

HELP YOUR CHILD COPE WITH THIS PANDEMIC!

by Doug Puder, MD



It's a stressful time for all of us. Even those children who don't understand COVID-19 can be worried and fearful. They react to changes in routines, isolation, social distancing, extra handwashing, wearing facemasks, and more.

Children and teens need to be reassured that whatever they are feeling is ok. There is no right or wrong way to feel about this global pandemic. Parents should get in the habit of checking in with each child privately throughout the day to listen to their concerns.

Pay attention to what your child sees and hears:

Limit your child's screen time, but also your own! Children are affected when news is constantly on (TV or internet) and shows COVID-19 numbers and sad images. Some information, stories, and social media posts may be based on inaccurate information. Take the time to look through this information together and discuss it in a way that works for your child's age.

Manage your own anxiety:

If you are feeling anxious, take some time to manage your own fears. Take a few breaths before starting a conversation or answering your child's questions. If you are having trouble controlling your own anxiety, counseling can be very helpful. It is available for adults and children via televisits until face-to-face can resume. Call us...

Be a good role model to your children:

Children learn most from what they see their parents do. Set a good example by taking care of your physical and mental health! Self-care helps your children too! Avoid catastrophizing, remind yourself we will get through this together.

Maintain structure and routines:

Make sure you are taking care of the basics. Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping kids happy and healthy. For example, plan a daily walk. Children do better when they know what the day will bring. When possible, tell them about any change in routine ahead of time.

Children often worry more about family and friends:

They've heard that older people are more likely to be seriously ill from COVID-19, and might worry about grandparents and relatives. Calls or video chats with relatives can be reassuring.

Help your child feel in control when possible:

Kids feel empowered when they know what to do to keep safe. Take any opportunity to let your child feel in control by making choices or taking steps to keep healthy. Let them suggest ways to stay strong and well. Explain that regular hand washing also helps stop viruses from spreading to others, but that now you are going to be extra careful. But you must set limits too!

What if your child is too focused on negative thoughts?

Listen to their worries and suggest positive outcomes. For example, just because there is a risk that something will happen, does not necessarily mean it will. If this isn't working, call us. Counseling can really help a child deal with this stressful time!

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