



Helping Kids Cope During COVID-19

For Parents and Caregivers

How Kids Respond to Stress

Children respond in different ways to stress and change.

Sometimes stress in children can look like: excessive crying or irritability, clingy, unhealthy change in eating or sleeping habits, excessive worrying or preoccupation with COVID-19 or news, withdrawing, Difficulty with concentration, unexplained increase in headaches, body aches or stomach aches, increase in frequency of tantrums and returning to habits they've outgrown like bedwetting.

Some children react right away, while others may show signs of difficulty later.

Children and teens react, in part, based on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with emergencies calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children.

Talking to Children

Give your child a space to talk about their concerns and listen intently. Choose a time and space with little interruptions or distractions.

Provide clear information and stick to the facts.

Answer questions in a way that your child or teen can understand. Consider their age and what they've already been exposed to.

Limit your family's exposure to news coverage, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

Empower your child through education, like teaching them about handwashing – make it fun!

Explain why they are staying home from school: "We are staying home to slow the virus from spreading."

Talk to children about things they CAN DO vs. things they can't.

Reassure your child or teen 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.

What Parents Can Do

Give lots of attention, reassurance and affection.

Be a role model – take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, eat well, and stay connected with your friends and family members.

Be on the lookout for behavioral changes and trust your intuition. Don't explain away changes in a child's behavior; talk to them about it.

If you have concerns, explore appropriate professional help and reach out for more information or support.

Try to limit screen time; Too much screen time can cause irritability and an increase in tantrums.

Planning for Homeschooling

Keep a routine and try to build in opportunities for children to play and relax throughout the day. Engage your child in creating their new routines. Ask questions like, Do you want to work on science in the morning or afternoon?

Post the daily schedule so children can easily consult it. Have children be in charge of following the schedule.

Have your child select an area in the home to complete their school work and engage them in creating and decorating the learning space.

Gather resources and get creative. YouTube, Facebook, Teachers Pay Teachers and Pinterest all have great educational opportunities.

Consult with teachers.

References: World Health Organization, MO Dept. of Mental Health, CDC

For more information and resources, check out our website:

SaintLouisCounseling.org