

HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE CORONA CRISIS?

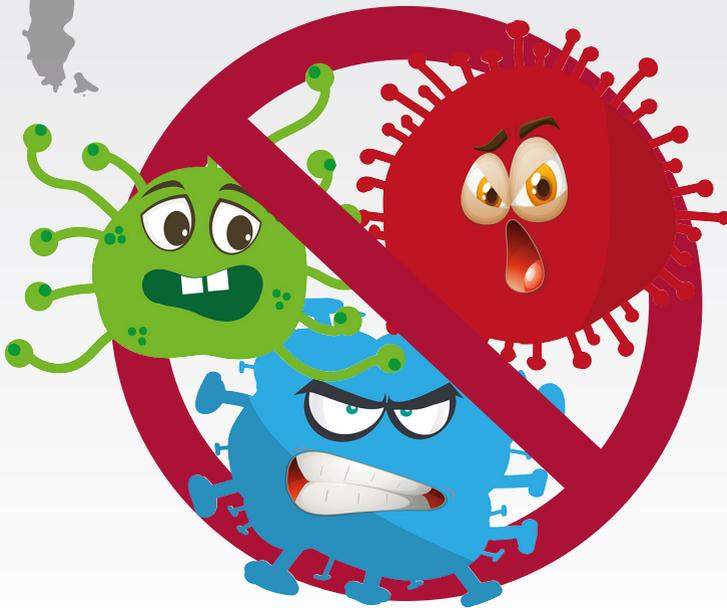


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CORONA PANDEMIC IS A GLOBAL CRISIS

that affects the lives of children and families on a large scale and significantly. The situation of each family, child and parent is unique and individual, and the reactions are also individual. This guide has gathered ways to strengthen the experience of self-capability and ease the emotional distress of children and adults. The aim is to provide sufficient psychoeducation about the corona virus. In addition, some practical ways to support the wellbeing of children and family, are offered. It is not intended that everyone goes through and does everything on this guide. Rather, the aim is to provide information and different ways of managing the distress caused by the corona situation, and everyone can choose the best means of coping for themselves and for their families.

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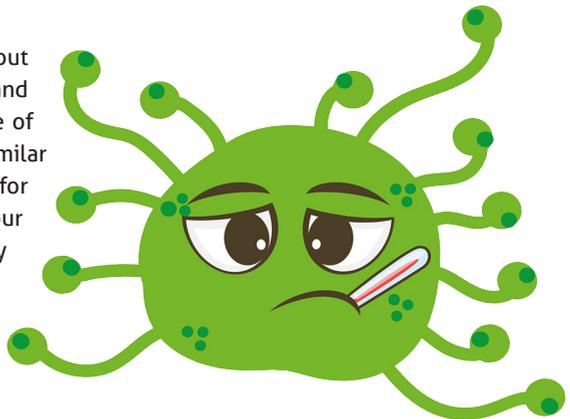


WHAT IS THE CORONAVIRUS?

The coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a disease caused by a virus. The main symptoms of the virus are coughing, fever, and breathing difficulties. Symptoms may also include stomach discomfort, muscle ache, and, among other things, temporary loss of taste and smell. The coronavirus is transmitted from one person to another, and through various surfaces, if corona virus has been transmitted to the surfaces through an exposed person.

In social media, there is a lot of misinformation about the virus, and it is therefore important to check the information you receive from social media or acquaintances. Reliable information can be obtained from news, THL website, and your doctor. It's a good idea to keep things in perspective and remember that the majority of people (80 %) exposed to the corona virus only have mild symptoms, and those with more severe symptoms receive skilled medical care. However, the corona virus can be dangerous for some people, and it is important to tell this to children; It is therefore important to protect oneself and others from the corona virus.

For example, you can talk to a child about a virus that causes coughing, fever, and sometimes breathing difficulties. Some of the symptoms of the coronavirus are similar to those of a common flu, or allergies, for example. It is also important to tell your child that coughing, fever and stuffy nose can also be caused by a common cold or allergies, and the child does not have to be afraid if they have such symptoms.



However, if a child develops a high fever, or if the child has difficulty breathing, you must go to the doctor and find out what is going on in order to help the child and the family in the best possible way. It is important to tell your child that doctors and nurses are skilled, good at their job, and know how to help the child and his or her family, or, for example, a sick relative, friend or acquaintance.

HOW DO CHILDREN REACT?

Children react to stress in many ways. Someone may cling to their parents, while the other may be withdrawn. Children can also become tense, irritable, fearful or sad. Some children can cry a lot, while others might be overly perky or glad, and joke excessively. Some children can start day or bed wetting again, and other skills that have already been learned may also regress. Some can find it hard to fall asleep, or stay asleep, and some may have nightmares. Some children can be completely immersed in schoolwork, while others may refuse to study or are unable to concentrate on schoolwork. Behavioral problems and defiance can increase. Various aches and pains can also increase as a reaction to stress. Some children can start to observe or monitor themselves too much, and pay much attention to the smallest of complaints, such as drying of the throat or feeling of warmth, fearing, for example, an increase in fever.

For some children, the situation does not seem to be distressing at all, and (s)he functions as usual in this situation, enjoying everyday activities as usual.

The reaction of each child and adult is individual. Personal life experiences and individual traits such as temperament, affect our reactions (*emotions, thoughts, behavior*). No reaction is better or worse than the other, and all reactions are allowed and understandable. This is important for the child to understand, too. Communicate to your child that his/her emotional reactions are acceptable, and that you understand them; This does not mean that bad behavior has to be tolerated, and even in a crisis, it is important to stick to boundaries and rules, even if it can feel bad to set limits to the child.



HOW TO ACT AS A PARENT?

It is important for the parent to remain calm and support their children according to their individual needs. Listen to your children and show them that they are important and dear to you. Tell your children truthfully about what is happening and why we need to act in certain ways now, for example, to spend a lot of time at home. Talk to your children at an age-appropriate level, i.e. use words your child understands. Tell your children what (s) he needs to know—truthfully and sufficiently. In particular, be sure to tell your children what they can do themselves to affect the situation and prevent the coronavirus from spreading. Give your children a lot of opportunities to ask about things bothering them—children may have different false beliefs that may be important to correct. For example, a child may think that flu-like symptoms are always life-threatening, or that going out is life-threatening.

Maintain your family's daily routines, such as mealtimes and sleep patterns, as well as other key routines that can be complied to in this situation. Establish common, short rules to enable everyone to carry out schoolwork and work. It is a good idea to come up with new activities in your home to replace the activities that cannot be carried out now. For example, you can organize game or play moments, relaxing moments, movie nights, or a karaoke night. Take breaks when possible and remember that time to calm down and time for yourself is still important. There is no shame in taking time for yourself!

Remember that as a parent, you know your child best, and you will be able to support them. However, in difficult situations, it is common and ok to need support and assistance as a parent. You can turn to a family clinic or a variety of guidance phones for support (e.g. the *Mannerheim league for child welfare* or *Mieli ry 24h support telephone, mll.fi, mieli.fi*). If you already have a support system, for example in the child psychiatry clinic, you can contact them for support.



WHAT DOES A CHILD THINK AND FEEL?

It is common to feel concerned, stressed, tense, fearful, helpless, angry, or, for example, lonely in this situation. Everyone has their own feelings, and they can be very different from someone else's. However, all emotions are allowed and comprehensible. Listen to your child and his/her concerns. Try to understand his/her feelings and thoughts, even if they are different from yours. Show that your child's different emotional experiences and thoughts are also allowed and understandable.



The concerns of children and adults are often related to their own daily lives, e.g. how schooling or hobbies are organized, whether the homework needs to be done, can they see their friends, or go on play dates. The smaller children may be mostly delighted to be allowed to spend more time with their parents.

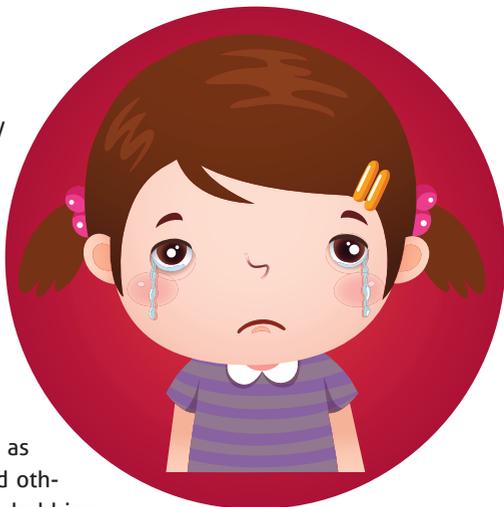
It is important for parents and children to keep in contact and talk with people close to them. If you or your child find it difficult not to think about corona virus issues, it may be a good idea to limit the amount of time you spend, for example, by following news or by reading about the topic online. In this case, you can agree on when and how long you can talk, follow news, and read about your concerns about corona. For example, you can spend time with this issue twice a day for 5–15 minutes – whatever works best for your family!

Remember that you, you and your children already have a lot of skills that have helped you cope with previous stressful life situations and events. You can use the same coping skills now to cope with distressing feelings and thoughts!

You can keep in touch with the people you care about by phone, messaging, and social media. Children may often worry about how grandparents, relatives and friends are doing, and it is important to offer them a lot of opportunities to communicate with the people they care about.

DISAPPOINTMENTS

The corona virus restrictions cause many disappointments for adults and children. Some hobbies need to be on hold, birthdays and other big days cannot be celebrated as usual, and many other things are also cancelled. This can cause big feelings in children, such as sadness, anger and disappointment. It's important to discuss these issues openly with children.



As a parent, you can tell the child how you as a parent feel when the child's hobbies and other things are cancelled, and when your own hobbies, for example, are cancelled. Verbalizing your own and the child's emotions is important and serves as a good model for a child. Thus, the child also learns to verbalize and control his or her feelings better. Verbalizing emotions means telling how you feel and what has caused the feeling. For example, you can tell that at the moment you are upset that you can't go to work and meet colleagues, or that you can't go to your dance practice, but even though you are sad about this now, you are also happy because you can spend time with the child playing and drawing. You can also tell your child that you as a parent are also sad about that the child's own hobbies, for example, football, is cancelled, and that it makes you sad too, that the child is sad about the cancellations.

Then, what could we do instead of these hobbies, to have fun? Could we have a birthday party later, when there are no more meeting restrictions? It is also worth remembering that this situation is only temporary. It is also good to plan and dream about the future, the time after corona. What would you like to do then, as a family and with friends?



WHAT CAN CHILDREN DO TO PREVENT THEMSELVES & THOSE CLOSE TO THEM FROM GETTING SICK?

It is important to tell children about the things they can do themselves to prevent themselves, their family members, relatives, or friends from getting sick. This increases the child's experience of self-capability and meaning.

WASHING YOUR HANDS

Washing your hands regularly is an important step in avoiding all viral infections. You can protect yourself and other people by washing your hands regularly.

WASH HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER:

- if you have sneezed or coughed
- before and after eating
- before and after cooking
- when you go to the bathroom
- if you meet someone who is sick
- when your hands are dirty
- when touching animals
- when you come home from the store, for example

WASHING YOUR HANDS

1. Take soap and wet your hands
2. Rub soap in your palms
3. Also remember the back of the hand, i.e. the top of the hand
4. Rub soap on your thumbs and other fingers and fingertips
5. Rub soap on your wrists
6. Rinse hands

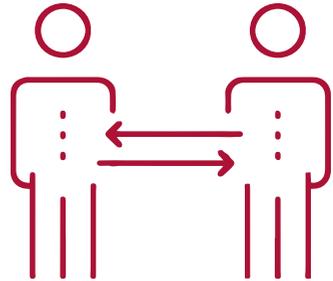


Count to 20 when you wash your hands and your hands will be clean!



KEEPING DISTANCE TO OTHER PEOPLE

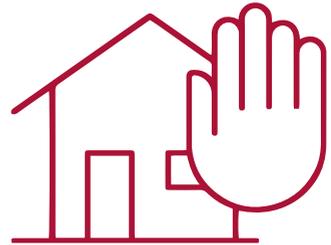
Keeping distance to other people is important so that the corona virus doesn't spread. It can be particularly difficult, but fortunately you can still hug and touch, and be around, the people closest to you – the ones you live with. However, it is important to keep physical distance to others until the corona virus situation calms down. You can keep in touch with your friends, schoolmates, grandparents, teachers and other important people, by calling them, sending messages, and chatting with them online. Pets can also still be hugged, petted and touched.



The safe distance to another person is 2 meters, that is, about 4–5 steps for children, and 3–4 steps for an adult.

STAYING AT HOME

All people should spend as much time at home as possible now! Children study at home, and this is called distance schooling or homeschooling. Many adults also must stay at home to work. At the same time, adults can spend more time with their children, which is nice. However, it is important for everyone to have their own space and peace to work at home, for children and adults as well. Parents should also have time and possibilities to help children with schoolwork when they need help. Staying at home is important so that you and your family members and friends don't get infected by the corona virus.



COUGHING AND SNEEZING

Remember to cough or sneeze on a tissue or on your shoulder or sleeve – and wash your hands afterwards! When coughing and sneezing, it is important to cover your mouth and nose with paper/tissue or shoulder, to protect other people from infecting. When you cough, sneeze or blow your nose, throw the paper in the trash immediately and wash your hands!



PSYCHOLOGICAL COPING

POSITIVE THINKING

In a situation like this, it is very common for many worries and sorrows to try to take over your mind. For example, someone can start catastrophizing, that is, to fear the worst possible outcome, believing that there is nothing they can do themselves to control the situation. Sometimes each one of us has problematic thoughts that hinder our well-being and our ability to act. These damaging ideas can be identified by the fact that they are often associated with extremes and absolutes; For example, they can be identified by the words “never/ nothing / nobody”, “ever”, “always” or “everything”. Are these thoughts true? What would you say to your friend or to your child who thinks this way? Tell that to yourself, too! Try to come up with more positive and helpful thoughts to replace the harmful or negative thoughts you have! Try this together, as a family, it will help you feel better! For children you can talk about red (*harmful*) and green (*helping, positive*) thoughts.



**I can't influence
the spread of the virus
in any way!**



**If I wash my hands regularly and talk
to my friends on the phone instead
of meeting them face to face,
I can stop the virus from spreading!**

In everyday life, it is important to try to focus on positive things and positive thinking. This may include things you are usually grateful for in your life, such as your own home, your spouse and children, as well as daily food, the opportunity to outdoors activities and nature, and the opportunity to talk about things with friends, family and relatives. Someone can be happy and grateful for the special opportunity to spend more time with their children and family, and especially small children can be excited about this. Someone can enjoy the air quality that has got better in this exceptional situation, or the increased silence outdoors due to reduction of traffic noise. In the springtime, the bird's singing and sunshine will also increase, which can be enjoyed both outdoors and indoors at home. Each night, with your children, you can talk about or write down things that have made you feel good or happy that day. What did you succeed in? What was particularly nice? What did you enjoy?

FOCUS ON THE THINGS YOU CAN AFFECT!

In crisis situations, as always, you should focus on the things that you can affect. Try not to worry about the things you can't control or affect.

I CAN'T CONTROL THESE, SO SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT THEM?

What others do

How long does this exceptional
situation last

How many people get sick

How others react

THESE I CAN INFLUENCE

How do I deal with the situation

How much do I watch the news and
look things up in social media

Will I wash my hands

Do I follow the instructions and rules

What nice things do I do

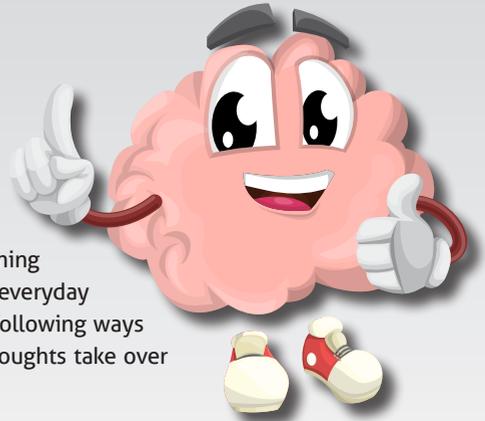
Do I keep in touch with my friends,
gradparents and relatives

What I eat, do I exercise or play,
how much do I sleep



MANAGING ANXIETY AND THOUGHTS

There are many ways of managing anxiety and harmful thoughts. It is important for everyone to find the right ways to relax, to reduce and manage anxiety, and to increase well-being. It is good to keep the things you enjoy, like listening to music, playing and crafting, as a part of your everyday life. In addition to these, you can also try the following ways of coping, especially if anxiety and harmful thoughts take over your own mind.



SOOTHING SNOW GLOBE METAPHOR

Your own anxiety, tension, fear, anger, disgust or other unpleasant feelings can be soothed by the snow globe metaphor.

Distressing, frightening, or other unpleasant feelings and thoughts are often abrupt and sudden, and quickly take over the mind. It is like what happens to the snowflakes in a snow globe when you shake it. However, after the snowflakes suddenly fill through the whole space – like unpleasant thoughts and emotions take over the mind – then the snowflakes float slowly and calmly, slowly, down, back to the ground. This also happens to unpleasant thoughts and feelings when you recognize, name, and accept these thoughts and feelings—when you allow yourself to experience these feelings and thoughts. When experiencing difficult thoughts and emotions, you can imagine a snow globe with snowflakes floating down, quietly and peacefully. Focus on this image, while breathing calmly and deeply.



BREATHING EXERCISE

STEP PURPOSE OF THE BREATHING EXERCISE

1 One good way to calm down and make you feel better is to control your breathing. It is easier to control and calm our emotions when we learn to control our own breathing. This is something you can do anytime, anywhere. Often, for example, when we are nervous, afraid, or angry, we begin to breathe very briefly and superficially. This affects our entire body, making our bodies tense. As we breathe calmly and deeply, it helps us calm down and control our emotions and behavior. Breathing deeply brings more air and oxygen to our brains and bodies, which is important so that we can relax and control ourselves. It is a good idea to practice this skill at first in situations where you feel calm and relaxed, and only after some training sessions, you can practice your skills even in situations where you are somewhat tense. In this way, this skill will be more useful in situations that make us really tense, frightened or angry.

STEP BREATHING EXERCISE

2 First, take a comfortable and relaxed stance. You can, for example, sit in a comfortable chair, or lie on the floor, whatever feels good for you. Once you've found a good stance, put your other hand on your stomach, just above your belly. Then, put your other hand up on your chest.

Then let's focus on our breathing. When we breathe in, the hand on our stomach should rise with our belly, and when we breathe out, it should go down. The hand on our chest should always stay put. This means we're breathing deeply. Focus on breathing and this movement of your belly for a while. It may be useful to think that your belly is like a balloon that grows bigger when filled with air, and when it empties, it shrinks.

If your chest moves a lot with your breath, it means that you breathe very superficially instead of breathing deeply. This is very common for people of all ages and should not be worried about. Just breathe in and out and try to focus on your belly rising as you breathe in and going down as you breathe out. Let's try to breathe out slower than we breathe in. This can be done by counting calmly during inhalation and exhalation. The idea is to count further when we breath in than when we breathe out. So, let's start counting from number 1 when we start breathing in, and let's start form number 1 again when we start to breath out.



STEP RELAXING WORD

3

After practicing a useful, soothing way to breathe, we can add a way to help us calm down as we breathe. Let's keep breathing the way we've practiced. Every time you breathe out, say a word that calms you down, either loudly or quietly in your mind. This word can be "relax" or something you like, like "beach" or "summer". Try to focus on this word. If any other thoughts come to your mind when thinking of this soothing word, imagine them floating away with your exhalation, as if you were blowing them away.



RELAXATION

Relaxation is important both normally during everyday life, and now in the midst of the corona crisis. Everyone has their own individual means to relax and unwind best. Someone relaxes best by listening to and dancing to their favorite music, someone else by a peaceful walk into the forest. For someone, heavy exercising does the trick, and yet for someone else baking or a board game night with the family. What's your own way of relaxing? It is important for the parent to take care of her/himself and try to find moments to relax and calm down either by themselves, or together with the children and the rest of the family.



What are the best ways for your child to relax? In children, relaxation can be supported, for example, by a fairy tale massage or reading fairy tales together with parents, or by the same means as for parents. To support relaxation, there are many different relaxation exercises online, some of which are more related to creating relaxing images, others for embodied training. You can find relaxation exercises, for example, from google or YouTube by the keywords "*relaxing*" or "*relaxing for children*". You should always take enough time for relaxation exercises; The mind and body might not have enough time stop and orient towards relaxation, if you only have a couple of minutes of time.

While you relax, you can listen to peaceful music, for example, birds singing, or the sound of waves. It is advisable to tell the relaxing stories in a quiet and relaxed voice, taking plenty of breaks along with the narrative, so that the relaxer has enough time to create as detailed mental images as possible.

IMAGINARY JOURNEY

LAKE

Imagine you're by the lake. It is a beautiful, perfect summer day and the sun shines from the clear sky. Remember that feeling, the gentle breath of wind and the warm sunshine by the lake. The sun warms your head and shoulders. You can feel the gentle breeze on your face and hands. The water is nice and cool.

Look at the beach and notice how much sand is on the beach. What color is it? How does it feel on your feet? You stand on dry, soft sand. Take a few steps. How does it feel to walk on warm, soft sand? Walk right by the lake, now the sand feels a little cooler. Feel how sand molds around your feet as you walk. Look behind you and you'll see your footprints. The waves are smooth and wash the shore, washing your footprints away.

Look at the shore of the lake. Notice the color with all the different nuances. The waves gently wash the beach and go back, again and again, they wash the beach. Hear the rhythmic sound of waves on the beach. Look at the horizon and you'll notice the waves coming from a distance. The sunshine sparkles beautifully in the waves. The light dances flickering on the water surface. Look at the clear sky. Breathe in the fresh air.

Walk a little on the sand. Take out a soft towel and spread the towel to the sand. You're lying on the soft towel, feeling the warm sand under your entire body. The sand feels comfortable and warm on your body. The sun shines and warms your body. You feel calm, warm and relaxed. Let the warm feeling fill your mind. Soon you'll be able to open your eyes and come back to this time and space, right here. How do you feel now?



STOP YOUR THOUGHTS

STEP THE PURPOSE OF STOPPING YOUR THOUGHTS

1 Now we can practice a way to stop our own thoughts if they interfere with our own activities, or if they scare us in a way that interferes with for example, our schoolwork, or stops us from going to school or hobbies. Once we learn to stop our disruptive thoughts, it's easier for us to focus on what's happening right now. Then we can focus better on schoolwork or being with our friends, for example. What is important to remember is that our unpleasant feelings, such as fear and anger, are also useful feelings. They should NOT always be stopped! Rather, sometimes they should be dealt with in other ways. Use this method only in situations where a thought or a feeling interferes with your behavior, and prevents you from doing your homework, going to school, or being with your friends, for example.

STEP STOP YOUR THOUGHTS

2 Close your eyes and think of something that often comes to your mind and makes you nervous, worried, or even afraid. Think about this for a moment. Now, say STOP! What are you thinking now? Did the disturbing thought disappear? While practicing you can say STOP to yourself out loud, or quietly in your mind. Sometimes you can even scream "Stop" out loud and at the same time hit your hands together, if your thoughts don't otherwise agree to go away. You can also use other stopping words or phrases if "STOP" doesn't feel good to you. For example, you can say, "Quit!" or "Dismiss!" You can also wear a rubber band around your wrist and snap it against your wrist to stop thinking about something disturbing. What do you think would work for you the best? Now try this exercise again the way you choose.

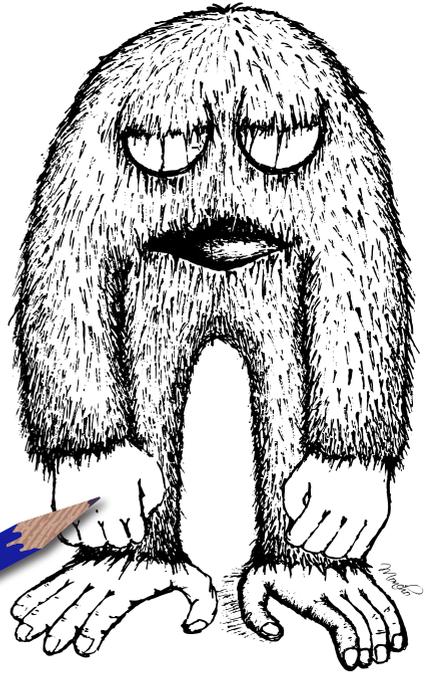
STEP REPLACING THOUGHT

3 Once you've practiced stopping the disturbing thoughts, and it's starting to work well, you can try replacing this disturbing thought with a new, comfortable or helpful thought. This will help us feel better and make us feel good. The purpose is therefore to first stop the disturbing thought, and then think about something nice. Try to remember a time when you were very happy. Or a situation when things were very good. Try to remember as many details of that situation as possible. Try to remember, for example, where you were and with whom you were. How was the weather like then, was there sunshine? What did the environment look like, were you inside or out? What was around you? What were you wearing, what kind of clothes? What did you see, what did you smell, what did you taste?

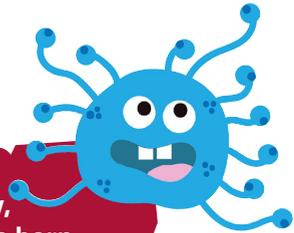
Now go back and practice stopping your thoughts, and after stopping your thoughts, always bring this good and comfortable memory or thought back to your mind.

DRAWING AND WRITING AWAY YOUR WORRIES AND SORROWS

Writing and drawing worries and sorrows, as well as nightmares, can help children and adults to feel better. You can come up with a good ending to the story, and use your imagination freely here. How could a difficult situation be resolved? What or who could help in this situation? How do you survive the situation? However, sometimes it can be difficult to come up with good solutions and positive plot twists. It's a good idea to ask your mother, father, grandparents, siblings, or friends to help you. Anything can happen when only your imagination is the limit!



You can also draw worries and sorrows. In this case, you can first draw your worries or nightmares as it is. Then you can make a new drawing, but this time make your worries or sorrows as funny or amusing as possible! When drawing, you can come up with a more positive, cheerful result.



**Although it is difficult now,
something new and good is also born
out of this. We have the ability to
survive and thrive even in harsh conditions.**

LIST OF THE WAYS TO COPE:

- Focus on good and positive things
- Write down or talk with your child every day about what has made you happy or to feel good that day
- Don't catastrophize
- Identify harmful and helping thoughts, and focus on the helping thoughts
- Focus on things you can affect
- Snow Globe Metaphor
- Stop your thoughts
- Breathing exercises
- Relaxation exercises
- Writing and drawing worries



EVERYDAY IDEAS!

- Spend some time alone with your child.
- Ask your child what he wants to do.
- Turn off your computer, phone, and other devices, and spend some corona-free time!
- List together the daily routines and rules you agree on during the corona crises and remember to be flexible if necessary.
- However, be sure to adhere enough to the family's routines and rules.
- Tell the children what you expect from them and thank and praise your children for doing well!
- Set an example for your child!
- Don't forget to have fun with your children too! You can also make a fun moment or a game of washing your hands or keeping distance, for example by associating a rhyme, a song, a play or a game to them.
 - movies, series, Netflix
 - games, board games, online games
 - books, fairy tales, telling stories, making up stories
 - old games like mirror and color, playing
 - Simon Says, to help practice the corona-related rules; Simon Says.. to stay 2 meters away from everyone!
 - listening to, playing and making music, karaoke night
 - baking and cooking together
 - crafting



References:: <https://www.cdc.gov/> • <https://estss.org/> • <https://istss.org/home> • <https://mieli.fi/fi> •
<https://www.mll.fi/> • <https://www.terveyskyla.fi/> • <https://thl.fi/fi/>

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