



Helping Children and Teens Cope during COVID-19

Honest Information and Open Communication

Children and teens are keenly aware of the world around them and need the support of a trusted adult to help them cope during these moments of uncertainty. Children and teens feel more secure when they are given honest information and an open space to ask their questions and express their concerns.

Using simple, truthful and concrete information can help alleviate their fears and concerns. Saying “I don’t know” is okay. Avoid promises that can’t be kept such as “don’t worry, no one in our family will get COVID-19”. Instead, help them list things they can control, such as physical distancing and hand washing. Validate their fears and anxieties to help normalize the experience.

Answering the tough questions:

What is Covid-19? It’s a new virus that everyone is still learning about and it has flu-like symptoms that can be shared from person to person. Some people have it and don’t feel sick at all. The majority of people who feel sick will likely get better at home, while some may need to go to the hospital to be cared for by doctors and nurses.

Will I die from it? Most people who become sick with COVID-19 are able to get better at home. We can all do our part to keep the virus from spreading, this means washing our hands often and staying home. When outside, staying 6 feet or 2M away from other people, which is about 2 arms lengths away.

Can I hang out with my friends? We all need to do our part to keep the virus from spreading from person to person. It’s difficult to stay away from your friends but there are safer ways to communicate such as video chatting and texting. You can also play games online and stream videos at the same time.

Sense of Control and Routine

Give children and teens a daily schedule to provide normalcy and predictability. Involve them in creating it and provide them as many choices as possible, such as choosing when to do their homework, what the family activity will be for the day or what they want for a snack.

Consider building “COVID-Free time” into each day, the news and social media outlets can be overwhelming with constant information. Children and teens may easily get confused by the various news sources, therefore, create time to discuss what they have seen to help clarify any misconceptions or knowledge gaps. Additionally, teach them where to find credible sources in order to gain accurate information.

Provide creative experiences to change up the routine so that they have something to look forward to. This can be turning dinner into a restaurant-like experience, having a mini-Olympics at home, making art and hosting a family-art gallery, or filming a movie with a set, characters and story line.

This is an opportunity to make memories together!

	Their understanding of COVID-19	How COVID-19 may affect them	What can help them feel better
0 to 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will sense the disruption in routine Will pick up on any emotional stress the caregiver may have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in routine Separation if constant caregivers are not able to be with them (i.e., grandparents who normally babysit) In the future, when going back to their normal routine, they may struggle with not having their caregivers constantly around and available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent, daily routine Reassurance Video chats with loved ones Pictures of and items that smell like the caregiver if they are not present Familiar play, toys, and experiences
2 to 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 is a very abstract concept that is difficult to grasp May have misconceptions or over-imaginative ideas of what COVID-19 is May start to worry if they caused it or see it as punishment May believe it will be like this forever 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty understanding parents are home but have to work and may not be available to them May act out because of new limits and may not understand it's not punishment Sleep disturbances More clingy than usual Increased energy due to removal of typical outlets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple and concrete language Be aware of language use—saying 'Germs' instead of 'Bug' as bug may be interpreted as a real insect. Explain that it's 'right now' but 'not forever' Be creative and playful in approach such as creating a hand washing game or demonstrating hand hygiene while singing a song Help the child name their feelings or have 'worry time' outlets to allow for self-expression and acknowledgement of their feelings Provide firm and familiar limits
5 to 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May worry about themselves or loved ones getting sick Will learn indirectly by watching, listening, and absorbing information being discussed around them Will seek more information and ask questions Will look towards caregivers how to react and how to engage in discussion about COVID 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased uncertainty, fear, and anxiety from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of control and independence Loss of routine and activities Uncertainty in education and child care providers Loss of peer interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be open and honest with them. Use concrete information. Address any misconceptions that may come up. Control the amount of information that is said in front of the child. Keep it helpful and informative but not overwhelming Teach them things they can do to prevent the virus such as physical distancing and hand hygiene Show illustrations, picture books or videos to give them a visual (i.e., understanding the virus, changes in their routine, hand washing or identifying their feelings) Give realistic choices when possible (i.e., choosing meals or activities) Involve them in positive activities (i.e., making thank you or motivational signs for the window, helping elderly neighbors with groceries)
12+ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May believe they are invincible and won't catch it May see official recommendations as an overreaction Can be overwhelmed and confused by viral information shared on social media and not understand whether or not it is accurate information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of independence Increased time with caregivers Decreased time spent socializing with their peers May feel frustrated, sad or angry that they are missing out on important milestones (i.e., transitioning in and out of school, graduation, dances, and sport teams) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide them accurate and credible resources to do their own research if they are curious Acknowledge their emotions about social distancing and missing out on social activities. Offer creative ways for them to stay engaged Allow independence and privacy when possible and give them an active role in decision-making