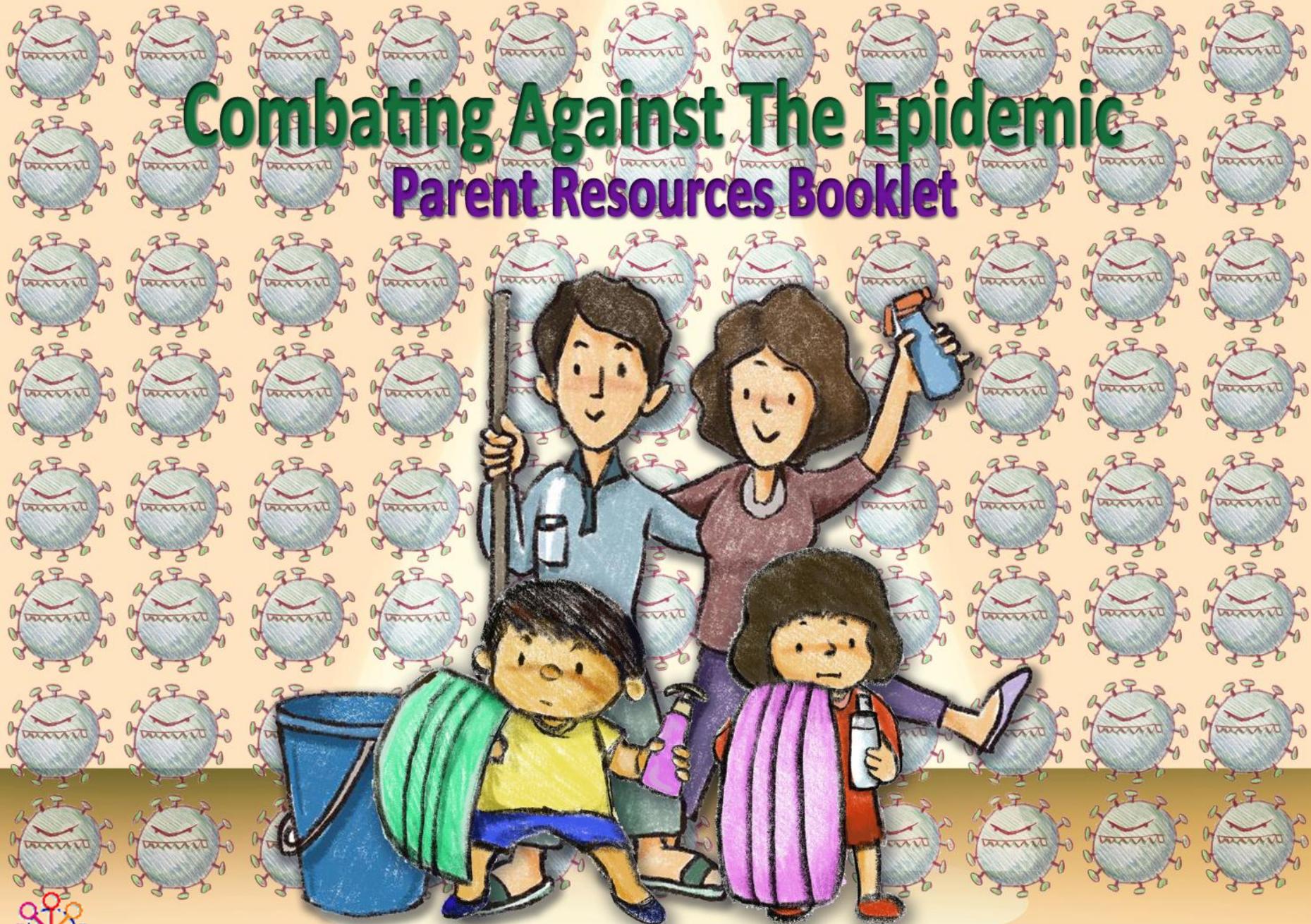


# Combating Against The Epidemic

## Parent Resources Booklet



# Preface

Many people in Hong Kong are caught unprepared by the unexpected rapid outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Parents worry about the epidemic and the availability of the protective resources. At the same time, they have to manage the “extra” vacation and outing restriction of their children during class suspension, leading to much stress and challenges to the parents.

Taking reference to some related psychological theories and evidence-based research, our professional team has designed this booklet with the aim to help parents take good care of themselves while they support their children’s physical and emotional needs, and to build up resilience in the family to combat against the epidemic together.

Dr. Florence Lee, Consultant Paediatrician  
Child Assessment Service, Department of Health



# **This booklet is divided into two sections:**



**Supporting parents'  
physical and  
emotional needs**



**Supporting  
children's physical  
and emotional needs**



# Content



## Supporting parents' physical and emotional needs

- Possible physiological and psychological responses in face of the epidemic
- Strategies to cope with the epidemic
- Stress management



## Supporting children's physical and emotional needs

- Possible reactions to an infectious disease outbreak
- Helping children to manage stress and anxiety
- When to seek for professional support?
- Advice to parents having children with Special Education Needs (SEN)





**Supporting parents’  
physical and  
emotional needs**

# Possible physiological and psychological responses in face of the epidemic

## Feeling

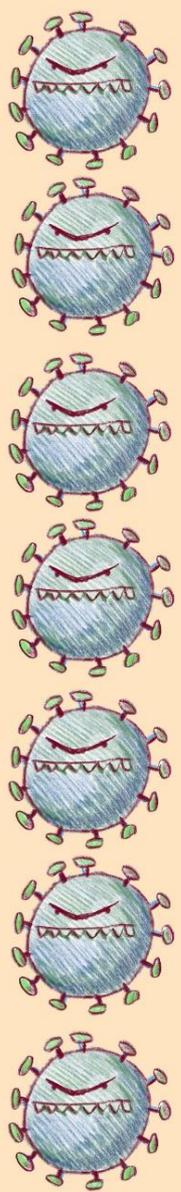
Worried, anxious, panicky, uneasy, nervous, helpless, angry, irritated .....

## Physiological response

Difficulty falling asleep, insomnia, palpitation, sweating, loss of appetite, difficulty in concentration .....

## Thought

- We are running out of masks at home and cannot buy any from shops. What can we do?
- My family member is feeling unwell, has he/she got infected?
- My children stay at home because of class suspension. What can they do at home?
- How dare people on the street don't wear masks even when they are coughing?
- How to organize my children's time at home while I go to work?
- .....





These feelings, emotions, physiological responses, and thoughts are natural and common during the epidemic. Each and every person's responses can be different.

To cope with the epidemic, we parents have to first enhance our own resilience before we can lead our children to combat against the virus together. We have to take good care of our own well-being, maintain positive attitude, make use of effective problem-solving skills, and work collaboratively with every family member to overcome the challenges.



# Strategies to cope with the epidemic

## As parents, we can:

- Maintain regular daily routine and children's learning at home
- Maintain healthy lifestyle through adequate sleep, balanced diet, and regular exercise
- Keep connected with relatives and friends and be supportive to each other
- Take initiative to care for the people around
- Be cautious about the news received while trying to keep abreast of the epidemic situation. Rely on credible sources for information and take a break when feeling overwhelmed by the surge of the information
- Respect and accept each family member's own perceptions and feelings towards the epidemic, and have an open discussion with them to develop feasible ways to combat against the virus



# Stress management – Rational thinking

1. Be aware whether our own thinking style tends to be negative or biased?

e.g. “Oh my god! I will get infected! I must stay at home!”

2. Consider other alternatives?

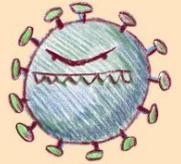
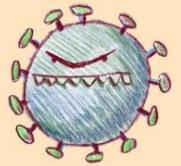
Besides your own negative thoughts, are there any positive and useful ones? If I change my negative thoughts, will I feel better?

e.g. ....

“As my children need not go to school, we can have more time at home, and I notice something more about them than before.”

“We don’t have enough surgical masks at home, so we may have to go out less often. Thanks to my relatives and friends for giving us some masks during this period.”

“Though I worry that we might get infected, I can take appropriate precautionary measures to reduce the risk of infection.”



# Stress management – Gratitude exercise

Gratitude is the understanding that we cannot take things for granted. It helps us appreciate the people and things we do have with a humble attitude. Scientific studies find that people who are more grateful tend to be happier and sleep better, and in return boost their immune system and resilience.

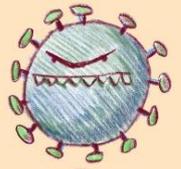
Suggestions:

1. Counting blessings (aka Gratitude Journals): There are many things in our lives, both big and small, that we might be grateful for. Recall events in the past week and write down a few things for which you are grateful or thankful of. E.g.

- children helped doing household chores during class suspension
- relatives and friends gave me surgical masks and other materials

2. Gratitude letter:

Write a letter to someone whom you are grateful. Write down the things you are grateful for and how his/her act affects you (particularly during the epidemic), and how you often appreciate his/her kindness.



# Stress management – Relaxation exercise

When we are stressed out, our bodies will send out signals, such as irregular and shortness of breath, muscle tightness, increased heart rate, etc. Relaxation exercise can help our bodies relax and ease our mind.

Suggestions:

- Diaphragmatic Breathing exercise
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise
- Imagery Relaxation exercise

(Please refer to the page on Resources for information.)



# Stress management – Mindfulness exercise

Mindfulness refers to “the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”. (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p.xxxv)

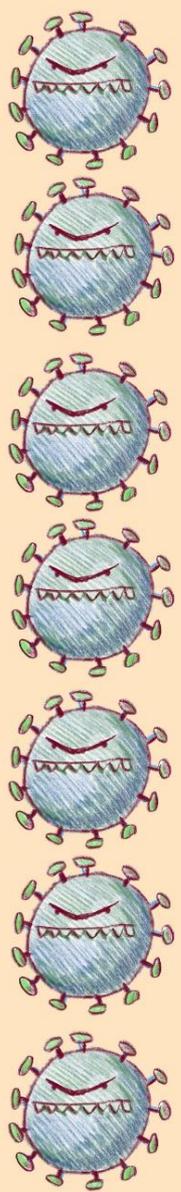
## Mindful breathing / Breathing meditation

- Sit comfortably and slowly close your eyes. Pay attention to your breath. Notice any body sensations. If you feel ok, you may continue. If you feel “not ok”, you may stop. If you feel nothing, you may continue or stop. If your mind wanders, just notice that and gently return your attention to your breath

## Mindful walking / Walking meditation

## Mindful eating

(Please refer to the page on Resources for information.)



# Mindful parenting

Scientific researches find that parents and educators of children with special needs showed significant reductions in stress and anxiety after receiving mindfulness training.

In mindful parenting, we learn to shift our attention from our children (& their behavior) back to ourselves. We can focus our attention more on the “here and now” of ourselves.

When we can manage our own stress better, we will have more “capacity” to understand our children’s needs underlying their behavior and respond empathically.





**Supporting children's  
physical and  
emotional needs**



# Possible reactions to an infectious disease outbreak

## Preschool children (0-5 years old)

**Preschool children may express stress and anxiety through:**

- Becoming clingy to parents and often asking for parents' company
- Thumb sucking or wetting the bed at night
- Mood fluctuations: crying easily or becoming agitated easily
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits (e.g. poor appetite, difficulty falling asleep, nightmares about monsters, etc.)
- Aches and pains that cannot be explained (e.g. headache, stomachache)
- Acting out the outbreak repeatedly in their play or telling exaggerated stories about it



# Possible reactions to an infectious disease outbreak

## School-age children (6-12 years old)

Besides those reactions mentioned in the previous page, school-age children may express stress and anxiety through:

- Acting younger than their age by asking to be fed or dressed by parents
- Having problem paying attention (even on their favorite activities)
- Becoming aggressive without apparent reasons
- Asking epidemic-related questions repeatedly due to anxiety (e.g. information from news, safety of family members, stock of household grocery)



# Helping children to manage stress and anxiety

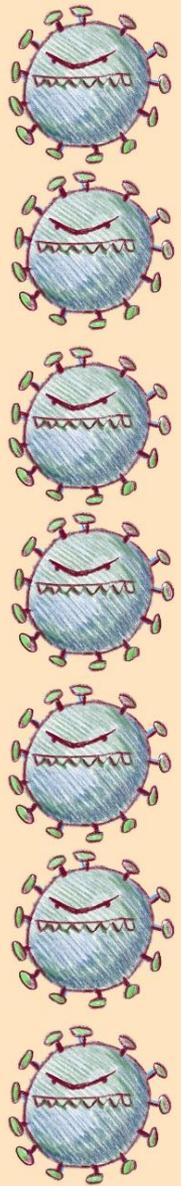
Parents and caregivers may need to tune into children's stage of development, temperament and special needs when comforting children in distress. It is vital to help them feel safe, cared for and loved. Young children usually enjoy physical contact (e.g. hugs) and company.

To help children regulate their emotions, parents may refer to Dr. J. Gottman's Five steps of Emotion Coaching and Tuning Into Kids program.

Five steps of Emotion Coaching:

1. Being aware of children's emotions
2. Listening with empathy and validating feelings
3. Labelling children's emotions
4. Helping children to solve problems
5. Setting limits

(Please refer to the page on Resources for information.)



# When to seek for professional support?

Many of the reactions mentioned in previous pages are normal when children are under stress. With parents' support, most children can learn to manage their emotions.

But if the following are noted:

- Significant emotional/ behavioral reactions persisted for 2-4 weeks
- Significant impairment in daily activities

Seek for professional help if the negative emotions remain or worsen after trying out the suggestions mentioned in this booklet.



# Advice to parents having children with SEN

## Children with attention / hyperactivity problems

- Be concise when explaining the epidemic to children in order to get their attention
- Set up a regular daily routine with children during class suspension. Include various kinds of fun and physical activities in the timetable (refer to the parent-child activity booklet)
- Break the instructions (e.g. steps of hand-washing) into small steps. Avoid giving more than two steps within one instruction at the same time
- Remind children about the natural consequence of undesirable behaviors (e.g. risk of being infected will be increased if not wearing mask)
- When there is a need to go out, explain and set up rules with children beforehand (e.g. putting hands into the trousers when lining up). Praise immediately and reward them if the desirable behavior is shown. Parents can prepare activities (e.g. riddle games) for their children when they are idled (e.g. when taking ride on a bus)



# Advice to parents having children with SEN

## Children with social and rigidity problems

- Make use of visual strategy such as pictures to help explain the epidemic and related information (e.g. parents can make reference to the posters or videos listed on the resources page to illustrate the proper steps of hand-washing)
- Prepare children what will happen in the near future, e.g. class will be suspended for the coming several weeks (can make use of calendar for explanation), people will have to wear mask whenever going out
- Set up a regular daily routine with children during class suspension
- Maintain the usual routine at home as much as possible to reduce the uneasy feeling caused by the sudden changes
- Help children express their emotions by using pictures on facial expression and drawings (refer to the parent-child activity booklet)
- Make use of social story to help children understand desirable and undesirable behaviors during the epidemic. Take into account children's age and comprehension ability when creating the social story





# Social story (example)

## <Why can't I go out or go to school?>

I go to school and parents go to work on weekdays. After school, I will go to playground to play for some time. But when there is an infectious disease outbreak, people usually stay home, and will not go out or go to school. *(Descriptive Sentences to describe context and situations)*

Staying at home will reduce the chance of getting infected with the disease, which can help protect ourselves and our family. *(Perspective Sentences to describe people's thoughts and beliefs)*

As Hong Kong has an outbreak of infectious disease recently, I will try to stay at home. Parents will guide me with play activities and home learning activities. *(Coaching Sentences to describe a suggested response)*

By doing so, everyone will praise me as a child who treasures my health and takes good precautions. *(Affirmative Sentences to stress important points by indicating commonly shared values or opinions)*



# Social story (example)

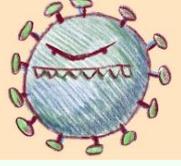
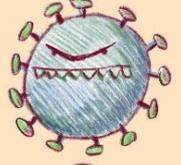
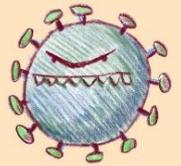
## <Why do we need to wash hands frequently?>

Recently, in Hong Kong, there is an infectious disease outbreak of a novel coronavirus, named as COVID-19. The virus can cause serious physical problems and requires hospitalization. It can be transmitted through droplets and contact, and the virus can stay alive on the surfaces for some time. *(Descriptive Sentences to describe context and situations)*

We may get infected after touching a surface/ object that has the virus on it and then touching our mouth, nose, or eyes. We may also spread the virus to others with our unclean hands. Also, if we pass food to others without cleaning our hands, people may not accept it for fear of getting infected. *(Perspective Sentences to describe people's thoughts and beliefs)*

We will work on hand hygiene before and after meals, after using the toilet and after touching unclean objects to prevent infection with the virus. *(Coaching Sentences to describe a suggested response)*

It is important to perform hand hygiene. If I do that, everyone will praise me as a young warrior who values good health and combats against the virus. *(Affirmative Sentences to stress important points by indicating commonly shared values or opinions)*



# Visual strategy (example)

**加入梘液 搓手20秒**  
Add soap Rub hands for 20 seconds

Steps for hand rubbing  
搓手步驟

1 手掌 Palms

2 手背 Back of hands

3 指隙 Between fingers

4 指背 Back of fingers

5 拇指 Thumbs

6 指尖 Finger tips

7 手腕 Wrists

當雙手沒有明顯污垢時  
你可用酒精搓手液潔手  
When hands are not visibly soiled,  
you may clean them with  
alcohol-based handrub

衛生防護中心  
Centre for Health Protection

衛生署  
Department of Health



# Advice to parents having children with SEN

## Children with emotional disturbance problems

- Parents have to observe own emotions and stay calm when explaining the epidemic to children
- Encourage children to share freely with you their feelings
- Be non-judgmental to children's feelings
- Avoid expecting children to be "brave" and "strong" during this period
- Reassure children that having "bad dreams" during this period is common, and dreams are unrealistic and will go by. Avoid asking children to tell you their dreams in detail
- Help children employ constructive ways to manage their negative feelings (e.g. breathing relaxation exercise, positive thinking)



# Epilogue

We hope this booklet can help parents treasure the time with their family, take care of themselves and their children physically and emotionally, and most importantly, walk through this period of difficulty.

Although the current situation due to the novel coronavirus is challenging, we believe that both parents and children can learn and grow with enhancement of resilience through this challenge.



# References

- Benn, R., Akiva, T., Arel, S., & Roeser, R.W. (2012). Mindfulness training effects for parents and educators of children with special needs. *Developmental Psychology*, 48(5), 1476-1487. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0027537
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377>
- Gottman, J.M., & DeClaire, J. (1997). *The heart of parenting: How to raise an emotionally intelligent child*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Havighurst, S. S., Kehoe, C. E., Harley, A. E., & Wilson, K. R. (2015). Tuning in to Kids: An emotion focused parenting intervention for children with disruptive behaviour problems. In C.A. Essau & J.L.Allen (Eds), *Making parenting work for children's mental health*. ACAMH Occasional Paper 33 (Chap 5, pp.41-50). London: Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.(2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed.).New York, NY: Bantam/Random House.
- SAMHSA (2012). [Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event – A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/tips-talking-helping-children-youth-cope-after-disaster-or-traumatic-event-guide-parents/sma12-4732). Retrieved February 4, 2020, from <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/tips-talking-helping-children-youth-cope-after-disaster-or-traumatic-event-guide-parents/sma12-4732>
- Wood, A. M., Joseph, S., Lloyd, J., & Atkins, S. (2009). Gratitude influences sleep through the mechanism of pre-sleep cognitions. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 66(1), 43–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2008.09.002>



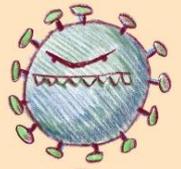
# Resources

## Novel coronavirus and personal hygiene

1. Use mask properly – Protect ourselves and protect others  
[https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/her/use\\_mask\\_properly\\_pamphlet.pdf](https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/her/use_mask_properly_pamphlet.pdf)
2. When to wash our hands  
<https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/08657-doh-pr2-r05.pdf>
3. How to clean our hands properly  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_3rYoh4gXV0&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3rYoh4gXV0&feature=youtu.be)
4. Hong Kong College of Paediatrician – Prevention of Novel Coronavirus Infection, Recommendations for parents  
[http://www.paediatrician.org.hk/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=1773&Itemid=66](http://www.paediatrician.org.hk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=1773&Itemid=66)

## Learning

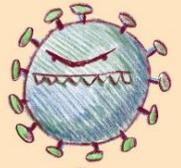
1. Hong Kong Public Library – Electronic Resources  
<https://www.hkpl.gov.hk/en/e-resources/index.html>
2. Hong Kong Education City  
<https://www.hkedcity.net/home/en/>
3. Education Bureau – Special Education Resource Centre  
<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/special/resources/serc/index.html>



# Resources

## Stress management

1. Joyful @HK  
<https://www.joyfulathk.hk/en/index.asp>
2. Relaxation exercise  
[https://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/emotional\\_health\\_tips/eht\\_re/eht\\_re.html](https://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/emotional_health_tips/eht_re/eht_re.html)  
<https://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/relaxation/relaxation.html>
3. Mindfulness exercise  
[https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/body.cfm?id=22&iirf\\_redirect=1](https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/body.cfm?id=22&iirf_redirect=1)  
<https://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/mindfulness/programs/mbsr/Pages/audio.aspx>
4. Mindfulness and Mindful Parenting  
[https://www.fhs.gov.hk/english/health\\_professional/OMP\\_eNewsletter/enews\\_20161230.html](https://www.fhs.gov.hk/english/health_professional/OMP_eNewsletter/enews_20161230.html)
5. Emotion Coaching  
[https://www.fhs.gov.hk/english/health\\_professional/OMP\\_eNewsletter/enews\\_20170630.html](https://www.fhs.gov.hk/english/health_professional/OMP_eNewsletter/enews_20170630.html)  
<https://www.gottman.com/blog/an-introduction-to-emotion-coaching/>  
<https://www.tuningintokids.org.au/>
6. Social Welfare Department Clinical Psychological Service Branch – 2020 Psycho-education information Hub for Combatting the Novel Coronavirus  
[https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site\\_pubsvc/page\\_cps/sub\\_2020](https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_cps/sub_2020)





# Combating Against The Epidemic Parent Resources Booklet

Author: Clinical Psychologist Team, Child Assessment Service,  
Department of Health

Acknowledgement: Mr. Simon Chiu for illustrations

Published in February 2020



Copyright © Child Assessment Service, Department of Health