

Advice to parents focusing on your own and children's mental health

Many have worries and concerns connected to the Corona pandemic. There is a lot of uncertainty, guidelines are constantly changed, and we get a lot of information from different sources. Families must now function together day and night without the social contact we are used to. Increased stress and concern is entirely normal now, and some might experience it as more than they can handle.

Here are some general advice on how you as a parent can focus on your own mental health:

1. Read and follow government recommendations – both local and national. Be sure that the information you read is from reliable sources. Be critical to the accuracy of the information, whether you read it through social media, websites or relatives/friends (we know there are a lot of rumours and fake news spreading).
2. Limit the time you spend on worrying and updating yourself about the pandemic (20 minutes a day is enough)
3. Maintain a normal sleep pattern, meals and activities throughout the day and night. This is the most important advice we can give to maintain a good mental and physical health for yourself and the children.
4. Be active, do something you like. You can find many suggestions online, or you can ask the kindergarten / school for advice. We will publish some suggestions on Sogndal kommune's website.
5. See the larger picture – the situation will pass
6. Talk with someone about your worries (friends, partners, public services – see contact details later in this document)

Children also need information, and can experience increased worries or levels of stress. Children are very adept at catching comments not meant for them to hear, as well as the mood in the family. It is important that you as a parent are aware of how you express yourself, and that you actively ask the children how they interpret the situation, thus providing you with the chance to correct any misunderstandings. Here are a few points for you as a parent to be able to take care of your child in this situation:

1. Talk with your child about its feelings, give them information that they can understand and express hopefulness. See examples of wording below.
2. Try to be calm; your child will notice this.
3. Perhaps the best you can give your child now is patience and good routines.
4. It is understandable that you as a parent feel that this is a demanding situation to be in. We therefore ask you to contact someone to ask for help or guidance. See contact information below.

Examples of good questions to the children:

Small children:

- Example on how you can acknowledge feelings and at the same time give correct and adapted information; The child asks whether we are going to become very sick:
 - “Are you afraid that we are all going to get sick? I can understand that, you might have heard us grown-ups talk about it. Most of those who get infected do not get very sick. A few, especially older people, can become very sick, and then the doctors will help them as best they can to get well. We can help by wash our hands and not get too close to others.”

- When adults are bickering / irritated:
 - “Now when we are a lot more together, I have noticed that mummy / daddy and I have bickered more, for instance earlier when we disagreed who should have tidied. How did you experience that?”
 - “You feel sad? That is understandable. It is not nice when people are angry. What do you feel when you can hear us arguing?”
 - “It is not dangerous that we disagree, we love each other anyway”
- How does it feel when you are not allowed to play with other kids we meet when we are outside?
- What do you think about being at home with us (and your sister/brother) all day?
- What has made you happy today? What has made you sad / angry / scared etc.?
- Is there anything you are wondering about these days, that you would like to talk about?

Older children/youths:

- “There are a lot of people who miss their friends now, how is it for you to not be able to meet them?”
- “Many are now concerned about how their friends / family / society are faring. How are you?”
- “It could be tiring to be with your family all the time; I feel that it is both nice and a little tiring. How is that for you?”
- “There’s a lot of information about the corona virus online, what have you heard and seen? Is there anything you’re wondering or worried about?”
- “What do you do which give you joy and hope?”

Contact information to local services connected to mental health

1. Sogndal Child Health Clinic: Public health nurses and midwives are available on their work phone numbers, or you can call reception on phone number: 576 29 720.
2. Sogn Child Welfare Services: Phone number during office hours: 975 06 095, emergency phone outside office hours: 400 22 988. Parents themselves can contact Sogn Child Welfare Services to seek advice and guidance without a case being opened. Sogn Child Welfare Services encourages parents to have a low threshold for contacting us.
3. Psychic health services for adults: tlf. 920 38 250. Contact us directly to talk with us if you experience anxiety, difficult thoughts, brooding, worries, sleep difficulties, anger/frustration, addictions, absence of joy, lack of motivation etc. You can contact this free municipal low threshold service directly without referral from a doctor.

Here are links to good sources for information about mental health and the corona virus (Norwegian web pages):

- Advice regarding how you can organise your family’s day , the needs of children of different ages and what activities you can plan:
https://bufdir.no/Foreldrehverdag/trygge_rad_til_foreldre_i_korona_hverdagen/
- Information to parents, children and youths, people with mental illness and general pieces of advice on how to cope with stress and worries:
<https://www.nkvts.no/aktuelt/rad-og-tips-i-forbindelse-med-korona/>
- Aftenposten’s podcast for parents (in Norwegian): «Foreldrekoden – med Hedvig Montgomery

- «Korona-viruset – få kontroll på egen og barnas frykt»
<https://play.acast.com/s/foreldrekode/7cc745ea-5458-40db-9968-e88708391b89>
- «I koronaens tid: Hvordan skape en levelig hverdag for familien?»
<https://play.acast.com/s/foreldrekode/d5eb4bf8-44b1-4bab-b357-b809aed1f84f>
- Good advice on how to take care of your family from Holmestrand municipality:
<https://holmestrand.kommune.no/aktuelt/a-skape-normalitet-i--unormale-for-barna-vare.3695.aspx>

Help lines and online chats that you or your children can contact:

- Help line for children and youths is open day and night:
 - phone number 116 111
 - text message: 41 71 61 11
 - webpage <https://www.116111.no/>
- Mental health has several helplines that are open day and night:
 - <https://mentalhelse.no/fa-hjelp>:
 - Help line for everyone who needs someone to talk to: tlf. 116 123
 - Parent support for all who have family related questions: tlf. 116 123 (dial 2), there is also a chat-function available!
- Web page with chat function: www.sidetmedord.no
- Overview of several available phone and chat services:
<https://psykiskhelse.no/hjelpetelefoner-og-nettsteder>

Be generous with each other! Think positively about neighbours / friends / shop employees / others. Everyone does their best, and if you react to their choices, keep in mind that they might be based on information not known to you.