

Children and Young People of Primary School Age



Navigating, Growing and Thriving Through COVID-19 Uncertainty

Through the uncertainty associated with COVID-19, children of primary school age require parents, teachers and support figures to bring ongoing focus or intent to the building blocks of 'stability', 'connections in community' and 'mindset of growth' through their caregiving and supporting adult roles. This factsheet articulates 'how' this can be actioned through key scripts and strategies.

WHAT? What's Happening?

- Children of primary school age may express a variety of experiences related to COVID-19. Children of this age present with naturally higher levels of background anxiety, compared to older children. This may be expressed (or magnified) at this time through behaviours such as clinginess, avoidance, aggression, non-compliance, withdrawal and physical symptoms (e.g., sleep disturbances, reporting they are feeling sick, butterflies in stomach).
- Anxiety and uncertainty can easily overwhelm children of this age (notably 5 to 10 year olds) whose thinking and coping skills are underdeveloped.
- Primary school children need adult figures to provide them reassurance, comfort and care during periods of heightened stress and uncertainty.
- Parents, teachers and support figures who bring ongoing focus and intent to building: (1) stability, (2) connections in community and (3) a mindset of growth are in the best position to support children to navigate, grow and build resilience through this period.

WHAT?

Building Blocks
of Growth Intent

HOW? scripts and strategies

Stability

In times of uncertainty, it is important that parents, teachers and support figures bring an intent to foster '**stability**' in and around the children and young people they are supporting. In action this includes:

- **Routine** - Support the implementation of a predictable daily home and teaching routine, that includes structure and purpose, healthy eating and sleep patterns, showering and dressing, and balancing screen time and movement time, inside and outside time, and adult-child connection versus solo time.
- **Rituals For Normality** - Implement rituals that bring a sense of 'normality' (e.g., Friday take-away, morning maths). Maintain consistent caregiving and teaching responses. Do not make big changes in how you manage children's behaviour.
- **Consistent Messages** - Have a plan for communication between both parents in terms of the information children should receive. Focus on facts, and use videos, books and resources to help you (see - www.lblearninghub.org/navigating-uncertainty).
- **Circle of Concern** - Engage children in the development of a daily routine, and provide opportunities and activities that provide them 'choice' or a level of control within the day. Ask for child input into family decisions. Engage in play that is led by children.
- **Grounding Points** - Encourage and name healthy activities and experiences that 'ground' everyone. Have a shared and common language of being 'grounded' (e.g., 'being in zone', 'focused', 'present', 'in control'), and role model and implement grounding strategies side-by-side with children. Have identified 'safe spaces', at home and school, where people can go (or be supported) to ground self. Provide space and permission for all family members to have some alone time.
- **Intentional Media Engagement** - Supervise, implement boundaries and monitor media engagement, and provide coaching and support for children to critically assess the messages they are receiving. Role model healthy and intentional media use.
- **Self-Care** - Develop a family or classroom 'Self-Care' or 'Keeping Us Strong' plan. Regularly talk out loud about the ways you are keeping everyone safe and caring for them during this period. Explore the words 'self-care' through curious conversations and reflective learning activities. Seek out professional input for children presenting with significant psychological or behavioural instability.

Connections in Community

In times of uncertainty, it is important that parents, teachers and support figures bring an intent to foster '**connections in community**' for children and young people. In action this includes:

- **Keeping Connected Plan** - Work side-by-side with children to map and identify their key connections, friends and supports. Develop a plan to develop positive and meaningful connections with these members. Remember that 'connection' can be both physical (phone) and psychological ('in our thoughts', positive reflection).
- **New Rituals** - Explore and taste test new rituals that foster fun and positive connection points between family members or within the face-to-face or virtual classroom (e.g., Try It Tuesdays, Fun Friday, Monopoly Mondays, weekend inside house camping).
- **Negotiated Connection Points** - Be available in your support, and negotiate a routine for ongoing connection or communication points that you will enact consistently (e.g., special 'parent-child time' each night, having a 'classroom check-in'). Ensure that your communication does not just become transactional or correctional in nature (e.g., 'have you done your homework?'), but includes 'connection' features ('how are you?').
- **Balanced Conversations** - Make yourself available for 'COVID-19 conversations' that focus on fact and explanations, and ensuring these are balanced and integrated within other 'life conversations' that bring focus to play, fun and future.
- **Suite of Connection Tools** - Work to provide access to a suite of connection tools, (phone, tele-conferencing - as matched to children's developmental age). Implement up-front boundaries, coach its safe and healthy use, and schedule regular reviews.
- **Respond Rather Than React** - Bring ongoing focus to remaining grounded and present in your support - where you respond rather than react - and focus on 'connection before correction' as the foundational pillars. Ensure you don't unintentionally reject nor abandon children you are supporting at this time. Develop your own self-care plan, bring focus to your grounding points and conduct proactive debriefs with others.

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Mindset of Growth

In times of uncertainty, it is important that parents, teachers and support figures bring an intent to foster a 'mindset of growth' for children and young people. In action this includes:

- **Side-By-Side Support With Shared Hope** - Create space and time away from caregiving and teaching tasks to validate or acknowledge that anxiety, ups and downs, and uncertainty are normal during times of significant change (e.g., individual or classroom 'check-ins'). Invite curious reflections about how children are experiencing their world ('I wonder how you feeling about the changes around you?'). Focus on a dialogue of shared hope: 'we are in this together - we will get through this together'.
- **Forward Intentions** - Invite conversations about everyone's hopes and dreams for the future, including identifying a meaningful shared activity that will be undertaken together at the end of the transition (e.g., school excursion, going to a restaurant). Implement a family or classroom project that can be done over a period of time and will provide a positive legacy for future (e.g., vegetable garden, online journal). Support children to master new skills (e.g., bike riding, musical instrument, reading).
- **Realistic Expectations** - Support children to set realistic expectations or goals for each day – and allowing some grace when things don't go to plan. Reward small achievements every day. Monitor and manage your own expectations.
- **Balanced Thinking** - Model balanced thinking, where negative and positive thinking are seen side-by-side, including bringing visibility to the 'good news stories' and gently challenging doom and gloom, catastrophising or worse case scenario thinking. Explore 'what is balanced thinking' through reflective discussions or learning activities.
- **Growth Opportunities** - Communicate that everyone thinks differently or constructs different meanings or stories about challenging or uncertain times. Role model and talk out loud about how you look for growth opportunities, or look for the life learnings, to try to make sense of things outside of your control.
- **Connecting to Nature** - encourage and provide opportunities to connect with nature (e.g., watering plants, growing seedlings, nature walk) that include reflections on how everything is adapting and growing to changing circumstances.

Who is LBI Foundation?

Life Buoyancy Institute Foundation is a Public Benevolent Institution dedicated to building the mental health and wellbeing of Australians in need by empowering and growing local community capacity.

We support individuals, teams and communities integrate the science of wellbeing, resilience, trauma-informed practice and growth with their local wisdom and knowledge to make a difference within their community.

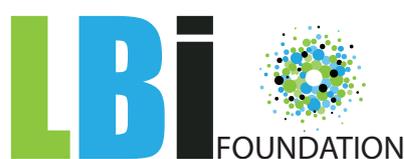
We offer a suite of services that draws upon the IMPACT Program and the What-What-How® method to enable parents, teachers, schools, agencies, programs, supporting adults and practitioners to implement intentional, personalised and practical responses that:

- Respond (rather than react) to the unique growth needs of individual and community
- Build individual and collective capacity for whole-of-life outcomes

We have a growing network of IMPACT Coaches. These are community members who are trained, accredited and supported to build the capacity of their communities across education (primary, secondary, alternative and adult), foster care, child protection, residential care, mental health, disability, homelessness, family preservation and other community service settings.



IMPACT



www.lbi.org.au

The content on this factsheet was reviewed in consultation with members of LBI Foundation's 'Science to Practice' Group (see www.lbi.org.au/science-to-practice-group).

These are IMPACT Coaches and key community representatives who are embedded within local schools and agencies who support the translation of best-practice science to local context. The content of this factsheet is mapped to an explainer video on LBI Foundation's online training and resource platform:

www.lblearninghub.org/navigating-uncertainty.

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