



Supporting your children and adolescents during home-based isolation

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SAFETY

This is the main priority. Your children need to be provided for and reassured.

- Is the home secure? Does your child have a space to call their own?
- Make sure your children are aware of any safety limits at home and remind them of these as situations arise and change.
- Do you have emergency information at hand and if appropriate are your children aware of what to do if they have a serious concern or an emergency?
- It is common for adolescents in this developmental stage to withdraw from their parents. Respectfully discuss with them the importance of their safety and health and any necessary changes that may need to be implemented. Try and keep things as normal as possible and allow for independence and freedom of choice when appropriate.
- Are the vital needs of your family being met? Shelter, food, water, medical needs, mental and physical health, exercise, connection and creativity?
- Monitor your child's wellbeing and mental health. Take action if concerned. Encourage them to talk with you but also make them aware of online and phone-based support lines if they need to seek support independently.
- Reassure your children that these adjustments are different, but okay. Be truthful, but clear that as their parent/caregiver it is your job to take care of things and you are up for the job!
- Be aware of your own reactions and responses as a caregiver.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, take some time-out. Reach out to your partner, friends, family and/or seek support from professionals.

SOOTHE

Look at your home environment with a different lens:

Is it a calming place to be?

- Is the house clean and mostly organised or is there clutter and mess everywhere?
- Encourage your children to reorganise their spaces, set up a space for quiet reflection / reading / napping. A space for schoolwork. A space for creative play. A space for togetherness as a family.
- Does it feel like a home? Is there adjustable lighting, a suitable temperature, soft furnishings, plants. Does it have life? Is it overly sterile or does it feel cosy, a place you would like to be? A place you can feel secure and relaxed in?
- Don't discount the importance of family pets, encourage your children to care for them and connect with them more than they may have been doing previously.

- Create a ritual at night of herbal tea, warm milk. Instigate a story or a chat before bed. Develop 'good-night' connection, especially with your adolescents.
- Good quality sleep needs to be prioritised. Encourage ALL technology to be stored and charged in a communal area at a set time each evening. Times may differ depending on the age and needs of the family.
- Be conscious of how you are accessing your information and the impact this may have on your child. Is the TV news on constantly? Try and be mindful of how and when you need to be updated, but allow everyone, especially children to switch-off from outside news sources.
- Use social stories to help younger children understand what is occurring and why.

SPACE

Discuss as a family the importance of having space and how this will be encouraged and respected when required.

- Work on finding a balance between connecting and allowing for your children to have their own autonomy and space when needed.

- Be respectful of each other's space. Knock before entering bedrooms, seek permission to use each other's personal things.
- Have a family meeting once a week to discuss any concerns, and changes that your family may need to address together.

SCHEDULING

When in isolation a weekly schedule is vital to assist in the reduction of anxiety and stress. Collaboratively work with your children to develop their Monday to Friday routine. Keep it as regular as possible.

- Use their school weekly timetable as a guide and get creative together in how classes or activities can be replicated in the home environment.
- Set up opportunities online with your child's friends, fellow students. This could be a daily quiz, reading to each other a creative writing response or an art class.
- Use the web as a source of learning tools, how to videos such as an indoor exercise class or how to learn a new skill or talent.
- Allow for weekend to be more relaxed and an opportunity to be together as a family, connect in with friends and reduced stress.

Brainstorm as a family creative ways of how to maintain connection with others when in isolation.

SOCIAL

Allow your children to connect in with their friends via social media platforms, especially visual ones.

- Encourage a video chat, watching your favourite show while Face Timing with a friend.
- Family movie and game nights. Allow family members to take turns in running the night. Choosing the game, preparing a snack and being the 'host'.
- Use this as an opportunity for your children to educate you on how they use social media platforms. You might want to set up a family Instagram account and post a daily photo, make a silly family Tik Tok.
- Be more vigilant around online bullying. Make sure you children are safe online and know what to do if something occurs. Discuss and remind the importance of responsible use of technology.
- Aim for 'screen free' time each day for all family members.

STRENGTHS

As a family talk about your individual strengths.

What is each member of the family good at? How their strengths might be used to support one another, contribute to the family from a practical and psychological perspective. Who is the encourager of the family? Who is the 'truth teller'? Who likes to brush the cat? Who likes to create new recipes?

SHARE

Helping others and encouraging random acts of kindness, can allow your child to focus beyond their own current circumstances and develop empathy. It lowers anxiety and stress and increases feelings of hope, connection and well-being.

- Draw and/or write letters of introduction, poems, funny jokes, a weekly 'Joe's family update' and pop them in neighbours letterboxes or send to friends and family.
- Plant herbs in small pots and gift to people.
- Cook or make something for a neighbour who may be elderly or lonely and drop it at their door.
- Write 'thank-you' cards for healthcare workers, teachers, shopkeepers, truck-drivers.

Remember to be gentle and patient with yourself as a caregiver of young people. Don't expect yourself to be the perfect person as you navigate this. Embrace the challenge but also accept that some moments will be easier and more successful than others. You've got this!

- Sophie

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Sophie Lea's background is in education as a primary, secondary and specialist education educator. She has worked as a school counsellor both in Australia and internationally in specialist settings and independent schools. She has her own private practice – Courageous Conversations in Melbourne - specialising in family and youth counselling and clinical supervision for therapists in Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

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