

7 Ways to Help Your Child Cope during Covid 19

Supporting Your Child's Mental Health



The stress and anxiety of the current COVID-19 pandemic is wearing on all of us—kids included. But we don't all necessarily exhibit that stress in the same way. Children and teens may express those feelings as anger, frustration, confusion, having a shorter temper, or clinging to you more, says Erica Lee, PhD, a psychologist at Boston Children's Hospital. How can you help your child cope in these uncertain times? Here, she and her colleague Heather Potts, PhD, provide answers.

1. Talk with your kids. Some children may come to you for guidance about scary things, while others may not. Don't be afraid to start or continue conversations about the events happening now, as even quiet children may want to share their feelings and concerns. "The single best thing you can do for your kids is just to sit with them ask how they are feeling and how they are doing," says Lee. Potts adds, "None of us have ever been through something like this before, so just to be there and be present with your kids is the best medicine you can give them right now. That sense of safety and connection is what kids will remember."

2. Strike the right tone. While there's still much we don't know about COVID-19, it's best to focus your conversations on what we do know and what we can do now, such as washing our hands, wearing a mask, and staying at home to help keep each other safe while we learn more about the new coronavirus. Kids are far more likely to understand and feel safer when you talk in a calm setting without any distractions. Be honest but positive and hopeful.

3. Establish routines. Lee says that trying to work some regular routines into the day, without going overboard, can be incredibly stabilizing for families right now. "Small things like regular meal, sleep, and wake times will help keep our bodies healthy, and that helps with our minds, too," says Lee. "Having some sense of normalcy can be really comforting for kids right now."

4. Get some exercise. Taking a daily walk with your family or just spending some time outside is also good for the mind. "Getting our bodies moving and getting fresh air helps ground us in the broader world," says Lee. "We usually spend the day interacting with others, and since we're missing that stimulation right now, this is another way to get our brains working and improve our mood."

5. Monitor screen time. Many children have now increased internet access. Monitor what they read and watch to make sure the content is age appropriate. Check in with them regularly about the information they see online to ensure accuracy and resolve misperceptions.

6. Find new ways to celebrate. If you are missing a child's birthday or other special occasion, celebrate and honor it however you can. "Because of these unique circumstances families have had to get really creative. Kids are having Zoom birthdays or birthday car parades," says Potts. Lee says, "Some kids have even told me they've had the best birthday ever."

7. Practice self-compassion. "Parents need to recognize that what they are being asked to do right now is impossible," says Lee. "You're now not only an employee, you're also a teacher, a counselor, a chef, and a lot of other things. Don't beat yourself up if you can't do it all. Lee says, "Take care of yourself and understand that being loving, forgiving, and flexible are most important."



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