

Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting From COVID-19 – Part 3

(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.)

STAY CONNECTED TO SCHOOL

Locate learning resources. Schools' capacity to conduct virtual learning experiences will vary greatly, but most schools are providing lessons and learning activities for children to do. Take advantage of the many companies and online platforms currently offering free learning opportunities. Identify additional resources. Know if your school is providing additional resources, such as meals, or technology, such as a laptop or tablet.

Stay in touch. Find out how the school is communicating with families and students. Be sure to read any communications you receive. Check with your children, particularly older ones, as they may be receiving information directly that would be helpful for you to know.

Connect with school staff. Reach out to your child's teacher and other relevant school staff if you have concerns about their coping and keeping up with assignments or activities.

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

According to the CDC, symptoms of fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath appear within 14 days after being exposed to the disease.

For some people, the symptoms are similar to having a cold; for others, they are more severe or even life threatening.

MODEL BASIC HYGIENE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE PRACTICES

Practice daily good hygiene. Encourage your child to practice these simple steps to prevent spreading the virus.

Wash your hands multiple times a day for 20 seconds. Singing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" or "Happy Birthday" twice is about 20 seconds.

Compliment your children when they use a Kleenex or sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow. Teach them the importance of throwing away used tissues immediately after sneezing or coughing.

Sadly, handshakes and hugs need to be limited to immediate family members, at least for now. Foster a sense of control. Offering guidance on what your child/children can do to prevent infection offers them a greater sense of control, which reduces anxiety.

Build the immune system. Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly; this will help them develop a robust immune system to fight off illness.

BE AWARE OF YOUR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members, even if showing signs of some anxiety or concerns, such as difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Some children, however, may have risk factors for more intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors. Risk factors can include a pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one. Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks.

Pre-schoolers—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.

Elementary school children—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.

Adolescents—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

This is the third and concluding part of the series