

Return to School

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COVID-19 has caused sudden and unforeseen changes to the lives of children and young people worldwide, it is critical that we understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and our community response to it is impacting them and how we can be proactive in helping them to understand what is occurring in the world right now, as well as reassure them that they are not alone in feeling anxious and we are here to support their wellbeing.

Although the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, the impacts it is having on the lives of children and young people themselves are not. Research on how children respond to critical situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic reflects that some will express reactions that persist or evolve over time, and that others who appear resilient at first may later develop reactions. Broadly, children and young people may experience changes in thinking, behaviour, emotional state and physical activity. Some common immediate/short-term reactions and behaviours may include:

Reactions/Behaviours <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling shocked• Asking lots of questions about the event and the future• Frustration, acting out• Relationship difficulties with peers and others• School refusal• Separation problems, such as clinging, etc.• Changes in thinking and learning, such as returning to a behaviour typical of a younger child, trouble concentrating, difficulty with organisation, difficulty with school work, etc.	Emotional Distress <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crying, feeling down• Anxiety• Sleep troubles• Outburst of distress• Feeling grumpy and losing temper Physical Problems <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Headaches• Upset stomach• Muscle aches and pains• Lethargy
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It is important to note that it is normal for children and young people to show some changes in behaviour, or difficulties managing emotions immediately in response to situations such as the current pandemic and the returning to school during the COVID-19 outbreak. Newman Senior High School advise that we will be implementing and consistently follow health and safety measures such as personal distancing and hand hygiene. In addition, entry to the school by parents and others will be limited. With these measures in place we will mitigate the risk of infection.

Many children and young people will look to family, friends and community members for the support and guidance they need to understand the current situation and manage their mental health and wellbeing as WA responds and recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. The following information draws on the universal rights of children and young people and the work of various organisations and researchers with expertise in child psychology, child participation, disaster management and clinical and service delivery expertise in post trauma situations. These strategies are important because they can help resolve concerns of many children and young people without the need for more specialised support.

Ways to support children and young people in their learning and participation:

- Re-establish routines and expectations.
- Continue to provide factual information on COVID-19 and answer their questions.
- Be flexible and allow spontaneous discussion or create opportunities to hear about their experiences, not only through talking but also activities such as writing stories or drawing pictures.
- Explore positive outcomes, such as the changes in lifestyle/environment and learning for the future.
- Acknowledge and affirm how children and young people have coped with the challenges they have faced.

Ways to support children and young people in staying healthy and connected:

- Let them know who they can talk to about their experience in more detail.
- Observe behaviours, look for changes and respond to signs of distress.
- Use activities that promote self-expression.
- Empower young people with strategies they can continue – exercise, good hygiene and practising self-care.

Ways to support children and young people in being safe and supported:

- Ensure children have a safe space if they are finding things too much.
- Encourage social connections with friends and peers.
- Celebrate positive experiences.
- Recognise the additional pressures and stress that children and families are experiencing, and seek or provide support where needed.

During this challenging time, having an open, [supportive discussion](#) with your children can help them understand, cope and even make a positive contribution for others. It is also important to support our young people to [self-regulate](#). By taking a coordinated approach, we at Newman Senior High School endeavour to support mental wellbeing of our young people. More information could be found on the [Raising Children](#) and [Emerging Minds](#) websites, and the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA provided a list of [e-mental health resources](#) for young people.

If you think your child or a young person in your care needs extra support, you may consult the following:

National 24/7 Crisis Services

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 or <https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>

BeyondBlue: 1300 224 636 or <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Additional Youth Support Services

HeadSpace: 1800 650 890 or <https://headspace.org.au/>

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 or <https://www.sane.org/>

Lastly, remember to make time to [look after yourself](#) so you are in a better position to support those around you.