

## HOW TO COPE AND LIVE CALMLY DURING THE TIME OF THE CORONAVIRUS

### INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus emergency has new characteristics which affect the physical as well as the psychological and emotional health of people, especially putting those most fragile at risk.

In addition to the idea of being exposed to a new and invisible risk such as Covid-19, which in itself is a factor that can cause anxiety, **quarantine changed our habits and the routines of our children.**

Being forced to stay at home with your family and being unable to go outside and engage in routine activities can be a stressful factor, especially if it lasts over a long period of time.

It is not to be overlooked that the loss of a schedule, of our organization of time and space, both physical and interpersonal, can destabilize children, especially when they struggle to give meaning to what is happening.

Thanks to the help of expert psychologists, Terre des Hommes would like to share some tips with their supporters on **how to find the right balance** for life in these difficult days.

### HOW TO ADDRESS THE EMERGENCY GOOD PRACTICES FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- One of the characteristics of the Covid-19 pandemic is related to the large amount of information always available. The first tip is to not expose your children to a constant flow of information: keeping yourself informed a couple times a day through ONLY authoritative sources can help you control anxiety

It is necessary to keep in mind that the situation is in progress, therefore it is not possible to know about all the advancements in research. It is therefore necessary to have **confidence in the work** that thousands of doctors and researchers are doing in Italy and around the world.

- Like adults, children and adolescents are exposed to a constant flow of information. For this reason, it is important to explain to your child what is happening, **using simple words** suitable for their age and level of maturity. It is also important to prevent your children from finding out it by themselves through TV, social networks and friends
- Especially for young children. It is important to avoid exposure to alarming tones and terrifying images
- Children can perceive the fears and anxieties of adults, so it is useful that, as a caregiver, you can be available to listen to them, trying to maintain a balance and calmness, for the benefit of you and your child
- It is normal for children to ask many questions about what is going on and talking to them helps them understand the situation
- Downplaying or hiding the truth from children is a behavior that confuses them and can amplify their fears, suggesting that something so serious is happening that it must be hidden or that it cannot be talked about. It is better to tell children the truth in the right manner, helping them to understand that if people follow good practices it is possible to avoid contagion
- Generic reassurances such as telling you to calm down and relax are not helpful to reduce fearful experiences. It is preferable to **reassure them** by saying that everyone, in the family and outside, is taking appropriate measures to protect themselves
- It is very important to keep children close to their caregivers. In the event of forced separation, for example if hospitalized or when self-isolation is necessary, it is useful, where possible, to guarantee telephone contact
- Even if you cannot meet, keep in touch with grandparents, relatives and friends through the phone or through the various applications available: feeling your loved ones close by is very important and creating opportunities to talk can reassure everyone that all is well

*Children may have heard in recent days that the virus primarily affects the elderly. Consider that your children may be experiencing a strong angst of losing their grandparents or parents themselves. It is often a fear that is difficult to put into words: be careful to catch the signs of unease.*

- It is possible that children, especially the youngest ones, express discomfort by showing irritability, need for attention, and agitation. They can become particularly whiny and, in some cases, pee in bed. It is useful to help them express their discomfort: playing or drawing are their tools for coping with stress. Spend more time with your children by engaging in these activities with them

- Due to the quarantine, children and adolescents can no longer rely on a clear organization of their time and space. As much as you can, it is important to keep some routines or creating new ones

Quarantine can be the moment to take advantage of the time that you don't normally have. Use it **creatively and positively**, making sure to use it to build relationships and not turn it into self-isolation through social networks or through the various devices that you have at home.

Drawing, telling stories, listening to music or doing arts and crafts are great opportunities for being together. Some activities such as **drawing or doing chores** are normalizing because they replicate what is done at school and can reassure your child, bringing him back to usual practices. For children and adolescents who need to tire the body, it is useful to do sport activities at home. You can use modelling pastes: kneading can relieve tension and cause a beneficial effect. Making bread or pizza can also work.

Our advice: many developmental psychologists created stories that are available online to explain coronavirus to children. Search and read them together with your child: fairy tales have always been a way **to fight fear!**

- Like adults, children and adolescents can adopt dysfunctional strategies to cope with anxiety or fight against boredom. You may notice, for example, the tendency to eat more or to have frequent snacks. If this happens, try to offer your child alternative strategies, showing that you are available and productive during the quarantine, as well as being open to listening and talking about what you are experiencing

It is important to **maintain personal care and hygiene routines**, even if you are at home. It is not a frivolous practice; it is a way to take care and dedicate the right attention to oneself. Drinking something hot, taking a bath, putting on a cream, are all ways to relax. If you and your child normally meditate, continue to do so: it is an effective practice against stress.

- Feeling anxious and stressed in this moment is normal. If you feel that you cannot manage your emotions or if you see your child is experiencing difficulties, do not hesitate to contact an expert who can help you cope with the situation, even online. Several international studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of remote psychological support

**To conclude, remember that each of us can do something to protect ourselves from the risk of contagion, starting from following good prevention practices as advised by experts and by following the rules indicated by the authorities.**