



## HELPING PARENTS DURING COVID-19

# Toddlers and Pre-schoolers (18 months to 4 years)

Parents and family members can play an important role in helping children cope with the many changes to daily life that have occurred due to the COVID-19 outbreak. As parents it is important we remember all children need extra love and attention from adults during stressful or difficult times.

### Signs of stress in toddlers and pre-schoolers

Just like adults, children will vary in their reactions to the COVID-19 outbreak. Some children will cope well during this time. Others may feel anxious and stressed, with parents finding themselves managing a number of challenges.

#### *Signs of stress in toddlers and pre-schoolers may include:*

- Easily upset or crying more than usual
- Returning to behaviours they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents, bedwetting or sucking their thumb)
- A change in eating behaviours, for example not eating food they would normally eat
- More clingy, “needy” behaviour
- Withdrawing from usually enjoyable activities
- Acting out
- Difficulty sleeping – either getting to sleep or staying asleep
- Tummy aches or other unexplained aches and pains

### Tips to support your toddler

- Be available for your child for extra cuddles or play. They may need a little extra “quality” time with you, which will help them feel safe.
- Young children benefit from routine, so try to keep to their routines as much as possible.
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and fears, especially those related to COVID-19 or their isolation. Ask them what they already know about the virus so you can clarify any misunderstandings they may have and provide facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child can understand. **Keep communication open, but non-alarmist. Be honest but reassuring and keep it fact-based and developmentally appropriate.**
- Limit/avoid exposure to the news and other coverage of the event, including social media.
- If you’re keeping your distance from friends or relatives you may like to help your child remain connected to them by phone or video.
- Some children need time to move and “wriggle” about. If you’re minimising time outside, try [yoga for 3-5 year old's](#) or other [online exercise programs](#) or you can download mindfulness apps such as Smiling Mind but keep in mind toddlers need interactive, fun mindfulness activities. This piece by [The Conversation](#) provides three techniques that may also be useful.

Developed by ATP Generation 3 in collaboration with SEED and the Melbourne Children's Campus