

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD COPE WITH COVID-19

Your children are hearing and seeing the impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic of COVID-19 is challenging children's beliefs that the world is a safe place. Empty shelves, closed schools, and ongoing news coverage are all harsh reminders of our child's (and our) vulnerability. Kids may be all but immune to this new virus, but they are susceptible to the anxiety surrounding it. All children will respond differently to trauma depending on age. Below are examples of reactions according to age group:

Preschool:

Fear of being alone, increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors, nightmares, speech difficulties, loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting, change in appetite

School Age (6-12):

Increased irritability, whining, clinging or aggressive behaviors, nightmares or sleep disturbances, lack of appetite, physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches), loss of interest, increased desire for parents' attention, forgetfulness

Teens (13-18):

Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches), sleep and appetite changes, symptoms of anxiety, decrease in energy, ignoring health concerns or suggestions, isolating from peers via technology

Understanding Media Exposure

Watching media coverage can increase fears and anxiety. The more time children spend watching coverage about COVID-19, the more likely they are to have negative reactions. Graphic images and news stories may be upsetting to children. As caregivers, limit your children's exposure to the media. The younger the child, the less exposure he/she should have. You may choose to eliminate all exposure for very young children. If you watch with your children, discuss the news stories with them. Ask older children and teens what they have seen on the internet. **Be available to talk about feelings, thoughts, and concerns. Constantly reassure them of their safety and of plans to keep them safe.** Do not assume what your children are thinking; ask questions to find out if your child is understanding information accurately. Be mindful of what you and other adults say about COVID-19 in front of children; children listen most when adults are unaware. You may choose to share positive media stories. Reassure your children that many people are working together to help the community be safe. This will give them a sense that adults are actively taking steps to protect them, their pets, friends and family.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Make children feel safe - give them space to share their feelings
- Increase coping skills - yoga, deep breathing, exercise, sensory play
- Increase family and friend communication through electronic means
- Limit media exposure and screen time
- Give facts and let the child lead the discussion; don't give more information than what is being asked by your child
- Encourage basic needs (eating, sleeping) and establish a routine
- Give your child specific things they can do to feel in control - wash their hands
- Let your kids know that it's normal to feel stressed out at times
- Keep checking in with your child
- Model the behavior you want to see in your child
- Take care of yourself