

SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH A CRISIS



Children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate.

This guide includes the following topics:

- Things to consider when you are together
- How parents can role model good health and well-being
- When to seek professional help
- How to help your child cope

WHEN YOU'RE TOGETHER



CREATE ROUTINE

- Get a daily calendar and schedule activities hour by hour
- Keep bedtime/wake up time routine at the same time every day
- Have mealtimes at the same time and try to have them together
- Monitor television, internet, and social media viewing—both for you and your children. Watching continual updates on the crisis may increase fear and anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information, or information designed for adults, can also cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

TALK OPENLY

- It is natural to have moments of stress and intensity at home given this situation. Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of not feeling safe, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a disease outbreak.
- Encourage age-appropriate questions and help them understand the current situation in a comforting and patient way.
- Have children talk about their feelings and validate them. Help them express their feelings through drawing or other activities.
- Have your family choose a "family code word" that makes the family laugh (when the family is coming apart and the tension is rising).

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Check back in with your children on a regular basis or when the situation changes.
- Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities.
- Remember, you are a role model for your children. How you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.

HOW PARENTS CAN ROLE MODEL GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING



Adults can role model a variety of activities to promote well-being for children and strengthen one's bond with each other providing a foundation for a healthier, happier life.

Physical Well-Being

- **Regular Exercise:** Show the importance of staying active by engaging in daily physical activities such as walking, yoga, or sports.
- **Healthy Eating:** Prepare and enjoy balanced meals, emphasizing the value of nutritious food choices.
- **Good Sleep Hygiene:** Maintain a consistent sleep schedule and emphasize the importance of rest.

Emotional Well-Being

- **Mindfulness Practices:** Practice mindfulness, meditation, or deep breathing exercises to manage stress and demonstrate emotional regulation.
- **Positive Communication:** Use kind, constructive language and actively listen to others to foster healthy relationships.
- **Emotional Expression:** Model how to express feelings appropriately and seek support when needed.

Mental Well-Being

- **Learning and Growth:** Show a love for lifelong learning through reading, exploring new skills, or pursuing hobbies.

- **Resilience Building:** Share strategies for overcoming challenges, like breaking tasks into manageable steps or seeking help when needed.
- **Gratitude Practice:** Reflect on and express gratitude daily to cultivate a positive outlook.

Social Well-Being

- **Community Involvement:** Volunteer or participate in community service to show the value of helping others.
- **Healthy Boundaries:** Demonstrate how to set and respect personal boundaries in relationships.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Model constructive ways to resolve disagreements through dialogue and compromise.

Overall Well-Being

- **Work-Life Balance:** Show how to prioritize family time and personal interests alongside professional responsibilities.
- **Self-Care:** Practice self-care routines, such as spending time on hobbies or relaxing activities, to show the importance of personal rejuvenation.
- **Acts of Kindness:** Engage in small acts of kindness to promote empathy and compassion.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Your Child's Mental Health Matters!

WHO TO CONTACT

- 1. Pediatrician:** Start by discussing concerns with a pediatrician, who can provide referrals to specialists.
- 2. School Counselor:** They can assess the child's behavior in the school setting and provide guidance.
- 3. Licensed Mental Health Professional:** Seek therapists, psychologists, or psychiatrists specializing in children and adolescents.
- 4. Emergency Services:** If the child poses an immediate risk to themselves or others, contact emergency services or a crisis hotline.

BEHAVIORAL CHANGES TO OBSERVE

Emotional Indicators

- **Excessive Anxiety or Worry:** Constant fear, nervousness, or difficulty separating from caregivers.
- **Low Self-Esteem:** Frequent expressions of worthlessness or self-doubt.
- **Trauma Responses:** Flashbacks, nightmares, or avoidance of situations tied to a traumatic event.

Physical Symptoms

- **Sleep Issues:** Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or frequent nightmares.
- **Appetite Changes:** Significant weight loss or gain without a clear physical cause.
- **Physical Complaints:** Recurring headaches, stomachaches, or other unexplained symptoms linked to emotional distress

School-Related Concerns

- **Decline in Academic Performance:** Sudden drop in grades or disinterest in schoolwork.
- **Difficulty Concentrating:** Inability to focus or complete tasks.
- **Disciplinary Issues:** Frequent visits to the principal's office or suspensions.

Risky or Harmful Behaviors

- **Self-Harm:** Cutting, burning, or other forms of self-injury.
- **Talk of Death or Suicide:** Any mention of wanting to harm oneself or end their life.
- **Substance Use:** Experimenting with drugs or alcohol, especially at a young age.

Developmental Concerns

- **Delayed Milestones:** Not reaching age-appropriate social, emotional, or communication skills.
- **Regression:** Returning to behaviors typical of a much younger age, such as bed wetting or clinginess.

Family or Environmental Factors

- **Major Life Changes:** Difficulty adjusting to divorce, relocation, or loss of a loved one.
- **Exposure to Trauma:** Witnessing violence, abuse, or a significant traumatic event.
- **Chronic Stress:** Living in an environment with ongoing conflict or instability.

Gut Instinct

- If a caregiver feels that something isn't right, trust that instinct. Early intervention can prevent minor issues from escalating into major problems.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD COPE

PRESCHOOL



Reactions

- Fear of being alone, bad dreams
- Speech difficulties
- Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting
- Does not want to eat or is eating too much
- Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors
- Thumb sucking

How to Help

- Patience and tolerance with one another
- Provide reassurance (love, affection and letting them know everything will be okay)
- Encourage expression through play and storytelling
- Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements
- Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime
- Maintain regular family routines
- Keep the news coverage off at your home as much as possible

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD COPE

SCHOOL-AGE (6-12)



Reactions

- Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior
- Clinging, nightmares
- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)
- Does not want to talk to friends, does not have interest in activities they used to like
- Competition for parents' attention
- Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school
- Worry about getting sick or dying

How to Help

- Patience, tolerance, and reassurance
- Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet
- Regular exercise and stretching (normal and healthy for children to play sick and play doctor and make everyone better)
- Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)
- Participate in structured household chores
- Discuss the current crisis and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community
- Encourage expression through play and conversation
- Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school
- Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD COPE

ADOLESCENT (13-18)



Reactions

- Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)
- Sleep/appetite disturbance
- Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy
- Ignoring health promotion behaviors
- Isolating from peers and loved ones
- Concerns about stigma and injustices
- Increase in conflicts

How to Help

- Patience, tolerance, and reassurance
- Continue routines
- Encourage discussion of crisis experience with peers, family (but do not force)
- Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games
- Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings
- Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school
- Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during the crisis