

Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting From COVID-19 – Part 1

(Sourced from the National Association of School Psychologists – NASP - which is the world's largest organization of school psychologists and represents more than 25,000 school psychologists throughout the United States and an additional 25 countries worldwide.)

Families across the countries are adapting to the evolving changes in daily life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes trying to keep children occupied, feeling safe, and attempting to keep up with schoolwork as best as possible. None of this is easy, but it helps to stay focused on what is possible in order to reinforce a sense of control and to reassure children that they are okay, and that the situation will get better.

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking the necessary actions that reduce the risk of illness. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety. This is also a tremendous opportunity for adults to model for children problem-solving, flexibility, and compassion.

STAY CALM, LISTEN, AND OFFER REASSURANCE

- Be a role model. Children will react to and follow your reactions. They learn from your example.
- Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19. Your discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease your child's fear. If true, remind your child that your family is healthy, and you are going to do everything within your power to keep loved ones safe and well. Carefully listen or have them draw or write out their thoughts and feelings and respond with truth and reassurance.
- Explain social distancing. Children probably don't fully understand why parents/guardians aren't allowing them to be with friends. Tell your child that your family is following the guidelines of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which include social distancing.

- Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. Showing older children, the "flatten the curve" charts will help them grasp the significance of social distancing.
- Demonstrate deep breathing. Deep breathing is a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Do breathing exercises with your children.
- Focus on the positive. Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings, create masterpieces. Sing, laugh, and go outside, if possible, to connect with nature and get needed exercise. Allow older children to connect with their friends virtually.
- Establish and maintain a daily routine. Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being. It also helps children and other family members respect others' need for quiet or uninterrupted time and when they can connect with friends virtually.
- Identify projects that might help others. This could include: writing letters to the neighbors or others who might be stuck at home alone or to healthcare workers; sending positive messages over social media; or reading a favorite children's book on a social media platform.
- Offer lots of love and affection.

This series will be continued in forthcoming parts