COPING WITH COVID-19 *FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY*

COPING RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

THE NEED FOR SELF CARE DURING COVID-19

Young children need their parents to offer a calm, stable and predictable "home base" for them. It's a challenge, but as a parent, the best way to help your child be at their best is to take care of yourself. Remember, how you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.

WAYS TO SUPPORT YOURSELF

- Choose activities that make you happy, reduce your stress level and leave you feeling calm.
- Pay attention to how you are feeling.
- Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation. Meditation and other replenishing activities are a great way to de stress. Take a moment to breathe and feel present.
- Be kind to yourself. This is not the time be hard on ourselves for not being the "best" parent. Right now, we need to be gentle with our kids, ourselves and our community.
- Stay connected to loved ones.
- Balance media consumption with other activities you enjoy.
- Eat healthy. Exercise. If you can, get outside.
- You don't have to have all the answers. It is okay to say, "I don't know the answer to that but there are many smart, dedicated people working on this, so we just have to do our part and let them do theirs."

HOW TO SURVIVE TELECOMMUTING AND HOMESCHOOLING

- Try to keep daily routines as stable as possible during this break.
- While a routine is good for your family, rigidity to that schedule is not. Things happen, so give yourself grace. Give kids grace too and let them explore creative ways to learn.
- Make time to do things at home that have made your family feel better in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising or engaging in meaningful activities consistent with your family and cultural values.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT COVID-19

- Keep updated about what is happening with the outbreak by getting information from credible media outlets, local public health authorities and updates from public health websites.
- Minimize exposure to media outlets or social media that might promote fear.
- Focus your family discussion on supporting children by encouraging questions and helping them understand the current situation. Check in regularly with them.
- In a developmentally appropriate way, talk about what the current disease outbreak is, how it is contracted, possible dangers and protective steps being taken by your family and community.
- Create a list of community resources that will be helpful during an outbreak.

Department of Community and Human Services Customer Service
703.746.5700

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others, call or text 24/7 PRS CrisisLink Hotline at 703.527.4077 or text "connect" to 855-11. For TTY, please Dial 7-1-1.

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HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH COMMON REACTIONS TO STRESS

INFANT TO 6 YEARS OLD

Infants may become crankier, cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more. Young children may return to behaviors they have outgrown, like toileting accidents, bed-wetting or being frightened about being separated from their caregivers. They may also have tantrums, difficulty sleeping, bad dreams, speech difficulties or changes in appetite.

HOW TO HELP

For infants through age 3

- Breathe. With your child, pretend your fingers are birthday candles and blow them out one by one.
- Lay your child on their back, put a favorite stuffed animal on their tummy and watch it slowly move up and down as they inhale and exhale.

For children ages 3 and older

- Be patient.
- Provide reassurance.
- Avoid media exposure.
- Maintain regular family routines.
- Plan calming and comforting activities before bedtime.
- Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements.
- Encourage expression through play.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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.

7 TO 10 YEARS OLD

Older children may feel sad, mad or afraid. They may focus on details of the crisis and want to talk about it all the time, or not want to talk about it at all. Other signs to look for include:

- Trouble concentrating.
- Excessive crying, whining, irritation or aggressive behavior.
- Clinging and nightmares.
- Sleep and appetite changes.
- Headaches and stomachaches.
- Withdrawal from peers.
- Loss of interest.
- Competition for parents' attention.

HOW TO HELP

- Be patient and reassure them that they are safe.
- Let them know it is okay to feel upset.
- Share how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- Think things through with them.
- Encourage play and connecting with friends, regular exercise and stretching, and participating in educational activities and structured household chores.
- Set gentle but firm limits.
- Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions.
- Limit media exposure.
- Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation.
- Help them express their feelings through drawing or other activities.

PREETEEN AND TEENAGER

Some preteens and teenagers respond to trauma by acting out. They can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their emotions may lead to increased arguing and even fighting. Other signs of distress include:

- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Unhealthy eating and sleeping habits.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Unexplained headaches or body pain.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.
- Decrease in energy.
- Isolation.
- Concerns about stigma and injustices.
- Avoiding schoolwork.

HOW TO HELP

- Encourage, but do not force, discussion of outbreak experience with peers and family.
- The message you want to send is, "I know you're scared, and that's okay. I'm here, and I'm going to help you get through this."
- The goal isn't to eliminate anxiety but to help your child manage it.
- Encourage them to connect with friends, participate in family routines and chores, and support younger siblings.
- Limit media exposure.
- Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and injustices occurring during outbreak.

Resources compiled from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Child Mind Institute, Zero to Three, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Public Health Insider and Mental Health First Aid.

FOR MORE HELPFUL RESOURCES, VISIT ALEXANDRIAVA.GOV/DCHS

FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ON COVID-19, VISIT ALEXANDRIAVA.GOV/CORONAVIRUS