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Help kids express themselves

By [Dr Haniza Rais](#) - July 2, 2020 @ 12:10am

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Kids are miniature adults who encounter positive and negative feelings in their daily lives.
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ONE of the biggest misconceptions we have as adults is that we think children have no feelings. Just because they can't say it in words, does not mean they do not experience feelings.

Kids are miniature adults who encounter positive and negative feelings in their daily lives.

However, they usually lack the ability to describe these feelings, and so, they are not able to properly express themselves verbally. Some of these negative feelings are translated into misbehaviour, like throwing tantrums. Some choose to withdraw from others or isolate themselves.

Younger children may have nightmares and sleepless nights. Kids may show some physiological symptoms, like frequent night urinating, vomiting or diarrhoea, which are not due to medical reasons. Their anxieties and worries are expressed in different ways.

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Going back to school after Covid-19 can be a challenge for some kids. Covid-19 has been viewed as a "huge, mean ugly monster" by the young that has ruined normal life for all. Everyone has been affected. Parents and siblings take precautions seriously and children are expected to follow.

Observing adults, children may have developed scary thoughts during the Movement Control Order. To be in school after months of absence or quarantine is a totally new experience. And for preschoolers, the new normal will be a new phase.

The first day at school, the young will start the day early. They will go through the process of detachment from the comfort of a home to that of a school setting, full of rules and regulations. Their friends may be seen as strangers. Approaching them directly may not work.

Parents and teachers need to explore such feelings and experiences. Have play therapy techniques to help them express those internal feelings. Their worries, anxieties and fears can interfere in the process of adjusting to the transition from home to school.

Some of the tools can be casual and fun. To begin with, children can be tuned in to the school mood by doing simple dances and movements with lively songs to sing. This helps them set the mood to be in a classroom with teachers and friends.

Some children would know about Covid-19, some may not. So it is good to start with what they know. Parents and teachers must allow children to ask questions and provide them with accurate answers. This is an opportunity to correct misconceptions.

Educate them about Covid-19 and other illnesses, health, hygiene and cleanliness, and how they can be affected and infected. Educate them about the importance of washing hands, social distancing and the use of masks and sanitisers. Explain that the procedures are to protect them from getting the disease. Infographics can illustrate the process as small children are more visually oriented in learning.

Teachers can also have sessions for colouring, painting and drawing. They can do bibliotherapy (using books to educate or counselling on certain issues), and share short stories on Covid-19.

Storytelling sessions can help them process the feelings of being at home for three months and coming back. Stories that have such elements can help them relate to Covid-19. It will show that they are "not alone".

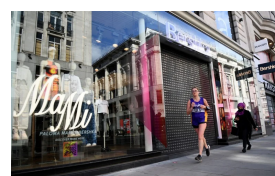
Teachers' observations are crucial as they can observe changes in the behaviours of children. Children who are in a world of their own or disassociate themselves from others need special attention. Teachers

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can communicate with parents and refer cases for professional help for further treatment.

The writer is a counselor educator at the Dept of Educ Psychology & Counseling, Kulliyyah of Education, IIUM and a crisis counselor volunteer/executive committee of PERKAMA International.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Straits Times

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