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COVER LIKE NO OTHER

**TALKING TO YOUR  
KIDS ABOUT COVID-19**



Protecting your children from the world you see day-in day-out as a police or emergency services worker is always at top of mind, but for once we're confronted with a problem affecting everybody, and it's outside of your control. It's hard to know the right way to talk to kids about coronavirus. Too little information and the problem appears minor, too much and it can feel like nothing they do will make much difference. They've seen people wearing face masks, they know that the situation isn't normal. The key is providing the right amount of information with the right amount of optimism, and addressing any fears they might have.

- Start with what they know. Ask them what they've heard or read about the virus
- Once you know how much information (or misinformation!) they have, add facts and discuss possibilities based on familiar experiences
- Take their questions as cues to guide the conversation. Ask open ended questions
- Keep the message as positive as possible, focus on what the world is doing to try and stop the spread
- Promote the silver linings – communities are coming together to protect the most vulnerable, and looking out for each other

When you link their questions to the actions that both authorities and communities are undertaking to mitigate risks, you can maintain a sense of control and optimism in uncertain times. It's important to be truthful; if you don't know the answer, say so. Remember to speak in a calm and reassuring manner. If you are currently feeling highly anxious about the virus, choose a time to talk to your kids once you are feeling calmer. Some further information about talking to your kids about COVID-19 can be found here: <https://www.phoenix-australia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-Families-tip-sheet.pdf>

## Help kids feel in control

As a police or emergency services worker, you deal with the unknown and crises all the time – but it's likely new to your children. While everyone is feeling a sense of helplessness to some degree, there are things you can do to help your kids feel more in control. Practice proper hand washing with them and let them know they can stay healthy by doing simple things like getting plenty of sleep and

drinking lots of water. Be a good role model for them by doing those things yourself.

Filter the news for them and put stories in context. The media will highlight the number of deaths but explain that not everyone will pass away, most people will just feel sick and some may not have symptoms at all. The measures we are all taking will reduce the number of people who will get very sick and reduce deaths.

## Everything is cancelled and I can't see my friends

While as a police or emergency services worker you know that even well-laid plans can fall apart at last minute, your kids are generally used to things going ahead as planned. Acknowledge that kids will be genuinely disappointed over the cancellation of holidays, closures of theme parks and the early ending of sporting seasons. While adults may consider these trivial matters in the overall scheme of things, for kids it can feel like the most important part of their life has been impacted.

Watch for signs of anxiety, stress or fear such as significant changes in appetite or sleeping patterns, unusual mood swings or irritability, and withdrawing from family or interests. **If you are concerned, have a chat to your family doctor or access: [\[refer help-lines\]](#)**

While it's important to maintain as normal a routine as possible, to help your family cope with the ongoing changes it might be time to renegotiate the usual rules. Perhaps allow more screen time than normal and see if there are safe ways for your kids to catch up with their friends, such as planning a FaceTime date.

## Staying safe at work

Your kids probably realise that a lot of people are staying home from work for their own safety and that as a police or emergency services worker, it isn't an option for you. It's understandable that they are worried. Focus on what measures you are taking to stay safe at work. Explain that working in your field means you are more equipped than most people to handle emergencies, have a greater understanding of infection control, and that you know how good your co-workers are at their jobs. Consider ways to decompress and decontaminate

before you arrive home to your family such as keeping a plastic box by your door for your work clothes and other items, and regularly cleaning your phone. Measures such as these will help your kids see how much effort is being made to contain the virus and will help you feel more in control, along with reducing potential infection.

## School attendance

Many parents are choosing to keep their children at home from school, and some states are moving to online education from next school term. For those families where one or both parents are police or emergency services workers, there is little choice but to continue sending their kids to school while they remain open.

Of course, for the kids this seems very unfair. While some of their peers get to remain safely at home, they must continue going to school. Some kids may feel quite scared that they are going to catch coronavirus at school, while others are feeling like they are missing out on being at home like their friends. Others might just be feeling out of place at school without the key friends they normally do everything with.

Let them know of all the measures the authorities, communities and families are taking to make sure the spread of the virus is slowed. Tell them to keep a safe distance from others, and to keep washing their hands and practice good hygiene.

**Remind them that they can talk to you about how they are feeling, encourage them to speak to a teacher, or reach out to Kids Helpline 1800 551 800.**

## Talking with younger kids

When talking to younger kids it's best to keep things simple. A good starting point to talk about the virus is explaining how germs spread and why good hygiene is important (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBG-soimPXZg>). Let them know that there are hospitals, doctors and nurses ready to treat the people who get sick.





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## Talking with older kids

With older children you can give more detail about the virus, and the measures authorities and the community are taking to slow the spread. They will also benefit from learning increased media literacy and how to identify a reliable source of information vs a non-evidence based source (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDOft1tFYx8>). Let them know that scientists around the world are working to develop a vaccine. Remind them that coronavirus is rarer than the flu and that kids tend to have milder symptoms.

## Concerns for older relatives

Many people are concerned about their older relatives and kids are no exception. They may have heard on the news or in the playground that grandparents are more likely to experience the worst symptoms of the virus, and are really worried about their own grandparents or other older relatives. Children who are used to regularly seeing their grandparents but no longer can due to social distancing will be missing them too. Organising a Skype date between your kids and their grandparents can make them feel reconnected and reassured.

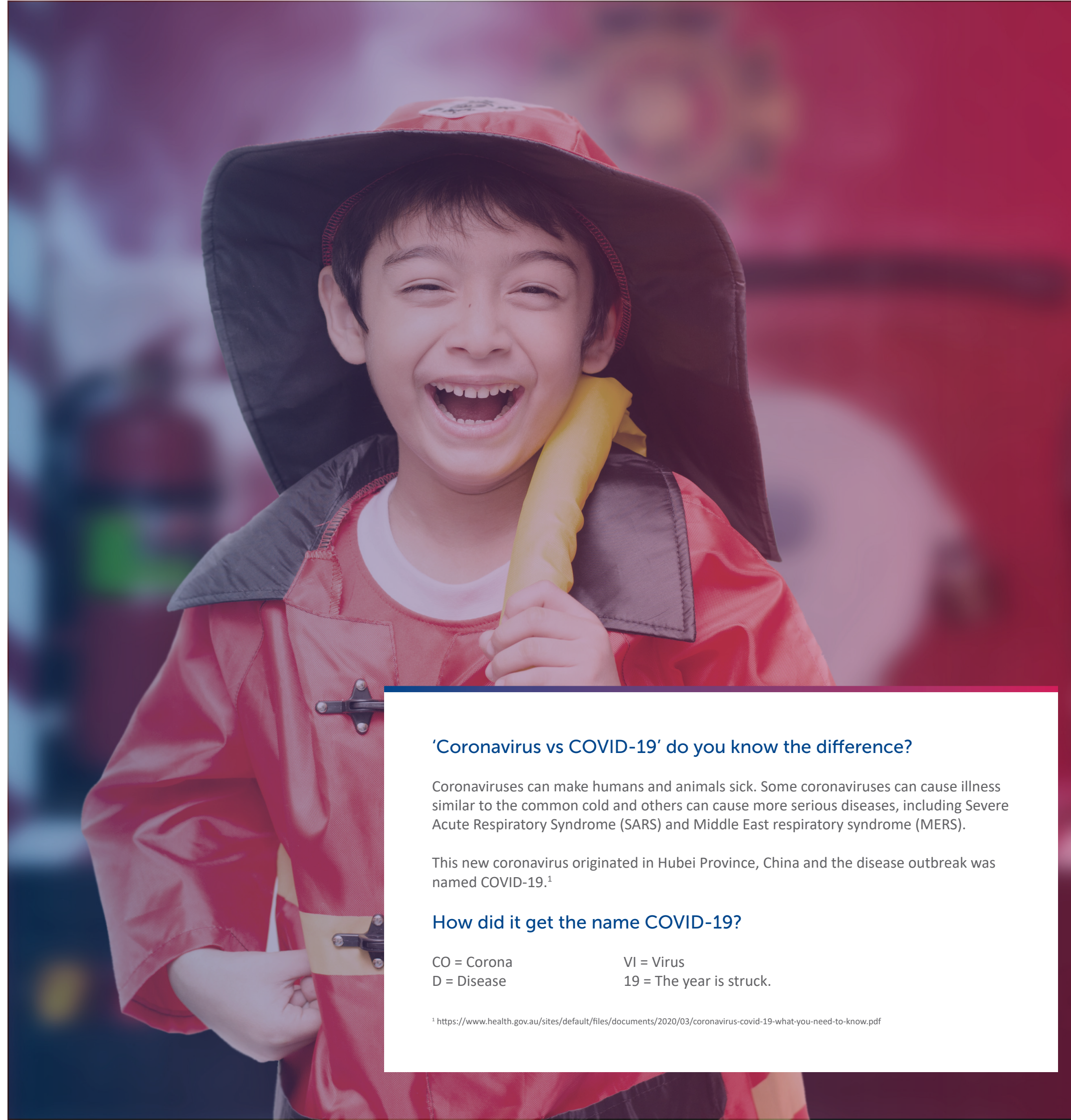
## Supporting your non-Emergency Worker Partner

As a frontliner in the fight against COVID-19, you are probably feeling stressed, anxious and conflicted right now. While you're out there protecting the community it's hard not to be concerned with the safety of your own family. The strong sense of duty you feel towards your colleagues and the community is conflicting with the responsibility you have towards your family. **If you need to speak with someone, contact: [\[refer helplines\]](#)**

## Supporting your Emergency Worker Partner

As the partner of a frontliner in the fight against COVID-19, you are probably feeling stressed, anxious and conflicted right now. Emergency service workers are proud to support Australians during this time of need but may feel guilty about potentially putting their families at risk of contracting the virus. The strong sense of duty they feel towards the community is conflicting with the responsibility they have to keep you and their family safe. **If you need to speak with someone, contact: [\[refer helplines\]](#)**

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### 'Coronavirus vs COVID-19' do you know the difference?

Coronaviruses can make humans and animals sick. Some coronaviruses can cause illness similar to the common cold and others can cause more serious diseases, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

This new coronavirus originated in Hubei Province, China and the disease outbreak was named COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

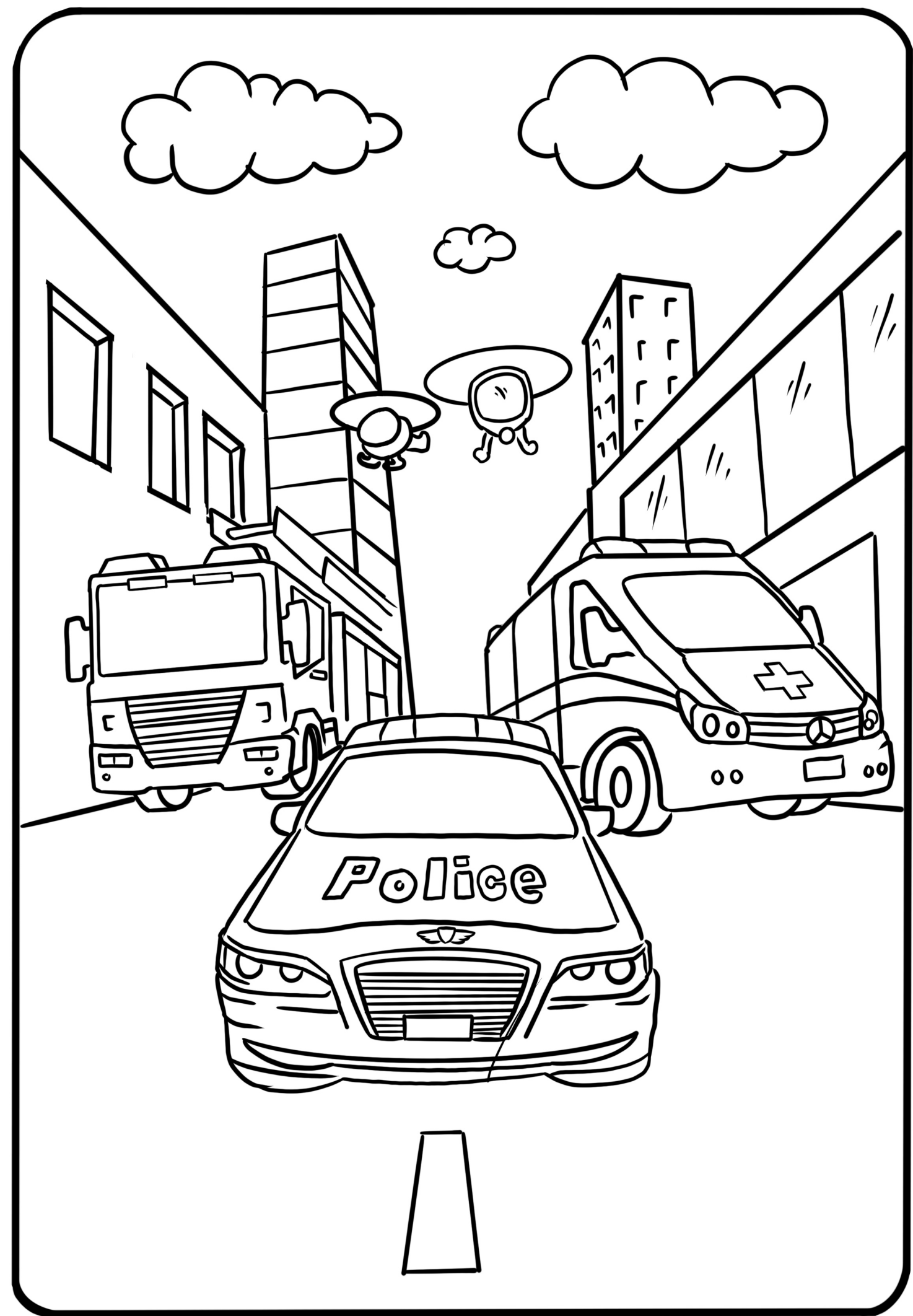
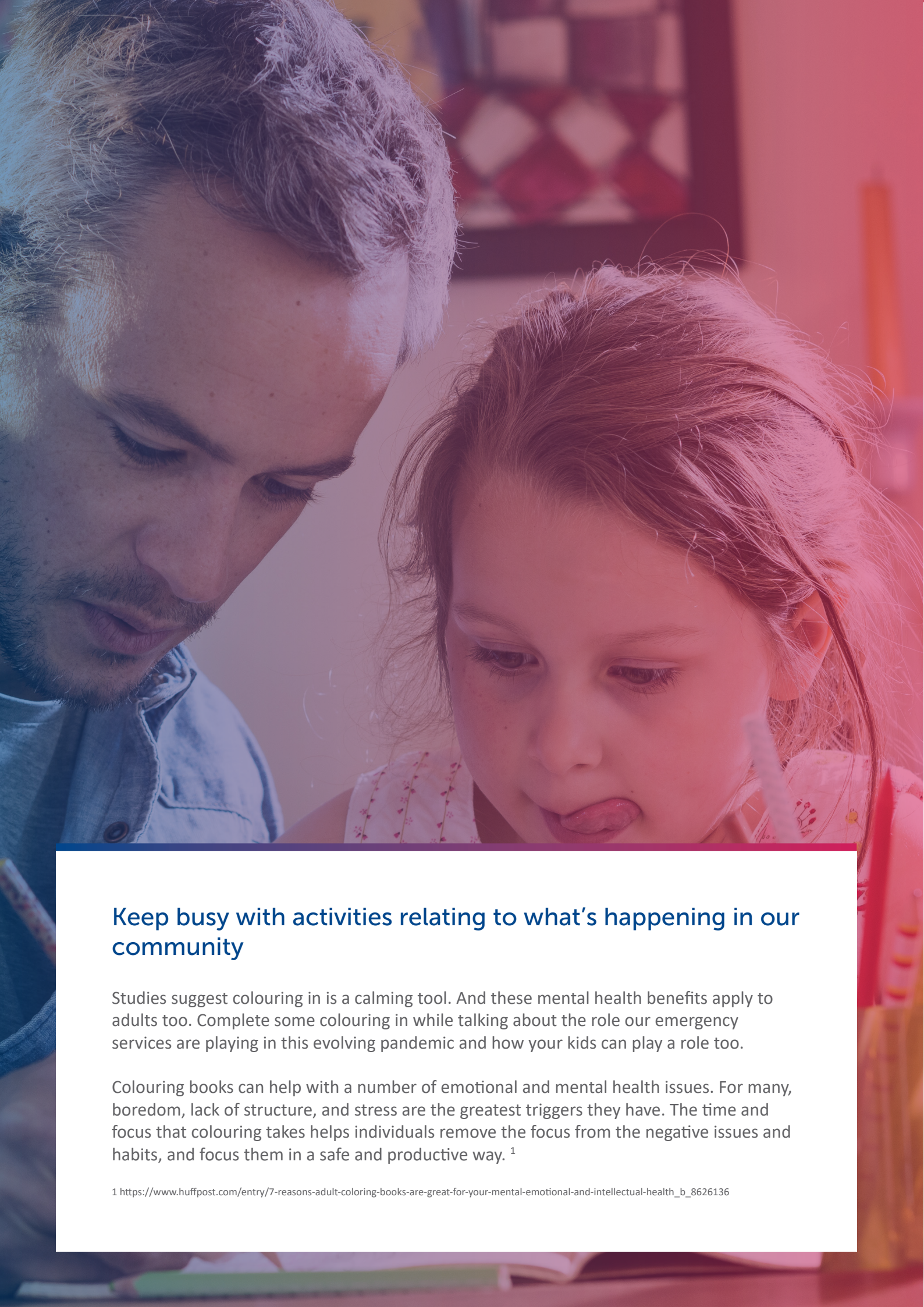
### How did it get the name COVID-19?

CO = Corona  
D = Disease

VI = Virus  
19 = The year is struck.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know.pdf>





## Keep busy with activities relating to what's happening in our community

Studies suggest colouring in is a calming tool. And these mental health benefits apply to adults too. Complete some colouring in while talking about the role our emergency services are playing in this evolving pandemic and how your kids can play a role too.

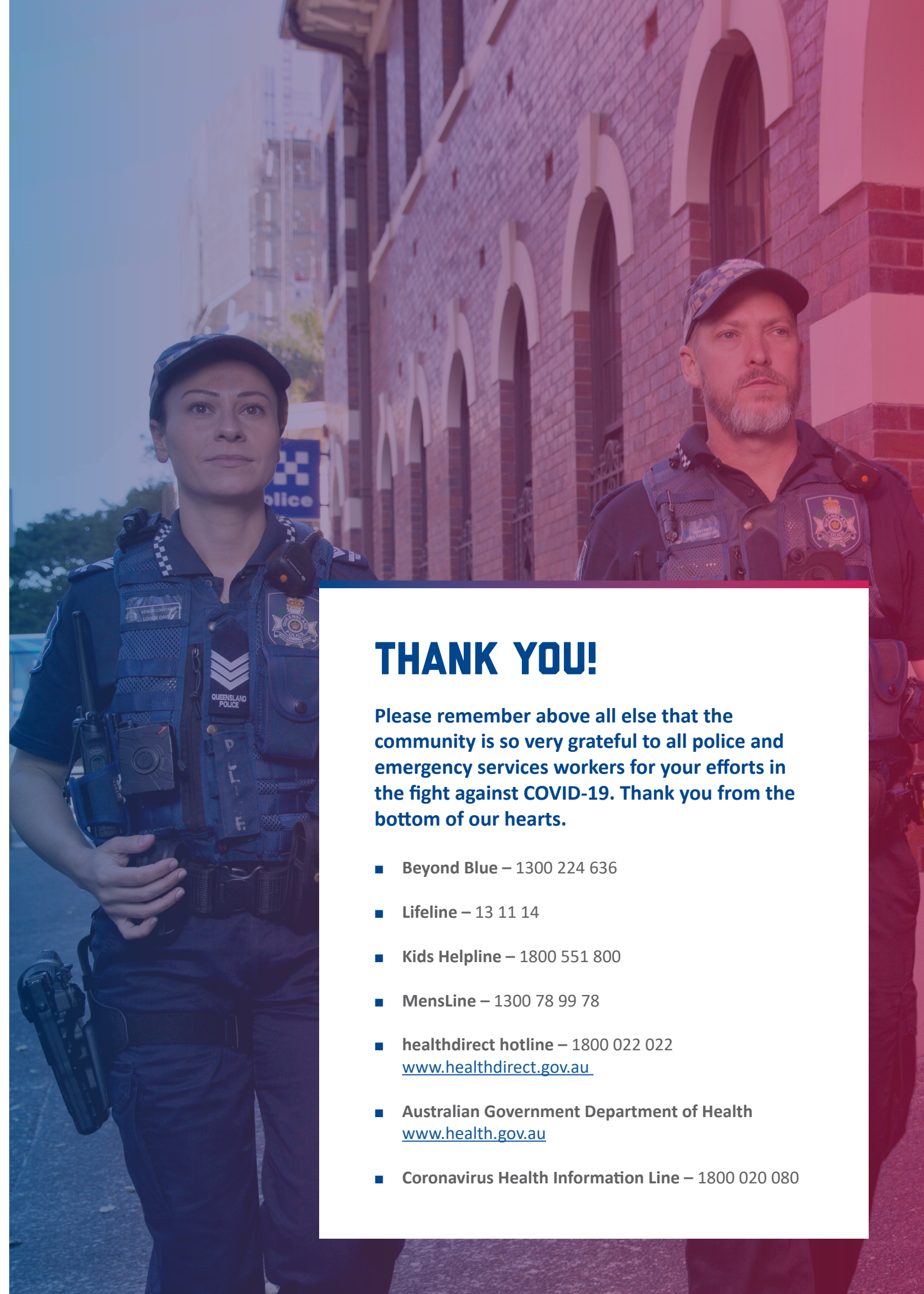
Colouring books can help with a number of emotional and mental health issues. For many, boredom, lack of structure, and stress are the greatest triggers they have. The time and focus that colouring takes helps individuals remove the focus from the negative issues and habits, and focus them in a safe and productive way. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/7-reasons-adult-coloring-books-are-great-for-your-mental-emotional-and-intellectual-health\\_b\\_8626136](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/7-reasons-adult-coloring-books-are-great-for-your-mental-emotional-and-intellectual-health_b_8626136)









## THANK YOU!

Please remember above all else that the community is so very grateful to all police and emergency services workers for your efforts in the fight against COVID-19. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

- Beyond Blue – 1300 224 636
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline – 1800 551 800
- MensLine – 1300 78 99 78
- healthdirect hotline – 1800 022 022  
[www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)
- Australian Government Department of Health  
[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
- Coronavirus Health Information Line – 1800 020 080





Call	1800 603 603	1300 703 703
Email	<a href="mailto:enquiries@policehealth.com.au">enquiries@policehealth.com.au</a>	<a href="mailto:enquiries@eshealth.com.au">enquiries@eshealth.com.au</a>
Web	<a href="http://policehealth.com.au">policehealth.com.au</a>	<a href="http://eshealth.com.au">eshealth.com.au</a>
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