



**HOW TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS
DURING DISASTER
(In response to Covid-19)**

Parents' Guide

Association for Early Childhood Education and Development

Crisis precipitated by natural or man-made disasters, at times family crisis, creates challenges in dealing with the situation. COVID 19 and the subsequent lock-down is a new and challenging situation for us in many ways.

During crises, our mind might be filled with concerns and worries about the health of our loved ones, managing work and family, and possible outcomes of the current situation. Just like us, our children too might find it hard to understand what might be happening and may have many thoughts and questions about the present situation. They too may have many disturbing thoughts which they might sometimes share with us or sometimes find hard to express.



RECOGNIZING AND EXPRESSING OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Let us begin by acknowledging that this is a new and unprecedented situation and is not something any of us were prepared to handle. It requires us to adjust and change many things we were doing regularly in the past.

Let us recognize our own thoughts, which could be full of worries in response to the changing scenario.

If there are persistent worries they could put us in negative moods. Such a mood state, if it is ongoing and interferes with focusing on and completing our tasks, can be called as a state of anxiety. We do not see any solution or hope immediately and it keeps us in a state of worry.

We or our children could also feel sad at this time due to the change of routine and not being able to access our friends and family. We may not feel like doing anything - not eating, not playing, not talking to anybody! Some of us, even children, may want to talk about the situation continuously.

In these times, it becomes important for us to remember, that our thoughts could also be full of solutions and may be able to help us find ways of handling our feelings by recognising them. Positive solutions could change our mood and might help us accomplish our goals. So, pat your back!

What can be done?

- ♥ **Recognise the disturbing feelings and thoughts** – This is the first step. Pause, and ask yourself what you are feeling and acknowledge what is going on in your mind – “Yes, I have these thoughts and feelings at the back of my mind!”
- ♥ **Take a deep breath to calm down** – Do whatever works for you! Pray, light a lamp, a candle; lie down and relax (do Shavasana), use relaxation techniques by closing your eyes and visualising a scene that has calmed you or made you most relaxed in the past.
- ♥ **Think of past situations where you successfully solved the problem**, or by not being worried about it, or due to the passage of time, things changed. Things change and sometimes waiting a bit works – “This Too Shall Pass”!
- ♥ **If need be, get scientific information about the problem** (like the current disaster). Go only to a proper source – Government source is the best See www.MoFW.gov.in
- ♥ **Take actions to be safe** – washing hands, being hygienic, staying safe/indoors, and educating children about hygiene and safety.

- ♥ If worrying prevails, **talk to people who have a positive outlook.**
- ♥ **Keep to the routines** – it helps us and children!
- ♥ If worrying continues, **talk to a counsellor** – At this time, there are many helplines providing psychosocial support. Reach out and ask your questions. iCall numbers: 9920241248, 8369799513 & 9372048501; Indian Association of Clinical Psychology, Indian Association of Professional Social Workers.

REACHING OUT TO OUR CHILDREN: TIPS ON CALMING CHILDREN

Paying attention to our children's moods and habits can tell us a lot about how they are doing at this time. We can pay attention to check if there is any change in moods, sleeping and eating patterns.

- ♥ If they are not eating with interest, not being excited about things that they liked to do, not interested in playing, not liking things like chocolates, etc. (things that were most sort after earlier).
- ♥ Lack of activities in children (during difficult times and also on a day-today basis) – not playing, not wanting to take a bath, lying around doing nothing, not taking suggestions – not wanting to read or listen to stories that they enjoyed earlier.

What can be done?

- ♥ They may be disturbed, and they may also need to make sense of what is happening and what you are telling and asking them to do! **Giving them time to self-regulate is helpful.**
- ♥ **Listen to them with your heart!** Children may not be able to articulate their fears, sadness and worry that would have cropped up! Child could be afraid, frustrated, sad and there could be negative thoughts.
- ♥ **Listen to them and their concerns.** Sit down with them, face-to-face and listen to them (not when you are doing something). Give them the feeling that what they are thinking, and feeling is important, and they will be listened to!
- ♥ **Maintain their routines as far as possible** – At this time when our children's regular routine might have changed, we can create a new way to plan the day that will keep them going. Ensuring some basic activities are happening at planned times, like taking a bath, prayers, cooking, playing, exercising, engaging in hobby activities (whatever is possible) helps children keep a rhythm. Most importantly, ensuring they get enough sleep and eat healthy. However, we would need to be mindful, so things are not forced! we could avoid regulating them into a very strict tight routine.
- ♥ While some children are having a **break in their academics**, others are having online learning. Support them with the academics, as being at home and completing school work can be challenging for them.
- ♥ **Some children may have had problems in their academics or with friends, or any other issue.** So, watch out and **see that the child is comfortable emotionally!**
- ♥ Telling the child in simple terms what the issue is. **Be honest! Answer should be at the level that the child understands.** Not to hide the facts, without causing fear in the child, explain and tell them what is required of them in the situation. **Do not bombard them with too much information or difficult and long explanations!** Answer the next question after making sure that they have absorbed what you have already told them!



- ♥ **Be positive**, that things will be better – this is important! This keeps the morale of the family high and the mood positive.
- ♥ There are many activities and hobbies for children – pick up old games, teach them the games you have played and told them about! Open up those old photo albums! Do things with them that you had put off for a long time. **Importantly help them to relax and play with them spontaneously!**
- ♥ **It will help to engage in drawing or other creative activities together with your child – using any medium that the child is comfortable in.** Doing things creatively can help children bond with parents and also help release emotions.

- ♥ Ensure children can engage in physical activities while at home. Joint exercises, dancing and other simple movement-based play can keep them active and energetic at this time.
- ♥ Manage screen time, and ensure children are not spending too much time on gadgets. This could sometimes keep them distracted from the worries they have and come in the way of expressing and facing the tasks at hand.
- ♥ Use positive messages and encouraging comments and appreciate them regularly for their contribution or work at home. At this time when there could be many frustrations and moods can change quickly, you can keep the tone positive and uplifting.
- ♥ It also brings on issues of keeping the interactions among siblings, cordial and meaningful! During crisis, each child may not be reacting to the situation in the same way! Therefore, there is a need to have a discussion on what each of us is feeling and thinking. Teach them to support each other by resolving differences, setting rules for play and other behaviour, for sharing and other activities.
- ♥ **If their difficult mood or thoughts continue, please seek out a counsellor** or keep their appointments if help was sought for the child.
- ♥ Family members are constantly together. It is most of the times a good situation to be in. Changed situation might create new problems or old ones can resurface. **It is important that issues are discussed and addressed (not in front of children). Children need to be shown the process of problem solving rather than not addressing the problems and saying that everything is fine!**



need if, in situations of domestic violence or persisting difficult behaviour, seek help from the police, non-governmental organisations and counsellors!

♥ It is important to consider the physical and emotional safety of the child. Seek help of relatives, neighbours, the police or the NGOs.

♥ **If there are any individuals who need extra support for their everyday living, make arrangements and seek help of organisations and counsellors.**

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References

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-anxiety/>

[Anxiety in children – NHS www.nhs.uk › Health A to Z › Mental health and wellbeing](https://www.nhs.uk/health-a-to-z/mental-health-and-wellbeing)

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/6-ways-parents-can-support-their-kids-through-coronavirus-covid-19>
<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

Other Resources:

[Dr. Shekhar P Seshadri. How to connect with children during ...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IltAX_t5ljE)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IltAX_t5ljE

<https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>

[WHO gives advice on handling mental health toll caused by ...](https://www.cnb.com/2020/03/10/who-gives-advice-on...)
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ogQjUP0XyU&feature=youtu.be>

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(Compiled from various sources*, by Rajani M Konantambigi¹)

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