

Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

Growing together through natural disasters - Pandemic

Information and activity sheet for families with babies and young children

The current pandemic is disrupting family life across the globe. It can be very hard for babies and young children to understand what's going on, and why it's taking so long to get back to normal. Some children have been ill themselves. Some have lost family members. Many children have experienced quarantine, extended lockdowns and restrictions on everyday activities. Parents often struggle to explain to little ones why they can't see their grandparents or play with their friends, and why birthday parties and other celebrations keep being cancelled.

Anything that creates stress for the family can make babies and young children feel unsafe.

People of all ages, from infants to adults, may be experiencing thoughts, feelings, physical reactions or behaviours at this time that are intense, confusing and frightening.

Little people manage their feelings through their relationships with parents and other caring adults. It's important to look after your own emotional wellbeing so you can stay calm and support your child.

If your child doesn't seem to 'be themselves', think about what their behaviour may be telling you. They may need more reassurance and connection with you. Sometimes, they might need more support from their teacher or educator, your doctor or child health nurse, or another expert professional.

In times of stress, babies and young children may

- become worried, but may not have the words to tell you
- be clingy or whiny, cry, seem more helpless or emotional
- have tantrums or become aggressive
- eat less or more than usual
- have trouble sleeping, have nightmares, or seem more tired than usual
- want to be closer to their parents or carers, needing more cuddles.

Parents and carers can

- read the story over the page with your child and talk about the pictures
- name your child's feelings, for example, 'You seem to be feeling sad'
- spend time each day having fun with your child, for example blowing bubbles, playing games, reading stories
- make sure your child's favourite toy or blanket is always handy for comfort.

- answer questions honestly in language your child can understand, but don't give more information than they need
- maintain regular routines like meal-times, bath-time, getting up time
- limit your child's exposure to media about the pandemic (TV, radio, newspapers, online)
- keep adult conversations about the pandemic away from babies and young children.

Let others help

- talk with your child's other carers, such as kindy teachers, about how your child is feeling
- stay in contact with friends, family and other parents by video-chat and phone if not in person
- do things that are good for you, to look after yourself physically, socially and emotionally.

If you or your family are finding it difficult to cope, professional help is available.



Where to get help

- Your doctor or child health nurse
- 1300HEALTH 13 43 25 84
- Lifeline (24hr) 131 114
- beyond blue info line 1300 224 636



Birdie and the Virus



One day Mr Frog felt yucky. His nose was runny. He had a cough. 'I think I'm sick,' croaked Mr Frog.



Doctor Grace came along. She said, 'Birdie, I know you feel sad and worried. But we will help Mr Frog and everyone else feel better.' Doctor Grace gave Mr Frog a mask to wear. Everyone had to wash their hands.



Doctor Grace checked for the virus inside Birdie's nose, to see if she might get sick too. The little stick felt strange inside Birdie's nose, but it wasn't there long.



Birdie didn't get sick. Soon Mr Frog felt better, and so did everyone else.



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Read the full version of Birdie and the Virus, watch the animation, play games and get more information on the Birdie's Tree website. Browse 'Birdie's Tree'

Birdie's Tree - Growing together through natural disasters | CHQ (health.qld.gov.au)

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