

Back to School Resources for Return

Health and Well-Being

How to Support Children's Social, Emotional and Behavioral Health and Well-Being

For Parents and Caregivers (#Parents)

Potential Behavioral Health Needs (#Potential)

Where to Get Help (#Help)

Additional Resources (#Resources)

FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

The information on this website is intended to provide practical ideas and easy steps to help support child (and adult) well-being.

Model Resiliency and Healthy Responses. When adults care for themselves, they model healthy behaviors for children. Children watch and repeat how adults manage stress. As a result, it's important for adults to cultivate their own physical, mental and emotional well-being.

Keep Adult Conversations with Adults. When processing uncertainties or even frustration, do so in a way that limits a child's exposure and models a healthy response.

Have Frequent and Solution-Focused Communication with Other Caregivers. Make sure children see the adults in their lives as members of the same team. This team may include the child's other parent, caregiver, teacher, coach or daycare provider. Keep open communication about what children are saying and doing; it may give insight to how they are feeling. When adults are working out any concerns or issues, they should do so away from children and use solution-focused skills. Monitor words, tone and body language exhibited in front of children.

Model Safe Health Practices for School or Other Public Places. Continue to practice and reinforce healthy habits such as hand-washing that may be expected in other settings. Children are more likely to practice these health habits when they are away from home if they have already been practicing them when they are at home.

Talk to Children about Current Events. Have age-appropriate conversations with children and be sure all adults in the household are using the same language to describe current community or global events. Share only developmentally appropriate facts with children. Focus on exhibiting calmness to avoid cultivating anxiety or distress in children.

Check in with Children Often. Create opportunities for children to share what is on their minds by asking open ended questions or making statements that do not simply suggest a yes or no response. Examples include "tell me about your day" or "what did you learn new today?" Listen attentively and show interest in what children have to say. For smaller children, make sure to sit or kneel on their level when talking with them.

Let Them Play. Play is often referred to as a child's language. Just like adults need to talk through difficult topics to process them, children need to play to process the difficult things in their lives. This can be true for younger and older children alike. Opportunities for preferred activities, especially with adults, can provide authentic chances for conversation and connection.

Encourage Expressive Activities. Encourage imaginative and expressive activities that can help children share how they are feeling (examples include, shaping or molding clay, drawing, coloring, listening to or playing music, singing, dancing and journaling). This may allow children to process their emotions in safe and productive ways.

Create a Structured Environment. Provide children with structure and routine. Have a daily schedule with general activities posted in the home. Smaller children may benefit from pictures rather than words in a schedule. Children do better and feel safer when they know what to expect next, whether is it homework, play, meal or school time.

Monitor Online Safety. Teach children responsible decision making when online. Ask them questions about what they are doing online and check on this frequently to ensure they are practicing online safety.

Give Children a Sense of Responsibility. Have a list of age-appropriate chores. For example, a student in kindergarten may be able to help clean up from dinner with the supervision of an adult, but a student in high school may be able to prepare dinner one night a week. Talk with children about chores and come up with a plan together to complete them. Expecting children to help around the house is good for them, as well as helpful to the rest of the family! Setting expectations and showing children how to do chores can be helpful in allowing them to feel a sense of accomplishment for contributing to the household.

Create Special Time. Parents and caregivers should set aside at least 10 minutes a day to focus on their child. More time is better. Actively listen to what he or she says and stay positive. If the child is younger, play with him or her during this time. Child-focused play has many benefits to child-adult relationships. Take time to help the child maintain friendships with relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents) or friends.

Spend Quality Time Together. Take a walk, play a board game or have dinner together. Read together – child to adult and adult to child. Put away all technology. Take turns sharing something happy about each day. Cook or bake favorite foods together. Children can help with meal preparation and clean up.

Show and Share Gratitude. Identify positive things, ideas or events and share these with children. Dedicate time daily to share statements of gratitude each day. This can be done on the way to school, at dinner or before bed. Keeping a gratitude journal may be helpful to both adults and older children.

Stay Active. Encourage children to play, walk or hike outdoors and be sure get outside with them as well. If the weather does not allow for outdoor time, try yoga, having a dance party or watching online videos that encourage exercise or movement indoors.

Maintain Healthy Eating and Sleep Habits. A nutritious, balanced diet can promote overall wellness. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has provided online resources (<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>) to encourage healthy nutrition. In addition, be sure children are getting enough sleep. Have the same nightly routine and bedtime on both weeknights and weekends to maintain consistency. The Centers for Disease Control has posted recommendations (https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html) for how much sleep children should get each night.

Focus on the Positive. Point out the “helpers” in the world and the good things they are doing. Stay age appropriate, limit details about potentially frightening situations and emphasize the good being done.

Smile and Laugh. Let children see the adults in their lives smile and laugh. Have fun with them. Not only can it feel contagious to smile when someone else does so, but it can also release endorphins, which are chemicals created by the body to relieve stress and pain and are associated with happiness.

Remember, No One Can Do It All. As good as all the advice may seem, it is nearly impossible to do it all at once with perfection. It is important to take things one step at a time. No one is perfect and that is okay! Take things one day at a time, learn from mistakes and adjust as needed. If things do not go as planned one day, start again fresh the next day and model a good attitude and problem-solving skills for children.

POTENTIAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NEEDS

Increased anxiety, inattention and a decrease in focus are some examples of typical stress responses. It is important for adults to monitor these responses closely to be sure they do not interfere with a child's daily functioning. Talk to the child's teacher to see what is happening at school.

Below are some important notes about behavioral health.

If the Child Currently Receives Behavioral Health Services. If the child is in therapy, contact his or her provider about options for teletherapy, in person therapy, or ideas of things to do at home to support his or her treatment goals.

If the Child Takes Medication for Behavioral Health. If the child is prescribed any medication for behavioral health, consult with his or her physician and follow medical recommendations.

If the Child Shows Safety Concerns. If the child is demonstrating risky behaviors (self-harming behavior, threats to self or others, drug or alcohol use, harming animals or smaller children), create a plan to provide consistent supervision. If the child has a mental health provider, follow-up with the provider immediately. If there is an immediate safety concern, contact local police, a local hospital, 911 or crisis response team.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Following are key resources:

Ohio Crisis Text Line (<https://mha.ohio.gov/Families-Children-and-Adults/Get-Help/Crisis-Text-Line>): Text 4hope to 741741

Ohio COVID CareLine (<https://mha.ohio.gov/Health-Professionals/About-Mental-Health-and-Addiction-Treatment/Emergency-Preparedness/Coronavirus/COVID-CareLine>) 1-800-720-9616

Find addiction and mental health treatment (<https://findtreatment.gov/>)

Contact a local alcohol, drug and mental health board (<https://www.oacbha.org/mappage.php>)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

On Our Sleeves- The New Self Care (<https://onoursleeves.org/find-help/tools-for-you/coronavirus/new-self-care>) On Our Sleeves- Mental Health Benefits of Gratitude (<https://onoursleeves.org/home/family-resources-education/700childrens/2020/05/gratitude>)

MHARS- Lorain County - Family Toolkit (<https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmharssl.org%2Ffamilytoolkit%2F&data=02%7C01%7Cbobbie.boyer%40mha.ohio.gov%7C21fc7434d1e44b468a8708d828e89ab4%7C50f8fcc494d84f0784eb36ed57c7c8a2%7C0%7C0%7C>)

USDA Choose My Plate (<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>)

CDC Sleep Guidance (https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html)



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Keeping Children Calm at Home

Keeping your children calm at home, especially during a pandemic, is key for their mental health. Research shows it is important for children to feel safe,

keep healthy routines, and manage their emotions during this uncertain time. Here are some tips from [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) to help parent your anxious kids:

Address Their Fears:

- Reassure your child that they are safe and you are there for them
- Let them know that they aren't alone
- Answer questions simply and honestly
- Acknowledge their feelings, and validate them
- Keep in touch with loved ones and friends
- Model good coping mechanisms for them to duplicate
- Look for the positives in each day

Keep Healthy Routines:

- Establish new routines and be sure to stick to them as best as you can
- Plan some "special time in" to give your child your undivided attention for 10-20 minutes

Use Positive Discipline:

- Redirect bad behavior by finding them something else to do
- Encourage your child to engage in creative play
- Notice good behavior and praise it
- Use rewards and privileges to help reinforce good behavior

Take Care of You

- Besides eating right and staying active, be sure to give yourself a mental break too
- If you are feeling overwhelmed, reach out to others
 - Ask yourself these questions to help deflate the panic and impulse to lash out:
 - Does the problem represent an immediate danger?
 - How will I feel about this problem tomorrow?
 - Is this situation permanent?



Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks

What You Should Know

When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease such as Ebola, you may feel anxious and show signs of stress—even when the outbreak affects people far from where you live and you are at low or no risk of getting sick. These signs of stress are normal, and may be more likely or pronounced in people with loved ones in parts of the world affected by the outbreak. In the wake of an infectious disease outbreak, monitor your own physical and mental health. Know the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones. Know how to relieve stress, and know when to get help.

Know the Signs of Stress

What follows are behavioral, physical, emotional, and cognitive responses that are all common signs of anxiety and stress. You may notice some of them after you learn about an infectious disease outbreak.

YOUR BEHAVIOR:

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels
- An increase in your alcohol, tobacco use, or use of illegal drugs
- An increase in irritability, with outbursts of anger and frequent arguing
- Having trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Crying frequently
- Worrying excessively
- Wanting to be alone most of the time
- Blaming other people for everything
- Having difficulty communicating or listening
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun

Know When To Get Help

You may experience serious distress when you hear about an infectious disease outbreak, even if you are at little or no risk of getting sick. If you or someone you know shows signs of stress (see list at left) for several days or weeks, get help by accessing one of the resources at the end of this tip sheet. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline right away if you or someone you know threatens to hurt or kill him- or herself or someone else, or talks or writes about death, dying, or suicide.



Know How To Relieve Stress

You can manage and alleviate your stress by taking time to take care of yourself.

KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE:

Set limits on how much time you spend reading or watching news about the outbreak. You will want to stay up to date on news of the outbreak, particularly if you have loved ones in places where many people have gotten sick. But make sure to take time away from the news to focus on things in your life that are going well and that you can control.

GET THE FACTS:

Find people and resources you can depend on for accurate health information. Learn from them about the outbreak and how you can protect yourself against illness, if you are at risk. You may turn to your family doctor, a state or local health department, U.S. government agencies, or an international organization. Check out the sidebar on the next page for links to good sources of information about infectious disease outbreaks.

KEEP YOURSELF HEALTHY:

- Eat healthy foods, and drink water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol.
- Do not use tobacco or illegal drugs.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Get physical exercise.

YOUR BODY:

- Having stomachaches or diarrhea
- Having headaches and other pains
- Losing your appetite or eating too much
- Sweating or having chills
- Getting tremors or muscle twitches
- Being easily startled

YOUR EMOTIONS:

- Being anxious or fearful
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling angry
- Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- Not caring about anything
- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness

YOUR THINKING:

- Having trouble remembering things
- Feeling confused
- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating
- Having difficulty making decisions

USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO RELAX:

- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, wash your face and hands, or engage in pleasurable hobbies.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities, and do a fun thing after a hard task.
- Use time off to relax—eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family.
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often.



Take care of your physical health to help lower your stress. Take a break to focus on positive parts of your life, like connections with loved ones.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY, FEELINGS, AND SPIRIT:

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress.
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of thinking and feeling about this event, and think of how you handled your thoughts, emotions, and behavior around past events.
- Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty, or angry is common after an event like an infectious disease outbreak, even when it does not directly threaten you.
- Connect with others who may be experiencing stress about the outbreak. Talk about your feelings about the outbreak, share reliable health information, and enjoy conversation unrelated to the outbreak, to remind yourself of the many important and positive things in your lives.
- Take time to renew your spirit through meditation, prayer, or helping others in need.

Sources for Credible Outbreak-Related Health Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
<https://www.cdc.gov>

World Health Organization
Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization
525 23rd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-974-3000
<http://www.who.int/en>

Helpful Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane

Rockville, MD 20857

Toll-Free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

Email: info@samhsa.hhs.gov

SAMHSA Store: https://store.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA Hotlines

SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-985-5990 (English and español)

SMS: Text TalkWithUs to 66746

SMS (español): "Hablános" al 66746

TTY: 1-800-846-8517

Website in English: https://

www.disasterdistress.samhsa.gov

Website in Spanish: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/

disaster-distress-helpline/espanol

SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (24/7/365 Treatment Referral

Information Service in English and español)

Website: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Toll-Free (español): 1-888-628-9454

TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889)

Website in English: https://

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Website in Spanish: https://

suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol

Treatment Locator

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

Website: https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator/home

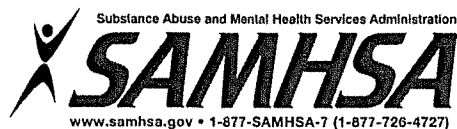
SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515

Email: DTAC@samhsa.hhs.gov

Website: https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac

**Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*



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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

Updated March 25, 2020



*National
Association of
School Nurses*

Helping Children Cope With Changes Resulting From COVID-19

Families across the country are adapting to the evolving changes in daily life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most schools, places of public gathering, and nonessential businesses are closed, and parents and other caregivers are faced with helping their families adjust to the new normal. This includes trying to keep children occupied, feeling safe, and attempting to keep up with schoolwork as best as possible. None of this easy, but it helps to stay focused on what is possible in order to reinforce a sense of control and to reassure children that they are okay, and that the situation will get better.

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking the necessary actions that reduce the risk of illness. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety. This is also a tremendous opportunity for adults to model for children problem-solving, flexibility, and compassion as we all work through adjusting daily schedules, balancing work and other activities, getting creative about how we spend time, processing new information from authorities, and connecting and supporting friends and family members in new ways. The following tips can help.

STAY CALM, LISTEN, AND OFFER REASSURANCE

- **Be a role model.** Children will react to and follow your reactions. They learn from your example.
- **Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19.** Your discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease your child's fear. If true, remind your child that your family is healthy, and you are going to do everything within your power to keep loved ones safe and well. Carefully listen or have them draw or write out their thoughts and feelings and respond with truth and reassurance.
- **Explain social distancing.** Children probably don't fully understand why parents/guardians aren't allowing them to be with friends. Tell your child that your family is following the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which include social distancing. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. Showing older children the "flatten the curve" charts will help them grasp the significance of social distancing. Explain that while we don't know how long it will take to "flatten the curve" to reduce the number of those infected, we do know that this is a critical time—we must follow the guidelines of health experts to do our part.
- **Demonstrate deep breathing.** Deep breathing is a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Do breathing exercises with your children.
- **Focus on the positive.** Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings, create masterpieces. Sing, laugh, and go outside, if possible, to connect with nature and get needed exercise. Allow older children to connect with their friends virtually.

- **Establish and maintain a daily routine.** Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being. It also helps children and other family members respect others' need for quiet or uninterrupted time and when they can connect with friends virtually.
- **Identify projects that might help others.** This could include: writing letters to the neighbors or others who might be stuck at home alone or to healthcare workers; sending positive messages over social media; or reading a favorite children's book on a social media platform for younger children to hear.
- **Offer lots of love and affection.**

MONITOR TELEVISION VIEWING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Parents/guardians should monitor television, internet, and social media viewing—both for themselves and their children. Watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase fear and anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information, or information designed for adults, can also cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- Dispel rumors and inaccurate information. Explain to your child that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may include rumors and inaccurate information. Older children, in particular, may be accessing a great deal of information online and from friends that contains inaccuracies. Talk to your child about factual disease information.
- Provide alternatives. Engage your child in games or other exciting activities instead.

TAKE TIME TO TALK

- **Let your children's questions guide you.** Answer their questions truthfully, but don't offer unnecessary details or facts. Don't avoid giving them the information that experts indicate as crucial to your children's well-being. Often, children and youth do not talk about their concerns because they are confused or don't want to worry loved ones. Younger children absorb scary information in waves. They ask questions, listen, play, and then repeat the cycle. Children always feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life. A sense of control reduces fear.

BE HONEST AND ACCURATE

- **Correct misinformation.** Children often imagine situations worse than reality; therefore, offering developmentally appropriate facts can reduce fears.
- **Explain simple safety steps.** Tell your child this disease spreads between people who are in close contact with one another, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when one touches infected objects or surfaces.
- **Stay up-to-date on the facts.** Go to <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> for additional factual information.

KEEP EXPLANATIONS AGE-APPROPRIATE

- **Early elementary school children.** Provide brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people make every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as "adults are working hard to keep you safe."

- **Upper elementary and early middle school children.** This age group often is more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads in their area. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss the efforts national, state, and community leaders are doing to prevent germs from spreading.
- **Upper middle and high school students.** Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Engage them in decision-making about family plans, scheduling, and helping with chores at home.
- For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!

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 or district 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 you 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. Signing "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.

Preschoolers—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.

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/COVID-19>

For more information related to schools and physical and mental health, visit www.nasponline.org and www.nasn.org.

Adapted from, Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A Parent Resource, National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Nurses, NASP, 2020.

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