

ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONS



Dear parent/carer

There is no doubt that at the current time, the world and everything in it feels very surreal to us all. Our human minds are programmed to find comfort in familiarity and routine, whereby we can plan and feel prepared for the events that are likely to lie ahead in our everyday lives. This in turn allows us to manage our anxiety and anticipatory stress levels. I think we can all agree that for many of us, the coronavirus has seen our anticipatory stress levels soar, as the future in the coming weeks and months ahead remains uncertain.

Anything that we perceive to pose a threat to our well-being will activate an emotional response in our brains, which is designed to initiate a physical response from us to keep us safe. The downside, however, is that associated feelings such as despair, fear, anger and agitation can be challenging for us to manage. The challenge is even more difficult for our children, as they are still developing and learning coping strategies that we, as adults, already know and use to help us get by. This leaves us all wondering how we can support and guide our children through this very unsettling time.

Here at Unravel, we have developed a range of resources to support you and the children and young people in your lives at this unprecedented time. This particular resource offers guidance on acknowledging your children's emotions, which in itself will help to alleviate anxieties children may be experiencing.

As a parent/carer of any child, you know best the child/children you are caring for. Trust your gut and know that your ongoing love and reassurance will see your precious young ones through this crisis. We are all in this together, and together we shall flourish in these most unlikely of times, while building resilience in our children that will support their growth throughout childhood and into adulthood.

Take good care of yourselves and remember to embrace moments of joy wherever you find them.

The Unravel Team

The logo for Unravel, featuring the word "unravel" in a lowercase, teal, cursive-style font.

Experts in children & young people's
emotional well-being

Supporting you on behalf of your child's school



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- ✔ Be present and ready to listen when your child is speaking to you about their emotions. If you are hearing and validating your child's emotions, they are much less likely to escalate into more intense emotions that may cause further distress.
- ✔ Show your child you are actively listening, by repeating parts of what they say back to them. For example, "You really miss your friends...". Leaving this open ended also lets your child know that it's okay to keep sharing their feelings with you.
- ✔ Communicate to your child that it's okay to feel all feelings – including sadness, fear or anger. Children often believe these feelings are 'bad' and can be more reluctant to share them with you. A good way to do this is to lead by example. Don't be afraid to share with your child how you are feeling and communicate to them things that help you to feel better.
- ✔ A child's behaviour can suggest they are unhappy in some way. In younger children, it might be that they don't know the correct word for the feeling they are experiencing. It can be useful to help them acknowledge their own feelings by 'checking out' with them what you suspect they are feeling. If you suspect they are worried, for example, you might ask, "I wonder if you have a horrible, funny feeling in your tummy?"





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- ✔ An older child/teenager may also communicate negative emotion through behaviour, but not due to lack of vocabulary. You can seek to validate this behaviour and underlying emotion also by 'checking it out' with them. This lets your child know that you have noticed the change in behaviour and you really care about what is underlying that change. For example, "Tell me if I'm wrong – I'm wondering if you're feeling anxious..."
- ✔ Let your child know that their feelings make sense, perhaps by using the following sentence structure: "I can see that you feel..., and it makes sense that you want that feeling to go away."
- ✔ Empathise wholeheartedly, by putting yourself in your child's shoes. Let them know that you would probably feel the same way if you were in their position. Validating your child's feelings in this way will help them to self-validate both now and in the future.
- ✔ Acknowledging feelings linked to past experiences can be helpful. An example of this might be, "I know it doesn't seem fair that you're not able to go swimming with your friends this weekend, when you were able to go last weekend."





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- ✔ Validating your child's emotions in the above ways will let them know you acknowledge their emotions, and you understand. This will aid your child in reaching a place of acceptance, where anxiety will reduce, and a sense of inner calm can be restored. This place of tranquillity is essential for your child's well-being not just at present, but going forward too, and will allow them to flourish as they head forwards on their journey.
- ✔ Remember to validate your own feelings. You are just as important, and children will mirror your behaviours too.
- ✔ Acknowledging yours and your child's emotions will allow you to think and behave from your rational brain. We tend to make more appropriate, evidence-based decisions from than our rational brain than our emotional brain. Ignoring our emotions will only encourage us to remain influenced by our emotional brain.



CORONAVIRUS

**TOGETHER WE CAN
BEAT IT**

**Please keep yourselves
and your children safe**

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