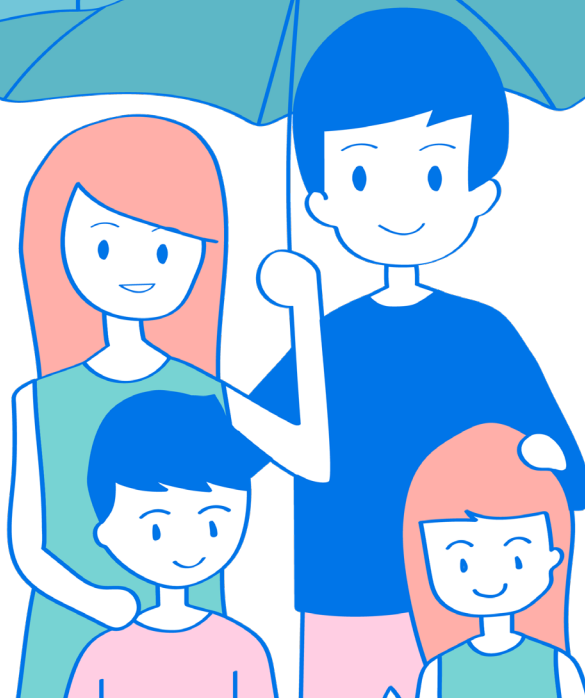


BRAVING THE STORM TOGETHER

SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN EMOTIONALLY THROUGH COVID-19



As the COVID-19 pandemic rages, we fear what might happen to ourselves and our loved ones. Children are having these big feelings too. What if my father or mother gets the virus? What if I pass the virus to my family? What if somebody in my family dies?

These are some of the worries told to us by children who chatted with Tinkle Friend, a helpline and online chat service for children operated by the Singapore Children's Society.

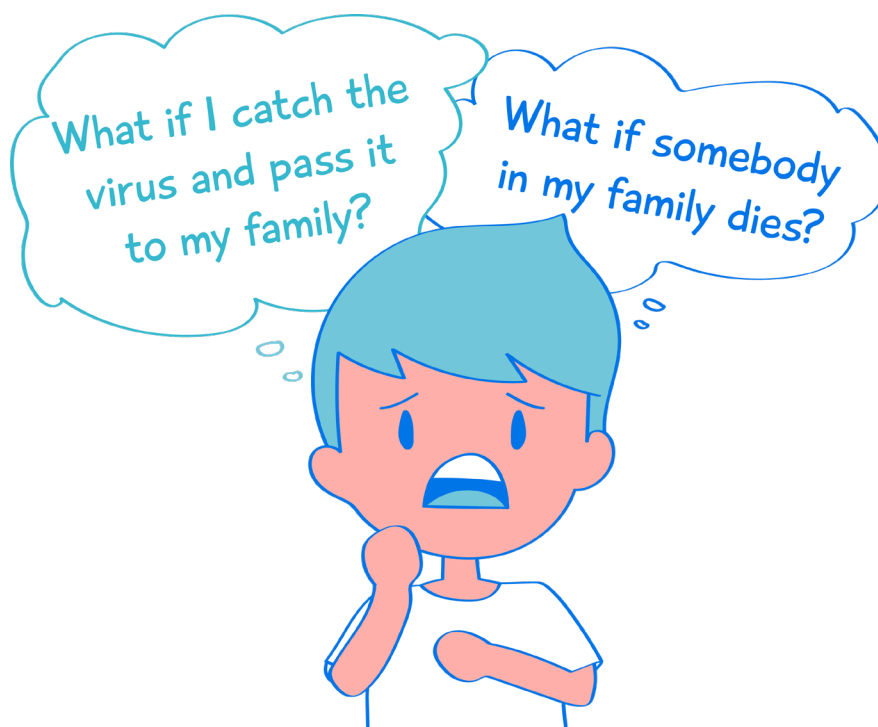
Some children themselves were quarantined and called in to Tinkle Friend because they felt upset or bored. Others felt lonely because they could not see their friends who were given Leave of Absence or Stay Home Notices.

Within a short span of time, children's worlds seemed to have shrunk rapidly. As schools close for a month, most children have to do home-based learning. Sporting facilities and even playgrounds are out of bounds too. Children cannot go out as freely as before.

What might your child be experiencing now? How does he or she feel?

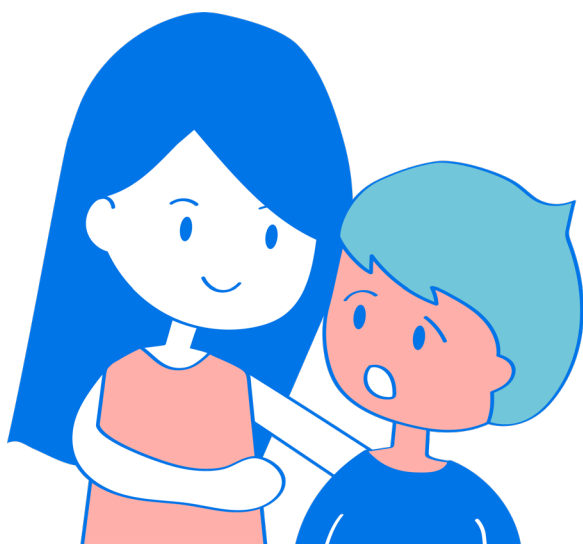
We share some of the common emotions that children are feeling, and hope that parents and caregivers can facilitate deeper conversations and support children to rise above this storm.

- [When children express their fears and worries...](#)
- [When children feel unsettled by the rapid changes...](#)
- [When children feel sad or angry...](#)
- [When children feel lonely and bored...](#)

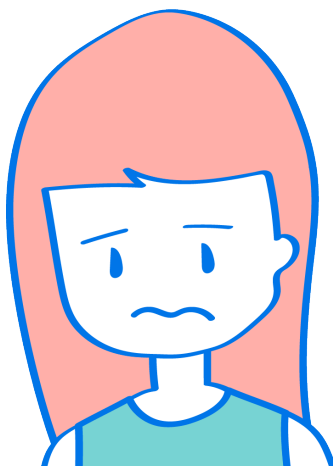


When children express their fears and worries...

- **Acknowledge their worries.** Sometimes it helps to be vulnerable and let them know that you're scared too. However, we can still be strong and courageous by doing our part to fight the virus together.
- **Provide a listening ear.** Children could be making remarks on the number of newly infected cases in Singapore or concerns about home-based learning. Invite them to talk about what they have heard and what they are most worried about. They could be worried that a family member might get infected from the virus and die. They could also be anxious about not being able to do well in major examinations due to school disruption.

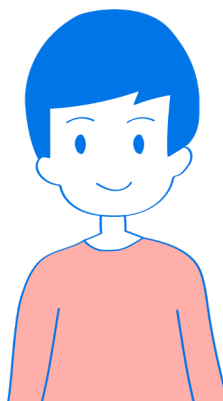


- **Have open and honest discussions and clarify any misconceptions.** While we want to provide hope and reassurance, children may still be worried about the possibility of infection and dying. This is especially real for children whose family members are healthcare workers. Such conversations may be challenging, but they are necessary during this time.
- **Help children regain a sense of control.** For instance, we can avoid coming into close contact with others to reduce the risk of infection. Use familiar examples such as when children have chicken pox and stay at home to avoid passing it to their friends. Turn their worries into constructive ways to cope.



When children feel unsettled by the rapid changes...

- Some children might be surprisingly flexible at adjusting to changes. Regardless of their level of ease, **affirm them for their efforts in responding to changes**. Ask them whether it was easy to adjust to home-based learning? What was one difficult change for them?



Is it easy to adjust to home-based learning?

What's difficult for you during this period?

What can I help you with?

- **Provide support and suggestions** for children to overcome their difficulties. If they already have solutions in mind, support and encourage them along the way.
- **Review, re-imagine and re-create** home life for children, with children. Retain regular timings for activities such as meals, baths and naps as much as possible. This gives a sense of stability and predictability. Invite children to co-create this new routine. Empower them with choices on how they want to make the home a place of fun and learning.
- **Redirect children to focus on the present**. Take a moment to express love and appreciation for family members. Take on meaningful projects such as making a card or calling the person whom they are worried about.



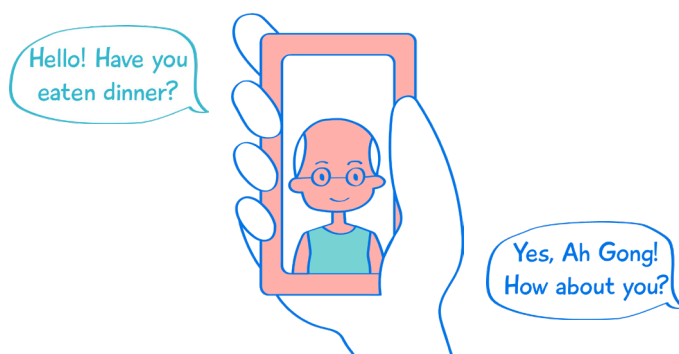
When children feel sad or angry...

- **Acknowledge these feelings and guide children to find ways to cope**. If a birthday celebration is cancelled, they could call their friends or meet them online. Remind children to count their blessings as this means that they still have friends, phones or computers, and Wi-Fi.
- **Observe for signs of bitterness and blame**, especially if it might be directed towards a particular group of people. There is a thin line between wanting to stay safe and discrimination.
- **Encourage children to let go of these negativities**. Have them recognise that this global pandemic is affecting lives worldwide. We have to accept this and try as much as we can to live life as usual.



When children feel lonely and bored...

- **Maintain connections.** This is a time when the whole family is likely to be at home at the same time. Parents might be working from home and older siblings have reduced social gatherings. This is an opportune period for intentional family bonding through eating, chatting, playing or watching television together. Show your child that he or she can still see and talk to family members and friends through phone and video calls.
- For children whose parents are working for essential service providers, they may not see their parents as much. **Find small yet significant ways to connect**, such as writing notes and messages for the child to hold on to while the parent is away.
- Every time your child wishes he or she could do an activity that is not possible now, **write it down on paper and fill a box with these notes**. When things go back to normal, these are the activities to start on!
- Parents and caregivers could **engage children in meaningful projects**. You can find such community initiatives at www.sgunitied.gov.sg.



SELF-CARE FOR CAREGIVERS

These are days of heightened anxiety. As a parent, you might be making tough decisions on how best to integrate health recommendations while maintaining a sense of normalcy for the family. Things can be stressful and overwhelming. Therefore, it is essential to first attend to your own needs and regularly top up your emotional bank.

Accept that we are in a difficult and uncertain period and we do not have all the answers to the future. With this acceptance, we would not be overloaded with the distress that uncertainty creates. This gives us more emotional bandwidth to be attuned and to be a safe space to contain our children's feelings.

Limit your sources of information to a few trusted ones. It feels like COVID-19 is all anyone wants to talk about, but for those who tend to be more anxious, this can be overwhelming. Allocate times to check news and updates. Set a buffer time before bedtime to avoid reading news to protect your mind and gain healthy sleep.

Seek counsel and support. Do you feel your stress and worries escalating? Minimising or ignoring these feelings will not make them go away. Look for people who are a source of counsel and support for you. Do a quick video call or text someone. There are people who care for you and want the best for you.

Recharge yourself. You are figuring out how to cope with the multiple changes as much as your child. It is okay to take time to settle yourself and recalibrate. You could also find pockets of time such as during children's nap time to rest, reflect and rejuvenate.

