-19. As a parent you must be informed to filter the facts from the emotional deposits.

Adolescents would require reassurance and emotional control. This presents as an opportunity to work with kids to build news and media literacy skills to separate fact from fiction. This would empower greater understanding towards building a “Teflon brain” that allows the teenager to discern the facts and the safety measures. Such control allows be lessened anxiety.

2. **Listen to your kids.** By listening you allow them to be part of your story and you are part of theirs. I could prevent them from feeling isolated amid the COVID-19 crisis. It allows them to rid themselves of the fears that might haunt them. This gives the adult opportunity to intervene and ensure felt safety.

3. **Create special moments for your child.** Shower your child with love and your undivided attention in special time that you ‘structure’. This relationship bond allows for calm and a sense of control. The familiar activity that you are engaging in gives the kids the confidence to normalize amid the uncertainty.

4. **Family play and laughing together** is essential. School lockdown can become extremely frustration after a couple of weeks. The natural structure of being at home every day can be ‘depressing’. It almost forces you into withdrawal. Family games that require interaction and prompting fun and laughter will raise the spirits in the home.

5. **Set limits on behaviour.** When we set limits, we can say ‘no’ with love. Anxiety often prompts irrational behaviour that can be construed as aberrant. By setting limits, you allow you child to release the ‘wrong’ behaviour within the safe structure of felt safety and correction.

6. **Ensure that you as parent take time for yourself.** This is necessary to ensure your own emotional sanity. Allow safe outlets for yourself by doing the things that relax you. Feel nurtured by talking to friends and family. Take you comfort breaks by reading for pleasure, listening to music or watch your favourite movie. This is necessary for you to be fully present for your kids.

“**Felt safety** as defined by Dr. **Purvis** is, “when you arrange the environment and adjust your behavior so your children can feel in a profound and basic way that they are truly **safe** in their home with you.”

SPECIALISED SUPPORT SERVICES

Specialised Support Services are rendered to address barriers to learning and development at schools and to learners who are usually referred via School-based Support Teams (SBSTs). These services may include learning, social work, psychological, therapeutic and behaviour support.

- Facilitating specialised psycho-social-development services (e.g. HIV services and victim-empowerment programmes).
- Managing disaster-relief matters in conjunction with district offices, municipalities and other stakeholders.
- Training staff to provide various developmental social services.
- Ensuring that developmental social services and projects receive the necessary professional and technical support



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