

Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service

Where did the toilet paper go?

Supporting adopted children cope with the Coronavirus

The situation with COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. As adults it is difficult to make sense of all the available information and even if you are feeling calm and in control of your family at this time, your child may have been picking up on anxiety and panic in the community, at school, the shops or on the TV.

There are ways that your child may be uniquely impacted by circumstances surrounding Coronavirus because of their adoption and trauma history.

What your child may be experiencing:

- Intense feelings of abandonment due to the loss of physical contact with family, friends and mentors.
- Strong feelings of uncertainty and a lack of safety and security with changes in their activities, routines and relationships.
- An increase in racism, as observed in the broader community, such as the

- avoidance of Asian businesses or references to the “Chinese virus”.
- Concern for their birth family overseas and how they may be impacted by the virus. Your child may also be affected by the closure of borders and international flights which feels like an additional, impenetrable barrier between them and their country of origin and birth family.
- Increased hypervigilance which may be contributing to physical and mental exhaustion and behaviour changes.
- Appetite or sleep disturbance and increased irritability due to feeling anxious.

How can you help protect your child’s emotional health?

- Create time and space to have a family discussion about Covid-19. Discuss and validate your child’s feelings, address specific fears or misconceptions and come up with a plan together including any strategies that your child identifies will make them feel safe. Help young children express themselves through drawing, play and re-enactment or story-telling. Invite older children to discuss any stigma or discrimination they may have experienced or

observed since the Covid-19 outbreak.

- Help to reframe your child's statements and beliefs regarding the virus if they seem unhelpful, exaggerated or extremely negative. For example, increased time at home enables more quality time together as a family or a transition to online learning with school is an exciting way to explore how we can use technology to enhance learning.
- Maintain your normal routine at home, such as with bedtime and meals, and if quarantined, create a new schedule to provide some consistency and structure to days at home.
- If contact with family and friends is restricted, develop a plan for staying connected with them. Your child may like to have phone calls or video calls with them, or exchange letters or artwork via the mail.
- Pursue new opportunities to spend time with your child in novel ways that will be fun and exciting for them, such as watching their favourite zoo animal on live stream while they sit and draw a picture of the animal.
- Create regular opportunities for movement and exercise to help children self-regulate. If you are able, do activities in the sun and fresh air. Otherwise, create an obstacle course

at home together, dance to loud music or follow a children's yoga video session on the internet.

- Create an enclosed secure space for quiet play that enhances a child's sense of safety, such as a cubby with blankets, cushions and a favoured toy.
- Provide opportunities for your child to have some agency and control in their day, such as providing choices at meal times or when doing activities.
- Minimise exposure to media outlets or social media to allow escape from thoughts relating to Covid-19. Regularly ask older children what updates they have heard about Covid-19 to clarify any misinformation that may arise.
- Role model for your children positive ways of managing this stressful situation to help manage their own worries.

Where can I go for extra support?

The Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service is continuing to operate, providing information, support and counselling to intercountry adoptees and families of intercountry adoptees throughout Australia. Please contact the Intercountry Adoption Family Support Team for assistance.



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