Coronavirus - supporting children with high anxiety

- Focus on what we <u>can</u> do: Give precautionary instructions about cleaning and hand washing in a concise and matter-of-fact way. Move swiftly onto typical classroom activities as routine is reassuring to children.

- When discussing the issue, talk openly, with an air of mild interest. Use comforting tones and keep to the facts. Answer children's questions honestly and clearly. It's okay if you don't have all the answers though.

- Praise children for taking necessary measures and carrying on as normal.

- Be a role model. Recognise and manage your own worries first and model this to children.

- If children show concern, reassure them that the effects on healthy young people are very mild. Try to find facts that relate the impact of the virus to the impact of things that are more tangible in their life and so highlight the mildness in relation to them.

- Promote awareness of the body's immune system; that it is constantly working against germs without us knowing. We can't and don't need to control this process.

- Ensure children are aware of the benefits of healthy eating, sleep, and exercise. Give the message that these help our bodies do the best job they can do in fighting illness.

- Acknowledge and promote acceptance of the presence of 'germs' more generally. Remind children that we are safeguarding against this particular illness, simply because it is a new one which our bodies haven't come across before, so is more likely to spread easily.

- Help children regulate more specific heightened levels of anxiety (e.g. children with existing phobias or OCDs) by having left-brain activating tasks available, such as counting, ordering and sorting and encourage use of relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing.

- Detect any obsessive or compulsive behaviours early and intervene before they become entrenched patterns of thinking. Do this by challenging unhelpful thoughts and assumptions. Frame worries as situation-specific by relating them to the current situation, which is temporary and unusual / not typical.