

Guidance to Support Children during Pandemics

Adapted from “Resources for Supporting Children’s Emotional Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic”, published by Child Trends, & available at: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Children respond differently to a new situation like a pandemic. This is normal. Some children may go back to behaviors from when they were younger.

- Create a safe space for your child(ren) by not yelling or reacting angrily to unwanted behaviors. Let them communicate how they are feeling, even—and especially—if they have been acting out. They may be acting this way because they are scared.
- If possible, ask how they are feeling. Ask what makes them feel better when they are [insert feeling]. Comfort your children in that way.
- Be extra patient and take small breaks when needed. It is okay to ignore your child’s misbehavior and step away to try to reset yourself. Make sure your child is in a safe place, go to a separate space, and take a few minutes for yourself just to breathe deeply.
- Set limits. Make sure that you are calm before responding to your child.
- Finally, take care of yourself. Your children will be watching you to see how you are doing. Use calming techniques such as deep breathing and positive statements (“it will be okay”) when you feel stressed, and demonstrate the behaviors that prevent spread including hand washing, healthy eating and getting sleep.

Talk to your child(ren) about the pandemic in a way that is appropriate for their age.

- Refer to CDC guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>
- Keep children away from news sources that may be too advanced for them (e.g., news on the television, adult conversations, social media, etc.).

Why? Adult news sources may be scary and not appropriate for children.

Follow the three R’s: Reassurance, Routine, and Regulation

- Reassure your child that your job is to keep them safe and that you will take care of them.
 - Tell them that their relatives or friends are also safe (if true).
 - Be positive and supportive around your kids.
- Create **routines** for the whole family and follow them as best you can. See sample routine and adapt to your family.
- Organize activities that help your family reduce stress, such as a walk outdoors, meditation or quiet breathing, hugs/snuggles, etc. This will help everyone regulate their emotions.

Why? Knowing what to expect will help children to remain calm and not act out.

Support and empower your kids to help keep their family and friends healthy by washing their hands, cleaning up around the house, preparing food, and helping others.

Why? This will help children feel like they have some control of the situation. Children like to help but may not know how.

Organize a way for your child(ren) to stay connected to their friends and family, such as writing letters, video chats, talking on the phone, etc.

Why? Children need the consistent presence of loved ones in their lives. This will help them be resilient and calm.

Keep your children busy with interactive activities like those on the cActivity and iActivity Cards.

- You can find other examples here: <https://www.care.com/c/stories/4073/101-fun-things-to-do-with-toddlers/>

Why? Children are more likely to act out when they are bored. Being active will help them not to worry too much.