

Supporting Your Child During COVID-19

In these uncertain times, it is easy to become overwhelmed and experience increased worry and anxiety. Children are not immune to being impacted by these situations, even if they do not understand what is going on. It is important to take care of ourselves and to also be mindful of the way our own emotions and fears may be impacting the younger generation. It is important to remember to view this as an opportunity to teach resilience and that we have choices in the way we respond to life's unexpected moments.

For thorough information, please see the Factsheet on Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with COVID-19:

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

For highlights from the Factsheet and other things to consider:

Use Developmentally Age Appropriate Language

For all children, it is important to be honest and accurate. When children do not understand what is going on, they often can imagine situations, and their imaginations may be more frightening for them than the reality of the situation. It is okay to be honest with children, and this also helps to empower them by teaching them ways to stay safe (ex. proper handwashing, covering cough, avoiding those who are sick, social distancing)

For younger children:

Ask: Start the conversation by asking what they have heard. This gives you an understanding of how they are processing the situation. Inquire to see if they have any worries. Let them lead the conversation. Respond in a brief, calm manner and be aware that children will pick up on your emotions.

Name It: Use a specific term, coronavirus or COVID-19. This helps to distinguish this virus from other viruses they have had or could have in the future. This will lessen the fear about having cold related symptoms.

For adolescents: Be present with them, ask them what questions or concerns they have. Knowledge can help them feel a sense of control. Provide them with trusted sources of information to avoid media outlets that might provide misleading information. This is an opportunity to discuss how we have choices in the way we respond to a crisis or stressful situation. *Ask: Why do you think people are buying a cart full of toilet paper?* We can use what we are observing and turn it into a teaching opportunity on the importance of our response to a given situation.

Be Aware of Who is Listening

You want your child to hear you sounding calm and reassuring. Be mindful of the content of conversations, tone of voice and media in the background at home. They may not look like they are watching the T.V. but they very well may be. Create conversations that have a hopeful tone where they can pick up on your confidence about the situation.

Ways to Help

With your help, children can effectively manage their stress. The most important thing a caregiver can do is stay connected. Be available for listening to them, remain calm and provide reassurance. Make sure they know they are loved and that you are all in this together.

Keep a consistent routine with meals, hygiene, bedtime, exercise, a bit more structure to play time, take walks together and work out stress through music, art and play.

Help your child stay connected with their friends because this is a valuable protective factor.

Honor your child's need for privacy. Some students may need to continue their outpatient counseling appointments via telehealth, so a recommendation would be to provide a quiet, confidential location for your child to have their session with the security that no one else is listening.

You Know Your Child Best

Pay close attention to their behavior, watch for changes or symptoms of distress. Signs could include:

Younger children: being sensitive to the emotions of caregivers and displaying the same emotions, such as crying or hypervigilance. Regressed behaviors, asking for help with previously mastered tasks, and wanting to be held more. There could be increased aggressiveness or hyperactivity as they work out feelings of anxiety and worry.

Adolescents: signs include withdrawing and not verbalizing how they are feeling through avoidance. Somatic complaints could appear, i.e. stomach pain, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance, headaches or GI distress. Other signs include agitation, isolation or lack of energy.

Do Not Hesitate to Reach Out for Parent Guidance:

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