

## CHILDREN COPING WITH STRESS

### KEY WORDS:

COVID-19, Stress, anxiety, cope, react, children

When parents deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Not all children respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for in children:

- Excessive crying and irritation
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (e.g., toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)
- Ignoring health promotion behaviors

### THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT YOURSELF:

- Children need adults’ love and attention during difficult times. Give them extra time and attention.
- Listen to your children, speak kindly and reassure them.
- If possible, make opportunities for the child to play and relax.
- Keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible, or help create new ones in a new environment, including school/learning as well as time for safely playing and relaxing.
- Provide facts about what has happened, explain what is going on now and give them clear information about how to reduce their risk of being infected by the disease in words that they can understand depending on their age.
- Take time to talk with your child about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child can understand.
- Reassure your children that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.

- Limit your child's exposure to media coverage of the event. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Be a role model; take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members and rely on your social support system.
- Talk to your children so that they know you are prepared to keep them safe.
- Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games
- Review safety plans before a disaster or emergency happens. Having a plan will increase your children's confidence and help give them a sense of control..
- Encourage them to share concerns and ask questions.
- You can help your children feel a sense of control and manage their feelings by encouraging them to take action directly related to the disaster.
- It is important for family members to work together to share information about how each child is coping after a traumatic event.
- Children with special needs may need extra words of reassurance, more explanations about the event, and more comfort and other positive physical contact such as hugs from loved ones.

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#### Reference:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/coping.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>
- <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-caregiver-guide-to-helping-families-cope-with-the-coronavirus-disease-2019>
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