



Crisis
Counseling
Program

WASHINGTON, D.C.

A large, abstract graphic made of thick, pink, hand-drawn scribbles that covers the left and bottom portions of the page. The scribbles are dense and chaotic, creating a textured, organic shape.

Supporting Your Child Through COVID-19

Parent Booklet for COVID-19 and parenting

Be a role model

Children will look to the adults in their lives to decide how to act and react. By following the guidelines, reinforcing them with children, and reacting in a calm manner you provide a model for children to follow. This is also the case with coping skills. Try modeling deep breathing or talk through a problem you have and how you solved it so they can see how to do it themselves.

Maintain a routine and schedule

Between virtual learning, hybrid learning, work and daycare, our schedules have all changed dramatically. The more you can establish and maintain a home routine the safer and more secure your child will feel. It acts as their anchor in a sea of Covid-19 chaos. It can be as simple as having a dinner and morning or bedtime routine that is the same every day. Or making sure they have a place that is just for them to do their schoolwork. Things are constantly changing with this virus so providing routines leads to some stability.

Focus on the Positive

It is hard to do many times in our current circumstances but providing a model of positivity children are offered hope and feelings of safety.

Limit Exposure to News and Headlines

Too much exposure to news, either through social media, TV, print material, or the radio all can lead to increased anxiety. Try to limit the amount of information children see and hear about Covid-19 and the negative aspects of the virus.

Focus on what is in control

So many things feel out of our control these days and children have even less control than adults. Help your child understand some of the things they DO have control over and even consider giving them things to do to feel in control. Washing your hands, choosing a meal, learning how to cook, or finding ways to help others are all ways children can take control of things in their lives.

Stay connected to your community

Identify your community resources, such as church, school, or support groups and make sure you find ways to stay connected. Many of these community resources all have additional ways to help you if needed. This can include resources such as meals, technology, mental health supports, or school supplies. In addition, staying connected to school is one way for children to keep the social connection strong as well as allow their teacher and other school staff to give you feedback on how they are doing both academically and socially.

Tips for Talking to Kids about Covid-19

Make Yourself Available

Let children know that you are available to talk whenever they have questions but make sure you don't overwhelm them with information. Be available and open when they want to talk or come to you with a question. Answer without judgement or shame and it will encourage them to come back the next time. A key way to engage children in continued conversation is to ask them thinking questions that allow them to think and respond, which shows that you are interested in what they have to say. For example, ask them what they think about a situation instead of immediately giving them an answer.

Test the Waters for Information

By finding out what your child already knows you meet them where they are instead of providing too much or too little information. Here are some tips to help:

Young Children: Keep it brief and remind them they are safe. Provide them with tools for what they can do to help stop the spread of germs. Create fun activities to help them understand the concept like experimenting with glitter on your hands then washing with and without soap. Remind them that adults around them are doing everything they can to help keep people safe and provide them with examples of how people are helping.

Elementary-Age Children: As children get older they might have more questions and you might find that you have to help them understand and clarify rumors they hear from others. Continue providing them with information about how they are safe and focus on the larger groups that are helping, like scientists, government, or local community organizations. Discuss ways in which we can all contribute in helping as well in a safe way.

Middle and High School Age Children: Children at this age have the ability to do their own research and you are able to help guide them in analyzing it. You are helping them discover truth from fiction as well as providing them with factual information about what is happening with COVID-19. They are able to engage in more abstract and deep discussions about the virus and impact it has on your family, local, national, and world groups. They are also able to help in family decision-making and planning about how to handle situations or volunteer at home.

Follow your child's lead.

Let them guide the conversation. If they continue to ask questions keep talking, but if they lose interest or stop asking questions it is ok to let them know you are there later if they would like to talk more. Try to keep your questions open ended and vague enough to let them ask what is needed. For example. When they ask about coronavirus you might respond with, "what have you heard about it?" to gauge their level of understanding and what information or mis information they have received.

Keep the discussions at their age level.

Depending on your child's age and developmental level you might respond differently to their questions. For example, older children and teens may have more questions about the more abstract concepts related to COVID-19 (i.e, politics or views on why people are getting sick, eec). Younger children may just need facts and reassurance of safety.

Be truthful and compassionate

Giving children the correct information is essential in these times however, you also want to make sure you are offering only the information they need and providing it in a way that allows them to continue to feel safe. You can do this by making sure you have the correct information yourself and when you deliver it to them, always follow up with ways in which you will support them and share ways they are safe and protected. When you don't know an answer, just be honest and use the opportunity to research it together. Check the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#) for up-to-date, reliable information about coronavirus (COVID-

19). Make sure you are researching on sites that don't have news headlines, instead find sources of information that provide facts to avoid unnecessary, scary information.

Know when to ask for help

Parents and caregivers are often the best supports for children but when you feel your child might need more than you can give reach out to local community resources. If you see changes in your child that are impacting their daily functioning, it could be a sign that they need additional mental health support. Some of the signs you might see as red flags for additional help might include:

- Increased anger or sad outbursts
- changes in appetite, energy, desires or interests
- Change in sleep patterns or increased nightmares
- Difficulty with concentrating or focusing
- Trouble making decisions
- Increased complaints of physical problems such as stomachaches, headaches, etc.
- Changes in weight
- Thoughts or attempts at suicide
- Substance use and abuse
- Reduced excitement about activities they love
- Decreased self esteem and self confidence
- Regressing to behaviors they had when they were younger
- Constantly looking for reassurance and the need to be with you

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Coping-with-Stress-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/sma14-4885>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/children.html>

Handwashing and Hand Sanitizer Use at Home, at Play, and Out and About

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/hand-sanitizer-factsheet.pdf>

NASP COVID-19 Resource Center

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>