

Toolkit: Helping Families Cope with the Corona-virus

Information & Communication

- **Keep updated about what is happening** with the outbreak and additional recommendations by getting information from credible media outlets, local public health authorities, and updates from public health websites (e.g., CDC in the US). **Don't rely on social media.**
- **Seek support and continued connections from friends and family** by talking to them on the telephone, texting, or communicating through email or social media. Schools may have additional ways to stay in contact with educators and classmates. **Check in regularly with your children about what they have seen on the Internet and clarify any misinformation** – help them understand the current situation in a way they understand.

Scheduling & Activities

- **Even if your family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.** Keep your family's schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
- **Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better** in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities (prayer, participating in services on the Internet).
- **Have children participate in distance learning opportunities** that may be offered by their schools or other institutions/organizations.
- **Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting disease, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a disease outbreak.**

Hygiene & Medical Care

- **Find ways to encourage proper hygiene and health promoting behavior with your children.** Include them in household jobs or activities so they feel a sense of accomplishment. Provide praise and encouragement for engaging in household jobs and good hygiene. Explain, however, that not every cough or sneeze means that they or others have COVID-19.

Self Care & Coping

- **Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of the situation** and focus on what you can accomplish. Shift expectations and priorities to focus more on what gives you meaning, purpose, or fulfillment.
- **Attempt to control self-defeating statements** and replace them with more positive thoughts.
- **Remember, you are a role model for your children.** How you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.

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Age group	Reactions	How to help?
Pre-school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of being alone, bad dreams • Speech difficulties • Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting • Change in appetite • Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience and tolerance • Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) • Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling • Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements • Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime • Maintain regular family routines • Avoid media exposure
Ages 6-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior • Clinging, nightmares • Sleep/appetite disturbance • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches) • Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest • Competition for parents' attention • Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet • Regular exercise and stretching • Engage in educational activities • Participate in structured household chores • Set gentle but firm limits • Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community • Encourage expression through play and conversation • Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school • Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation
Ages 13-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.) • Sleep/appetite disturbance • Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy • Ignoring health promotion behaviors • Isolating from peers and loved ones • Concerns about stigma and injustices • Avoiding/cutting school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Encourage continuation of routines • Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force) • Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games • Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school • Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak

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Seeking Additional Help

If you or a loved one is having a difficult time coping with the outbreak and want to seek outside help, there are ways to get that help. For example:

- Get support regarding your anxiety or stress by speaking to a trained counselor at **SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or by texting TalkWithUS 66746**
- Contact your physician or your insurance company (if they have a consultation line) to ask health-related questions or to seek mental health support

Sources

- https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
SAMHSA