



COVID and Kids' Mental Health



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Pandemic-related changes have been challenging for everyone over the last year. Parents are trying to work while helping their children learn, and children are experiencing school in periodic or ongoing isolation.

Kids are resilient, but we are now heading into the second year of pandemic living. The “new normal” of these changes has been difficult for kids, who are experiencing higher rates of mental health issues.

“Children thrive when they are safe and protected, when family and community connections are stable and nurturing, and when their basic needs are met.

The coronavirus pandemic and the unprecedented measures to contain its spread are disrupting nearly every aspect of children's lives: their health, development, learning, behavior, their families' economic security and their protection from violence and abuse.

And their mental health.”

World Economic Forum: <http://bit.ly/309PawO>

What can parents do?

We can't change the circumstances of the pandemic, but parents can make it easier for their children to cope with the disruptions that include changes to routines, school and socializing, and insecurity about safety and missed life events.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a list of parental resources for children's wellbeing during COVID-19, including links to resources to help support children's social, emotional and mental well-being during COVID-19 and beyond: <http://bit.ly/3ropNDL>

Parent tips to help maintain stability and support to children:

- Talk, listen, and encourage expression.
- Give honest and accurate information.
- Teach simple steps to stay healthy.
- Be alert for any change in behavior.
- Reassure children about their safety and well-being.

Parent tips to help with stress:

Recognize and address fear, stress and behavior changes.

Children might worry about getting sick with COVID-19, and about their loved ones getting sick, too. Excessive worry or sadness, unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, and difficulty with attention and concentration are signs of stress in children. Adult support is essential to help children cope.

Teach and reinforce everyday preventive actions.

Empower children to protect themselves. There are actions we can take to help prevent getting sick. Be a good role model — if adults wash their hands often, stay at least 6 feet apart from others, and wear their masks in public spaces to help protect themselves and others, then children are more likely to do the same.

Help keep children healthy.

Schedule well-child and immunizations visits for children. Seek continuity in mental and occupational health care. Help children to eat healthy food and drink water — instead of sugar-sweetened beverages — for strong teeth. Encourage children to play outdoors — it's great for physical and mental health, and can help children stay healthy and focused.

Help children stay socially connected.

Reach out to friends and family via phone or video chats. Write cards or letters to family members they may not be able to visit.

Tips for talking to children

Remain calm. Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.

Reassure children that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.

Make yourself available to listen and to talk. Let children know they can come to you when they have questions.

Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma.

Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online.

Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

Provide information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child. Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs. Remind children to wash their hands frequently and stay away from people who are coughing, sneezing or sick. Also, remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, and then throw the tissue into the trash.

<http://bit.ly/3rct0pP>