

Ways to Help Children and Teens Cope During a Pandemic



Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with pandemic protocols calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Stay informed and in touch:

- Get up-to-date information about local pandemic guidelines from public health officials.
- Create a list of local organisations you and your household can contact in case you need access to information, healthcare services, support, and resources.
- Create an emergency contact list including family, friends, neighbours, carpool drivers, healthcare providers, teachers, employers, the local public health department, and other community resources.

Ways to support your child

- **Talk with your child about the outbreak.**
- Answer questions and share facts about the outbreak in a way that your child can understand.
- Reassure your child that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn from you how to cope with stress.
- Limit your family's exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.
- Spending time with your child in meaningful activities, reading together, exercising, playing board games.

Tips for talking to children

- **Remain calm.** Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.
- **Reassure children** that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- **Make yourself available to listen and to talk.** Let children know they can come to you when they have questions.
- **Avoid language that might blame others** and lead to stigma.
- **Pay attention to what children see or hear** on television, radio, or online. Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on the pandemic. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.
- **Provide information that is truthful and appropriate** for the age and developmental level of the child. Talk to children about how some stories of the outbreak on the Internet and social media may be based on rumours and inaccurate information. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- **Teach children everyday actions** to reduce the spread of germs. Remind children to wash their hands frequently and stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick. Also, remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.
- **If school is open, discuss any new actions that may be taken** at school to help protect children and school staff.



Take care of your own mental health!

You may experience increased stress during a pandemic. Fear and anxiety can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Use your list of local organisations for assistance in managing your own mental health.

Reference:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

Adapted and modified by Get into Neurodiversity for a global audience