

Mental Health in Children and Youth during COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is impacting our children and youth. Children and youth can get sick with COVID-19, but their social, emotional, and mental well-being can also be affected. Changes in their routines, breaks in learning or changes in where and how they learn, feelings of loss of security and safety, and physical distancing from family and friends can create a great amount of stress and anxiety. Trauma faced at this developmental stage can continue to affect them across their lifespan.



Watch for changes in your child's behavior that could indicate stress:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bed-wetting in younger children).
- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens.
- Poor school performance or avoiding school.
- Difficulties with attention and concentration.
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past.
- Unexplained headaches or body pain.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

If you or a family member are struggling with trauma or distress caused by COVID-19, contact:

VA COPES Warm Line Toll Free (call or text): 877-349-6428

9 AM - 9 PM Monday - Friday

5 PM - 9 PM Saturday - Sunday

Disaster Distress Helpline : 1-800-985-5990

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for English, 1-888-628-9454 for Spanish



Steps to take to support children:

Support new structure and routines

- A schedule might include time outside, time for virtual school activities, exercise, and participation in social activities while maintaining physical distancing, such as a Zoom or FaceTime game night.



Use screen time constructively

- Balance screen time for school and fun. Use of social media to try dance challenges, photography projects and other activities, based on their interests, can boost their confidence. Limit exposure to news coverage as that might be misinterpreted or frightening.



Set boundaries and provide purpose

- Assign age appropriate chores and engage children in family activities.



Discuss the facts about COVID-19 and the pandemic

- Have a regular weekly check-in when children and adults can discuss COVID-19 information as a family using trustworthy, science-based sources. This can help clear up misunderstandings and give parents a chance to answer children's questions honestly and clearly.



Recognize hidden anxieties

- Ask open-ended questions about children's concerns to provide them a chance to express their fears. Praising children for behaviors such as handwashing, mask-wearing, and physical distancing shows them that they can play a part in protecting their own health and that of other people around them.



Be a good role model

- Stigma and discrimination hurt everyone by creating fear or anger towards others. When you show empathy and support to those who are ill and take steps to protect yourself and others, your children will too.



Offer reassurance

- Remind children that researchers and scientists are learning as much as they can, as quickly as they can about the virus and are taking steps to keep everyone safe.

For more resources about COVID-19 and children's mental health please visit:

[American Psychological Association](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Illness: Virginia Chapter](#)

[CDC: Helping Children Cope](#)

[CDC: Parental Resources Kit](#)

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