

CORONAVIRUS, BUSHFIRES AND OTHER CHALLENGES WE HAVE FACED!

Our community has faced many challenges over recent months. This can leave us feeling a little scared or anxious. It is important to acknowledge these feelings and to work out ways to best deal with them. To help us on our way we have asked a few questions of Dr Hughes, she is an expert in the field of child and adolescent anxiety disorders, here is what she had to say.



I sometimes think I might be feeling anxious, can you please explain what it feels like to feel anxious and how to handle it.

Anxiety can feel a bit different for everyone. Some people feel anxiety as an emotion (and that can range from feeling just a little bit nervous or on edge, to feeling really scared and afraid), some people feel anxiety as worry (their heads gets stuck thinking about things that haven't happened yet but that they're afraid might happen), some people feel anxiety in their body (that can mean feeling sick in the stomach, having a racing heartbeat, or even feeling like you can't catch your breath), and some people feel a mix of all of these things.

A friend of mine was impacted by the recent bushfires. She is still really sad about it and sometimes I don't know what to say, how can I help her?

Your friend is probably going to feel sad about what happened for a while, and that's OK. It can be hard to know what to say, but probably what your friend needs more than anything is someone to listen when she wants to talk about how she's feeling, someone to give her a hug when she feels sad, and someone to have fun with, to have a break from thinking about everything she's been through. If you're ever really stuck, you can say something like 'I'm really sorry that that happened and I'm sorry you're feeling so sad'. It won't fix what's happened, but it'll remind her that she's surrounded by people who care, and that's what'll make the difference.

Things have been changing quite a bit at school and my class excursion was cancelled, I was really looking forward to it. Is it OK to be disappointed?

Absolutely. It is really disappointing when things you're looking forward to are cancelled or postponed. Hopefully your teacher will organise another excursion for later in the year – I bet they do.

When I am feeling worried, who should I talk to and what should I ask?

It's always good to talk to someone when you're feeling worried. Your mum and dad are a good place to start, or you could talk to a family friend who's an adult or another adult family member. And if you can't talk to someone at home, your teacher or the school counsellor are good options as well. You can always talk to your friends too, but if you're feeling really worried, adults might be more able to help.

What are some good ways to avoid being bored if we end up being stuck at home for a while?

You're probably going to want to watch TV or play games on your iPad, and they're good options, but it's good to do a mix of things so you don't get bored. You can play board games, work your way through an activity book, draw with chalk on the driveway (and play hopscotch), dig out a few puzzles, and if you have a back yard, you can still play outside – kick a ball around, work on your basketball skills – so long as your mum and dad say it's ok.

Why is it so important to realise what emotions you are feeling?

Knowing how you're feeling makes it easier to work out a plan to feel better. And if you know *why* you're feeling how you're feeling, even better. If you're feeling sad because your friend cancelled your playdate, you can ask for help to find something else fun to do, and plan another playdate for a different day. If you're anxious about a math test that's coming up at school, you can do some math practice, and maybe even ask for mum or dad's help to practice extra math problems. But if you can't figure it out, that's OK too. Feelings can be tricky and it can be hard to know how you're feeling and why. If you're stuck, try talking things out. Talking about it might help you get to the bottom of how you're feeling.

What does resilience mean and how do you build this in yourself?

Resilience means learning how to help yourself feel better when things don't go your way. One of the ways you can learn how to do that is to play the good news/bad news game. It works like this, each time something happens that's upsetting, you look for the good news. So, let's say you lose your netball final. The bad news is you lost the final, but the good news is your team came second – which is a really big achievement – and you had a lot of fun over the season. Or maybe you had a fight with your friend: the bad news is you had a fight and it was really upsetting, but the good news is you worked it out, and you're closer friends because of it. There's always a bit of good news in every situation – always – sometimes you just have to look a bit harder to find it. But you'll get better with practice, so stick with it.

