



Southeastern Idaho Public Health

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How to Help Children Cope in Times of Uncertainty

No matter their age, children may have strong emotions related to COVID-19. How a child reacts and the common signs of distress can vary according to the child's age, previous experiences, and how the child typically copes with stress.

Children react, in part, based upon what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with stressful situations calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Finding healthy ways to manage our own stress is the first step to helping children cope.

Tips for helping children stay mentally healthy:

- Provide factual information about COVID-19 in a way they can understand. Give them information that focuses on what they can control, like hand-washing instructions, avoiding physical contact with others, and covering their mouth when they cough. By focusing on what is in their control rather than what is not, children are likely to feel less anxious.
- Give children a chance to express and feel their feelings. Children have their own way of expressing upsetting feelings; sometimes they become withdrawn, irritable, or angry. Help children find ways to express disturbing feelings, such as fear and sadness.
- Give reassurance. To reassure a child, parents and caregivers should listen for the things that are causing the child concern and provide words of comfort to help the child feel safe about the things about which they are most worried.
- Establish daily routines. COVID-19 is disrupting our daily lives in a lot of ways. Creating a daily family routine can help adults and children alike regain a new sense of "normal." Establish a schedule for waking up, getting dressed, and eating breakfast like when going to school. Find a non-distracting area for children to work on school assignments. Switch learning activities every 30 to 40 minutes like school schedules do. Take breaks at regular times for lunch and recess. Find ways to make the weekend feel like a weekend and make time for fun.
- Monitor your children's social media and screen time. Constantly checking for updates on the coronavirus can increase anxiety. Instead, engage your kids in fun activities, such as playing games or reading.

- Connect with loved ones. “Social distancing” is meant to keep people healthy but children may be sad or even mad about needing to limit their in-person contact with friends and family. To keep kids from feeling alone, help them stay connected with others by using technology like Skype, Zoom, Facetime or other apps to set up virtual family gatherings or playdates.
- Parents should make physical activity part of their children’s routines as well. It’s great for mental health and allows for quality family time. Take a 10-minute activity break between school subjects. Make sure that recess includes opportunities for physical movement and fun. If possible, spend some time outdoors each day.
- Teach and model self-care. Self-care means taking care of your body and mind. It includes making time for exercise, making healthy food choices, practicing good hygiene habits, and managing stress. Help children identify the things that work to calm them when they are nervous or fearful. Practice soothing activities when you or your children experience stress.

By helping children learn how to cope with emotions and manage stress during COVID-19, parents and caregivers are providing important skills they can rely upon when facing future challenges.

For more information regarding COVID-19 visit siphidaho.org or by calling the Southeastern Idaho Public Health Hotline Monday – Friday from 9:00 am – 4:30 pm at 208.234.5875. You can also watch us live on Facebook Monday - Friday at 11 am.