



Martin James  
FOUNDATION



# COVID 19 CRISIS: TALKING WITH AND LISTENING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN ALTERNATIVE CARE

**This practice briefing aims to support carers and practitioners to talk and listen to children and young people in alternative care about Covid-19.**

The practice briefing includes top tips for communicating with children and young people and also includes links to a wide range of available resources.

The Covid-19 outbreak has resulted in unprecedented changes to peoples' daily lives across the globe. In many countries social distancing policies have had a major impact on children and young people. Staying at home has replaced the structured routines of school and leisure activities. For some children they may like being at home and having time away from school! However, for some these disruptions may significantly impact a child's sense of stability and wellbeing. A recent **SURVEY UNDERTAKEN BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY** found that many children were afraid about the impact of Covid-19. However, the majority are showing resilience, remaining positive and they 'are not worrying excessively'.

[CLICK HERE](#) ▶ to read the full survey.

The covid-19 crisis is exposing many children and young people to topics that they may find scary and cause them anxiety. For example, they may be concerned about people they know becoming unwell or even dying from the virus. Although it is important to communicate and be honest, it is also vital to listen to children about their concerns to gain their understanding of the situation in order to offer reassurance, which will help to lessen any fears and anxieties.

For children and young people growing up in alternative care who may have experienced difficulties and trauma in their early lives, the uncertainty of Covid-19 may be particularly challenging. To help them cope with this it is important that carers and social workers listen to their concerns and offer support and reassurance. Due to social distancing they may also have had direct contact with their friends and relatives cancelled. This could result in them worrying about people important to them, so it is vital that creative, yet safe, indirect contact is supported.

Dr Justin Rogers and Ian Thomas,  
**The Martin James Foundation.**

## 8 TOP TIPS

FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19

### #1

A good starting point is to **listen and ascertain the children's understanding** of Covid-19. Try to find out what they already know, and what may be worrying them.

### #2

**Engage in open conversations** providing them with truthful information about the virus at a level they understand. There are a wide range of online resources below that are aimed at different age ranges.

### #3

It's important when communicating with children and young people to **follow their lead and take it at their pace**, avoid an overwhelming one-off conversation covering every aspect of life in a global pandemic in one go.

### #4

**Stay positive** for children to convey a message of reassurance and safety.

### #5

**It's ok not to know the answers**, you can say you will find out or if something is uncertain then its ok to say so.

### #6

Extra thought and care should be considered when **communicating with children with disabilities**. It is important that their concerns are heard, and they are provided with relevant information in accessible formats.

### #7

**Think about the endings** of any conversation, bring things back to the positives and do something fun afterwards.

### #8

**Create space for ongoing dialogue** and communication, check back in and be open to answer questions after children have time to reflect.



## USEFUL RESOURCES

Thankfully, there are lots of organisations that have worked quickly to develop and share resources and tools. Some of these resources are aimed at parents but are useful for carers and practitioners to assist in their communication with children and young people.

### INFORMATION AND ADVICE USEFUL FOR PARENTS, CARERS AND PRACTITIONERS

- The **UK Government** have produced guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
- **UNICEF** have created a video offering advice and guidance to parents and carers when explaining Covid-19 to children and young people.
- **The Centre for Excellence** for Child and Family Welfare have produced a Staying at Home Toolkit for Foster Carers is a comprehensive guide to foster caring during the Covid-19 crisis.

- **Teenagers** who are required to stay in isolation may find it particularly difficult, especially if they are usually independent spending their time away from the home with friends etc. Dr Christine Carter, offers information in the article 'How to help Teens in Shelter'.
- **World Health organisation** have issued 'guidance on considerations when supporting people with disabilities during Covid-19'.
- **Knowing where to begin** and 'how to talk to children about Covid-19' can seem like a daunting prospect. Anxiety UK have offered some helpful guidance for parents, carers and practitioners.
- **Self-care for parents and carers in the of Covid-19** is an important aspect of positive parenting. The Child Mind Institute have developed guidance on 'Parent prioritising their own self-care', which inevitably has a positive impact on the children they care for.
- **COVIDparenting.com** is a great initiative from the World Health Organisation, which includes a range of online resources. Resources can be accessed in 60 languages and include an array of tips and activities for all age groups.
- **The Pandemic Toolkit for Parents** offers '8 expert tips to help families stay regulated'. Dr Bruce Perry, an expert neuroscientist who studies attachment, offers insights from his research on handling stress and staying self-regulated.
- **Community Care** have written an article that offers a 'How to support your emotional resilience and wellbeing during the pandemic'. This article is aimed at practitioners but could easily be adopted by parents and carers who are caring for children and young people.
- A range of organisations are running **webinars for training and information sharing** and peer support. For example, Be Strong Families in the USA are running daily webinars in English and Spanish that promote discussions on trauma informed responses to Covid-19.

# TOOLS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## STORY TIME AND CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Lots of children enjoy story time and children's books can be a helpful way to start conversations but also explain Covid-19 in an age appropriate way.

- Axel Scheffler the illustrator of the Gruffalo has produced an **illustrated book explaining Coronavirus** (Suitable for ages 5-9 years).
- Mindheart have published a short book aimed at children under seven about **Supporting and Reassuring Children around the World** (in English, Spanish, Italian, French, Polish, and numerous other languages).
- A **'Just for kids' Comic Book** exploring the coronavirus is a child-focused resource can be printed for children to read and explore with their parents.
- **"My Hero is You, how kids can fight Covid-19"** is a new story book to help children understand Covid-19 produced in collaboration of over 50 humanitarian organisations. There is also a public reading by Howard Donald from Take That on YouTube!.

## ALTERNATIVE CARE RESOURCES

Key organisations for alternative care that have published a range of covid-19 resources for children and young people in alternative care.

- **The Better Care Network** webpage is a helpful source of knowledge and practice for anyone working with issues related to children and alternative care.
- **Corom BAAF** (Adoption & Fostering Academy) Supporting agencies and professionals who work with children and young people.
- **FosterTalk** was established to support the unique needs of families who foster. They offer fostering advice, practice guidance, training and independent support for both foster carers and fostering services alike.
- **Who Cares? Scotland** is a national advocacy organisation, working with care experienced young people and care leavers across Scotland

This practice briefing was created by the team at the **Martin James Foundation**, the Foundation uses over 30 years' experience in foster care to change the lives of children around the world. We believe that every child has the right to grow up in a safe and loving home.



## CARTOONS AND YOUTUBE VIDEOS

There are a number of Cartoons and YouTube videos aimed at children that relate to Covid-19.

- Eurac Research have developed an animation explaining **'why children should stay at home during the coronavirus outbreak'**.
- CBC Kids News have developed a film explaining **'what social distancing'** and why it is important to follow the guidance.
- The Saskatchewan Health Authority have made a fun cartoon highlighting the importance of **'washing hands!'**
- CREATE Foundation and Suitcase Murphy have created the first in a series of short animations about COVID-19 **targeted at children in care.**
- **Cosmic Kids Yoga** offers stories and educational experiences through the method of Yoga-For Kids!

- **Become.** Is a charity for children in care and young adult care leavers.
- **CREATE Foundation Australia** offer advocacy services with a focus on creating a better life for children and young people in care.
- **Family Rights Group** is a charity in England and Wales who works with families whose children are at risk of, or in care.
- **International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO)** is an international network dedicated solely to the promotion and support of quality foster care across the world.
- **CELCIS:** The Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow.
- **EuroChild** advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policy-making.



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