

Parental/Guardian Guidelines for Helping Your Child/Children Cope With all the Changes Related to COVID-19

Stay calm, listen and offer reassurance

Children will react to and follow your reactions. You are their role model. They learn from your example. Your discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease your child's fear.

Deep breathing is a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Demonstrate such strategies. Do breathing exercises with your children.

If true, remind your child that your family is healthy, and you are going to do everything within your power to keep loved ones safe and well. Tell your child that your family is following the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, which includes social distancing. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. While we don't know how long it will take to "flatten the curve," Reduce the number of those infected, we do know that this is a critical time. We must follow the guidelines of health experts to do our part.

"We will have more family time to spend together." Suggest they draw or write their thoughts and feelings. Allow older children to connect with their friends virtually. They probably don't fully understand why parents/guardians aren't allowing them to be with friends. Showing older children, the "flatten the curve" charts will help them grasp the significance of social distancing. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings, create masterpieces, Sing, laugh, and go outside if possible to connect with nature and get needed exercise. Offer lots of love and affection.

Parents/ Guardians should monitor television viewing and social media

During a crisis, it is wise to limit television viewing of sites that increase fear. Parents should also monitor the internet and social media sites that their child/children are using as well as their own. Explain to your child that many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may include rumors and inaccurate information. Talk to your child about factual information about this disease. Watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information, information designed for adults, can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young. Engage your child in games or other exciting activities instead.

Be honest and accurate

Children often imagine situations worse than reality; therefore, offering developmentally appropriate facts can reduce fears. Tell your child/children; this disease spreads between people who are in close contact with one another—when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus spreads when one touches infected objects or surfaces.

For additional factual information, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> website.

Know the symptoms of COVID-19

According to the CDC, the following symptoms appear in a few days after being exposed to someone with the disease, or 14 days post-exposure: Fever, cough, and shortness for breath. For some people, the symptoms are similar to having a cold; for others, they are more severe or even life-threatening.

Model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices

Encourage your child to practice daily good hygiene—simple steps to prevent spreading the virus. Wash your hands multiple times a day for 20 seconds. Compliment your child when he/she uses a Kleenex or sneezes or coughs into the bend of their elbow. Teach them the importance of throwing away used tissues immediately after sneezing or coughing. Sadly, handshakes and hugs need to be limited to immediate family members, at least for now. Offering guidance on what your child/children can do to prevent infection offers a greater sense of control, which reduces anxiety. Please encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly; this will help them develop a robust immune system to fight off illness.

Parents/Guardians know their child/children best

Let your child's/children's questions guide you. Answer their questions truthfully but don't offer unnecessary details or facts. Don't avoid giving them the information that experts indicate as crucial to your child's/children's well-being. Often, children/youth do not talk about their concerns because they are confused, or they don't want to worry loved ones. Younger children absorb scary information in waves. They ask questions, listen, play, and then repeat the cycle. Children always feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life. A sense of control reduces fear. Keep explanations age-appropriate. Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should balance COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people make every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as "adults are working hard to keep you safe." Upper elementary and early middle school children are more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads in their area. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss the efforts national, state and community leaders are doing to prevent germs from spreading. Upper middle and high school students can discuss issues in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19.

Adapted from, Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource, National Association of School Psychologists, NASP, 2020.