

Wellness and Pastoral Care for PCPS Families

Dear Parents

This post is to check in with you and your family. I am really excited for the school term to begin, as I am sure all the children are too. I hope you are all keeping safe during these challenging times. The staff at Padbury Catholic Primary School are keeping all of our school community in our thoughts and prayers.

Our emotional health and wellbeing is affected by changes in our social circumstances and no event in recent history has changed our daily lives quite like COVID-19. Monday was not the start of term one that we were planning for and this week may bring a mixed range of emotions for children and parents. As part of our support for families we would like to provide you with some practical information that can assist you to increase your children's wellbeing during the lockdown period.

Masks and Lockdown

One of the biggest changes for families in lockdown this time around is the requirement for everyone over 12 years of age to wear masks in public. For both adults and children face masks can be confronting or overwhelming – a constant, visible reminder of how COVID-19 is affecting our daily lives and communities. Also, when people wear face masks, you cannot see their facial expressions and this can be unsettling. It can affect the way everyone interacts with others.

The way children react to and feel about seeing people in face masks during COVID-19 can depend on their age. Younger children pay a lot of attention to faces. So they might feel anxious or upset when they cannot see your face. Or they might feel that you or other people look 'scary' or 'strange'. Older children might be more comfortable with face masks. Children of all ages might have questions about why people are wearing face masks and whether they need to wear one too.

The good news is that most children will adapt to seeing you and other people wearing face masks, especially with the right support and reassurance.

Talking with children about face masks

Talking with children about face masks can help them cope and explore their feelings. Here are some suggestions for age-appropriate ways to talk with children.

For **young children**, you can:

- Use simple language to explain face masks and what they're for. For example, 'This is a face mask. Over my nose, over my mouth. Where's daddy? Here I am!'
- Make up silly songs or rhymes about face masks. Use plenty of actions.

- Make up stories about masked characters who are superheroes.
- Dress up your child's favourite soft toys in a face mask.
- Ask your child to draw a picture of the family wearing face masks.

For **older children**, you can talk with your child about face masks. Ask if they know why adults and teenagers have to wear a face mask when they go outside. Explain in child friendly language about face masks. Stick to the facts and focus on the positives.

For example:

- 'When we talk, breathe, cough and sneeze, snot and saliva can come out of our nose and mouth. Face masks can stop the snot and saliva getting on other people. It's best to keep snot and saliva to ourselves!'
- 'Healthy people wear face masks. Lots of people, like doctors and nurses wear face masks to do their jobs. Wearing masks is one way we can help to keep everyone safe from COVID-19.'
- 'You don't need to wear a face mask. But you're helping just by washing your hands, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, and remembering not to touch your face.'
- 'I don't need to wear a face mask at home. People only need to wear them when they leave the house.'

Tune into your child's feelings about face masks

Ask your child how they are feeling and listen to what your child says. Let your child know that their feelings are OK. You can also ask your child what they need to feel better. It might reassure your child if you share your own feelings and let your child know what you are doing to cope.

For example:

- 'How did you feel about seeing everyone in face masks today?'
- 'I know that face masks can look strange. It's OK to feel unsure. I bought some face masks in fun colours and patterns. Why don't you help me choose one to wear?'
- 'It sounds like you're worried about not wearing a face mask. It might help to know that it's mostly adults who get and spread the virus and most children don't get very sick if they get it.'

Communicating with children whilst you are wearing a face mask

Face masks hide some of our facial expressions, so they can affect the way we communicate, especially with children.

If you feel that wearing a face mask is affecting your ability to communicate with your child (at the shops or on your walk), here are some things you can do:

- Turn to face your child and use lots of eye contact.

- Try speaking more loudly, slowly and clearly so your child can hear you through the mask.
- Use exaggerated expressions so that your smile or surprise shows in your eyes.
- Use body language and gestures like nodding and touching your child gently to show you are listening.
- Play 'guess the expression' with your face mask on, using your eyes and eyebrows to show different emotions.
- Play charades to give your child practise in understanding and using body language, hand gestures and movement to communicate.
- Give your child a lot of cuddles and face time when you are at home together and you're not wearing a mask.

Support Information

And finally, the Staff at Padbury Catholic are just a message away if you require any support or assistance. Please feel free to contact me also via admin@padcath.edu.au
Please also see below a range of services offering 24/7 counselling and support.

Head to Health: The Australian Government's digital mental health gateway provides a range of information, advice, and links to free and low-cost phone and online mental health services.

www.headtohealth.gov.au

Beyond Blue: Coronavirus Mental Health Wellbeing Support Service provides support on a range of mental health issues and is available by phone or online via chat or email

1800 512 348 | <https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/>

Lifeline Australia: a crisis support service that provides short-term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.

13 11 14 | www.lifeline.org.au

Hope to see you all soon.

Kind regards

Mrs Ali Fisher
PCPS Social Worker