

Protecting children during COVID-19

Tips for social workers and social welfare practitioners

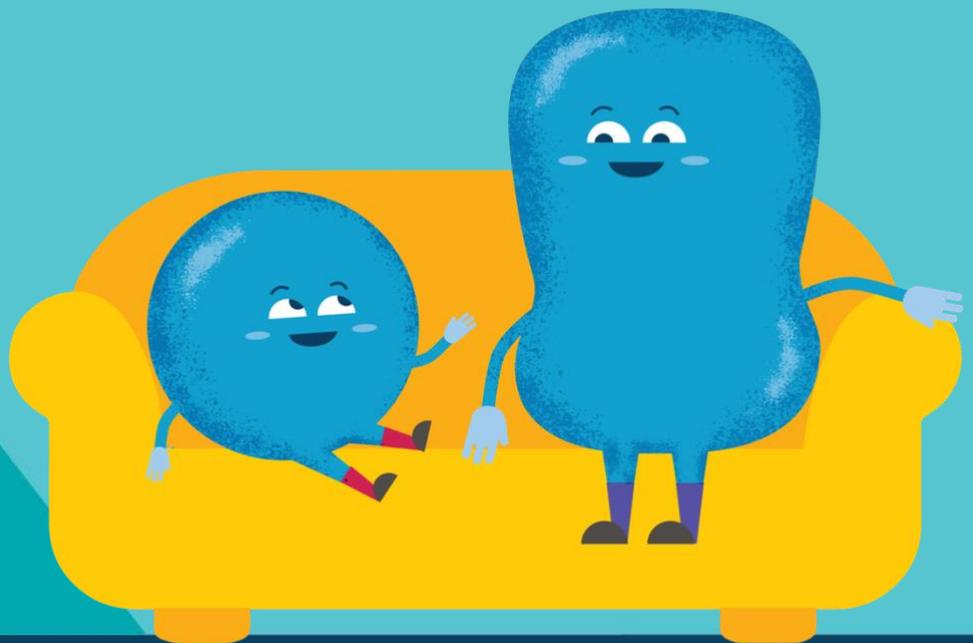
#4 – Managing Stress and Mental Health

In situations where in-person visits are not possible, as in times of COVID-19 containment, it is critical that social workers and social welfare practitioners maintain regular phone or virtual contact with the children, families and adults they support, to help them manage stress and mental health.

Consider the following tips for helping children and families manage stress and mental health

- Show empathy and understanding and plan how to seek help if needed
- Establish a routine
- Connect with others
- Take care of your body and mind
- Move your body
- Try to relax, be positive
- Keep your mind occupied
- Limit information intake

Next: messages for each of the above tips for managing stress and mental health



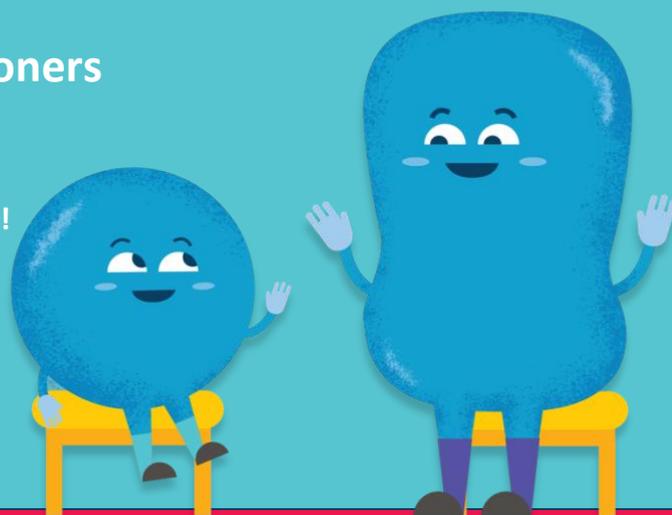
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Tips for social workers and practitioners

#4 – Managing Stress and Mental Health

Social workers and practitioners, you deserve praise!

Thank you for continuing to support children and families in need, even in these difficult times. You are heroes.



Show empathy and understanding and plan how to seek help if needed

It's okay to feel emotions like anxiety, fear, frustration, restlessness, confusion and sometimes panic

We can get through this with self-compassion

Care for body and mind, this includes making sure we continue taking those medicines for which we are receiving treatment

Have a plan for who to contact and how to seek help when feeling overwhelmed or for physical and mental health support

Establish a routine

Practice social distancing. Not being able to attend school or work is the new normal. We must ensure that families and children find a way to continue with their daily lives as best as they can under these abnormal conditions

Establish a daily routine. This can help create predictability, a sense of control, and improve our mental health.

- Try to plan the day, including educational /play activities, a menu to prepare for lunch/dinner, etc.
- Start every day with the same activity: making your bed, daily hygiene routine (bathing), eating breakfast, doing dishes, then learning or play activities, with frequent breaks (if children are doing home schooling).
- Eat meals together around the same time every day.
- Have a “bed time”.
- Plan regular times to go grocery shopping and/or check your email, use pre-planned menus to assist with grocery shopping.
- Develop a schedule for chores, dividing tasks amongst everyone in the house, and ensure that this schedule is adhered to.



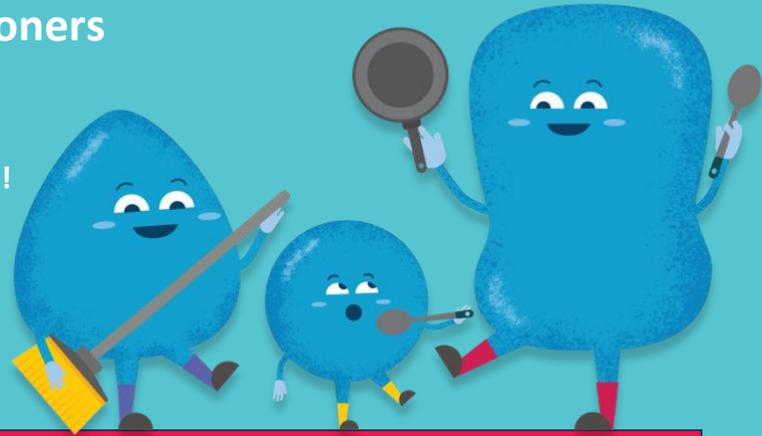
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Connect with others

Talk to friends or family every day. As humans, connection with others is essential to our well-being. We all need to connect.

- Use technology, like Facetime, Zoom, or Skype! This can give you face-to-face time and can help maintain or strengthen relationships.
- Ensure that children get a chance to connect to their best friends, cousins, grandparents and significant others. Schedule times to have phone or video calls with the people in your lives. You can even have virtual meals or parties together!
- Apps like Houseparty or GamePigeon can be used to play games and hang out with friends or connect with colleagues.

Take care of your body and mind

Staying healthy doesn't mean just practicing good hygiene. Think about some routines you can adopt to help yourself feel rejuvenated, fresh, and calm.

- Eat foods that are high in nutrients and vitamins.
- Track your water intake. Reduce caffeine and/or alcohol consumption.
- Take a relaxing bath or try a new soothing scent in your home.
- Learn or do a "hands-on" skill or craft. Sometimes keeping your hands busy helps realign your thoughts and your body.
- Play "brain games" like Sudoku, crosswords, or word-searches.

Move your body

Staying active helps to refocus your body and mind. Using and teaching your body new things can help reduce stress and anxiety, as well as boost energy and improve brain function.

- Watch online workout or dance videos and learn a new move!
- Take a walk or ride your bike.
- Practice Yoga, Tai-Chi or Stretching. Remember this is also a good time for mindfulness and deep breathing.



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Try to relax, be positive

During times of stress and anxiety, our bodies feel it. Our breathing often becomes shallow, our muscles become tense, and our heart rate increases. To return our bodies to a state of relaxation, try deep breathing.

- Put your hand on your stomach. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, and try to exhale for 6 seconds. As you inhale, your stomach should expand. As you exhale, your stomach should fall. Take it slow and be kind to yourself if you aren't able to exhale for 6 seconds. It takes time.

Keep your mind occupied

Keeping busy and helping others can distract from uncertainty and help you regain a sense of control.

- Organize your cabinets and drawers.
- Do a puzzle.
- Help someone with their homework remotely.
- Make something from waste material, e.g. face masks for all household members and even for others.

Limit information intake

Having access to constant streams of information can sometimes feel overwhelming. Consider blocking off time in the day to intentionally disconnect from the media.

- Put your phone on do not disturb.
- Do a social media cleanse or turn off your news alerts.
- Reduce time looking for information (1-2 times per day, rather than every hour). Set a timer for designated hours that you want to watch, read, or listen to news outlets.
- Get the facts. Find a credible source you can trust such as the UNICEF, Malaysian Ministry of Health or WHO websites
 - <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/coronavirus-covid-19>
 - [UNICEF's global Covid information hub](#)
 - [Malaysian Ministry of Health](#)
 - [World Health Organisation's Covid 19 page](#)
- Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time spent watching or listening to media coverage that you perceive as upsetting

