

Teacher Information - Talking to Students about COVID-19

Schools and teachers play a vital role in sharing accurate information following a case of Covid19 in the community.

Remain calm and reassuring

As a teacher you are a trusted adult and sharing accurate information will help reduce student's fears and worries and support their ability to cope.

Be honest and accurate. Be clear about the messaging provided by the school, you may need to repeat this message to provide reassurance to parents. Avoid elaborating on the information provided, a consistent message across the school community helps to foster calm.

Use a calm voice and a reassuring tone.

Use language that is appropriate to the student's level of understanding.

Don't overwhelm students with too much information.

Remind them that the adults at the school are following NSW Health guidelines and are working hard to prepare the school to be safe for the students to return.

Discuss the different feelings they may be experiencing and explain that these are typical reactions in these uncertain times. These may include being worried or scared for themselves and others, feeling unsettled and irritable.

Young children need more reassurance than factual information.

Older children may have more questions and need assistance interpreting news reports and separating facts from rumours.

Adolescents are able to discuss the issue in more depth and it may be useful to discuss in more detail the information they have heard or seen in the media, social media and from the community.

Be available to listen

Listen to students and parents/ carers concerns, they may not be what you think.

There may be lots of "what if" questions, take note of these and seek advice. There may be no clear answers and this uncertainty can cause distress.

Encourage them to express and communicate their feelings. Parents and carers may be frustrated about the disruption and have concerns about how this will impact on their child's wellbeing and learning.

Engage students in learning

Return to regular teaching routines and practises as soon as possible, predictability helps create a feeling of safety.

Teach some positive wellbeing strategies, this gives students a sense of control and provides simple steps to support their ability to cope.

Allow some choice in daily activities, this provides some opportunity self-efficacy in uncertain times.

Be understanding and flexible while gently but firmly maintaining behavioural expectations.

Support the students with complex needs who may be more vulnerable with mental health concerns or family issues.

Reinforce the NSW Health messages - wash hands; cough or sneeze into your elbow; physical distancing.

Emphasise there are things that students can do to stay healthy: Eat a balanced diet; get plenty of sleep; exercise regularly; keep up with school work.

Notice changes in behaviour

You may notice these changes in student's behaviour:

- Upset or distressed
- Increased irritability
- Increased anxiety
- Preoccupied on topics and can't move on
- Loss of interest and poor concentration.

If you concerned about students follow your usual practice – refer to LST; take your concerns to your supervisor; school counsellor/ school psychologist.

For more information: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/news/coronavirus-schools-adapting-to-changes>

Practise self-care

A case of Covid19 in the community may affect you personally as well as professionally. Your wellbeing can change over time, and encompasses the health of you as an individual – physical, mental, social and emotional.

The department's **EAP - Supporting You program** offers seven support services to improve the health and wellbeing of staff working in education, through a tailored, employee focused approach to delivering EAP services. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/inside-the-department/health-and-safety/staff-wellbeing/employee-assistance-program/supporting-resources>

Educators can access and choose from a wide range of online apps and resources providing valuable information and support around mental health and wellbeing via the BEYou website.

<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>