



Coronavirus Update

April 2, 2020

Supporting family and community during uncertain times

During this rapidly evolving outbreak, your first concern may be about how to protect and take care of your children and family. This resource provides ideas on how to help your family cope during this stressful time.

Caring for children

- Encourage active listening and understanding. Children usually feel relieved if they can communicate and express their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Every child has their way to express emotions; accepting and acknowledging how they feel is important.
- Engaging in creative activities, such as writing, drawing, playing and singing, can facilitate the process.
- Encourage an increased caring and sensitive environment.
- Infants and toddlers, 0-2 years old, cannot understand something bad in the world is happening, but they know when their parent is upset. They may start to show the same emotions as their parents, or they may act differently, like crying for no reason or withdrawing from people and not playing with their toys.
- Provide facts about what is occurring and give child-friendly, age-appropriate information on how to reduce risk and stay safe at home.
- Focus on staying healthy by reinforcing and demonstrating basic things kids know and understand such as wash their hands (demonstrate proper technique), get a good night's sleep and protect their immune system by eating a colorful plate and getting exercise.
- Children often take their emotional cues from important adults in their lives, so how adults respond is important, such as managing emotions and staying calm.
- Keep them busy with their studies, and reassure them that the current situation, like their school being closed, is the best way to keep people safe.
- The goal during traumatic events is to restore balance for children. Maintain or develop a routine and schedule - it will help eliminate unknowns and provide a sense of security.
- Spend time doing something special to let children know they are cared for and check in with them in a nonintrusive way.
- Encourage children to participate in recreational activities and limit over stimulation, such as persistent use of technology.

- Monitor social media and external influences. Stay informed of news updates but limit exposure, particularly when children are around.
- If your child takes medication, talk to their provider about getting an additional supply and other considerations.
- Virtual playdates over the phone or video can help them stay connected with friends.
- Children can stay connected to remote family members, particularly the elderly, by sending old-fashioned letters and postcards. Virtual book reading between early readers and elders can give purpose and enjoyment.
- Use technology to keep children in contact with family members and friends.

Caring for teens

- Normalize anxiety: Help young people appreciate that [healthy anxiety has a purpose](#): it alerts us to potential threats and helps us move toward safety. Encourage teenagers to channel their discomfort into useful action, such as learning about and following the [recommended health guidelines](#).
- Offer perspective: For psychologists, anxiety is when there is nothing to be worried about at all, or when it reaches heights that are grossly out of proportion to the threat involved, such as when a teenager experiences a panic attack over a minor quiz. Help adolescents keep their worries about the coronavirus at an appropriate level by making sure they don't [overestimate the dangers](#) or [underestimate their ability](#) to protect themselves from those dangers.
- Shift the spotlight: During difficult times, research suggests that teenagers feel better when they turn their attention to supporting others. We can remind teenagers that we wash our hands and follow other health recommendations not only to protect ourselves, but also to help to ease the [strain on local medical systems](#). Take the opportunity to talk about the challenges faced by people in need and consider donating nonperishables to a local food bank or volunteering with a group like [Invisible Hands](#).
- Encourage distraction: It might be hard for some teenagers *not* to obsess about coronavirus given the topic pervades headlines and social media. They could be compulsively checking for news updates. Remind them [not to rely on rumors](#) or unreliable sources. Encourage finding distractions while shielding themselves from digital intrusions.
- Manage your own anxiety: Anxious parents are [more likely to have](#) anxious teenagers. Teenagers can tell when adults are saying one thing and feeling another. Before trying to support a fretful teenager, tense adults should take steps to calm their own nerves using the same strategies outlined above.
- Allow privacy and time alone: Make it clear that you welcome your teenager's company, but don't take it personally if they want to be nearby but quiet, or if they want to spend time alone.
- Treat teens as problem-solving partners: Don't hesitate to recruit teenagers' help. Instead of presenting them with a suggested daily program, consider engaging them, "Can you show me what you have in mind in arranging your day so that I can get a feel for your regular schedule and make sure you're covering all your bases?" Similarly, we might ask persistently grumpy teenagers how they themselves would like to balance their own right to be upset with our reasonable expectation that they not make life in close quarters miserable for everyone else.
- Engage in emergency preparation plans: If your plans include stocking up on groceries and toiletries, invite your kids to go to the store with you or allow them the opportunity to help plan out what to have stored away.

Caring for parents/elders

- Older adults, especially in isolation, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated and withdrawn. Provide emotional support regularly through informal networks (families).
- Older adults are at an increased risk of loneliness which is defined as the sense of feeling alone. Staying connected regularly and reminding your parent that this will pass can help.
- Redefine "social distancing" by increasing your communication using the telephone, mail and care packages.
- Promote intergenerational communication between older and younger family members using phone, social media and video chats, such as FaceTime and Zoom. If needed, teach older adults how to use technology.
- Reframe communication: Instead of saying, "I'm afraid for you to leave the home," give them reasons to stay home.
- Encourage limiting exposure to the news to avoid excessive fear and limiting thoughts.
- Have conversations about who your parent is in contact with and who to trust. While the community is trying to stay connected, there may be an increase in scams and crime.
- If your parent lives in a retirement community, nursing facility or receives in home care, ask about their pandemic protocol.
- Take the time to discuss telehealth options and make sure they know how to access.
- If needed, teach them how to use online services such as online shopping for daily supplies, consultation/help lines or healthcare.
- Explore food delivery services and grocery shopping support.
- Provide older adults with simple physical exercises and stretches to perform in home to maintain mobility and reduce boredom.
- Provide them with practical help if needed, such as using transportation apps or taxi services.
- Encourage older adults with expertise, experiences and strengths to volunteer from their home.
- Recommend they talk to their doctor if stress gets in the way of daily activities for several days in a row.
- Check in with neighbors who may need help with errands (doorstep drop off) or phone/virtual outreach for emotional support.

Caring for high-risk family members

- The CDC identifies groups who are at higher risk for developing more serious complications from the coronavirus people as those over 65 years of age and those of any age with chronic medical conditions, including lung disease, heart conditions, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, severe obesity, and those who are immunosuppressed.
- Check in frequently with those who live alone or have other conditions such as cognitive decline/dementia or other mental health conditions.
- Determine if a medical alert system should be installed for those at risk who are alone.
- Older people may not be familiar with the use of protective devices (mask) or prevention methods to [protect themselves](#), or they might refuse to use them. Provide instructions in a clear and concise way.
- Have a list of their medical providers, contact information and medications including frequency and dosing.

- Check in with them to make sure they have an adequate supply of medicines and obtain refills early as it's important they have uninterrupted access to essential medicines (particularly for diabetes, cancer, heart disease, kidney disease and HIV).
- Protect those at risk from exposure by limiting family visits and stay connected through other means as listed above. Younger people may have asymptomatic disease and could potentially spread the disease to high-risk people unknowingly.
- Isolated or infected older adults should be presented with truthful information on risk factors and recovery.
- Share free meditation and mindfulness apps for relaxation techniques.
- During quarantine, adjust respite or home care services and use technology to provide trainings/counseling for family caregivers at home.

Resources

- [American Psychological Association: Coronavirus resources](#)
- [CDC: People that need extra precautions](#)
- [CDC: Managing stress](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists: Helping children cope with the coronavirus](#)
- [NCTSN: Parent/caregiver guide to helping families cope with the coronavirus disease 2019](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration coronavirus resources](#)
- [Mindfulness toolkit](#)
- [Resiliency toolkit](#)
- [Meditation toolkit](#)

Not medical advice: This document is not medical advice. Individuals should contact their healthcare provider for advice.

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