

TIPS FOR PARENTS

HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH STRESS RELATED TO COVID-19

Stay Calm, Be Empathic, Listen, and Offer Reassurance

Be a good role model

- Children look to adults for guidance in reacting to stressful situations
- Model basic hygiene, such as hand washing, “coughing into one’s elbow,” and use of hand sanitizer
- Model good habits of diet, sleep, and exercise
- Adults need to ensure the health of the whole family—including themselves
- Whenever possible, try to foster a sense of control, which tends to reduce your child’s anxiety

Talk to your child

- Because the situation is fluid, stay up to date on the facts of COVID-19 and current restrictions, including “stay at home” orders, social distancing, and use of face masks (*see references to CDC, below*)
- Be aware of how you talk to your child; let your child’s questions guide you
- Offer developmentally-appropriate facts and explanations that your child understands
- Be honest and accurate; correct misinformation; dispel rumors and “scary information”
- You can acknowledge an appropriate level of concern with the virus, *without panicking*
- Acknowledge that, while the virus may not be well understood, “adults are working hard to keep you safe” and remind children that the situation *will get better*

Support Daily Habits That Might Be New to Your Child

Stay connected to school

- Clarify and share with your child dates of school closure, summer school, and fall resumption
- Make sure you and your child remain in touch with teachers, keeping up on assignments
- Help your child locate and manage learning resources and technology (ex. a laptop or tablet)

Explore new activities

- Encourage children to maintain relationships with friends, for example, “virtually”
- For children *and* adults--watching continual coverage of the news on TV can increase fear and anxiety
- Start family activities that are fun (ex. games, puzzles, family movie night, reading), creative (ex. art) and active (ex. dance, yoga)
- Children feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life (ex. choosing family activities)
- Go outside and get exercise, as long as rules of social distancing are followed
- Start projects and communication that might help others in the family (ex. elderly relatives)

Be Aware of Your Child’s Mental Health

- All children and adults may show signs of worrying, anger, fear, and “cabin fever”
- Some children, however, may be at risk of more intense reactions, such as severe anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors
- Warning signs for preschoolers include thumb sucking, bedwetting, and clinging to parents
- Warning signs for elementary- and middle-school children include irritability, agitation, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, poor concentration, difficulty sleeping, and withdrawal from activities and friends
- Warning signs for adolescents include eating disturbances, increase in conflicts and aggression, physical complaints, self harm, and delinquent behavior (ex. alcohol or drug use)
- If you are concerned about your child’s well-being, consult with your pediatrician or a psychologist

Sources of Important Information

Note: The purpose of this TIP sheet is to help families cope with stress related to COVID-19, *not* to provide facts and understanding of the actual virus and disease. For more information, please refer to:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html>
- <https://www.apa.org/research/action/children-disabilities-covid-19.html>