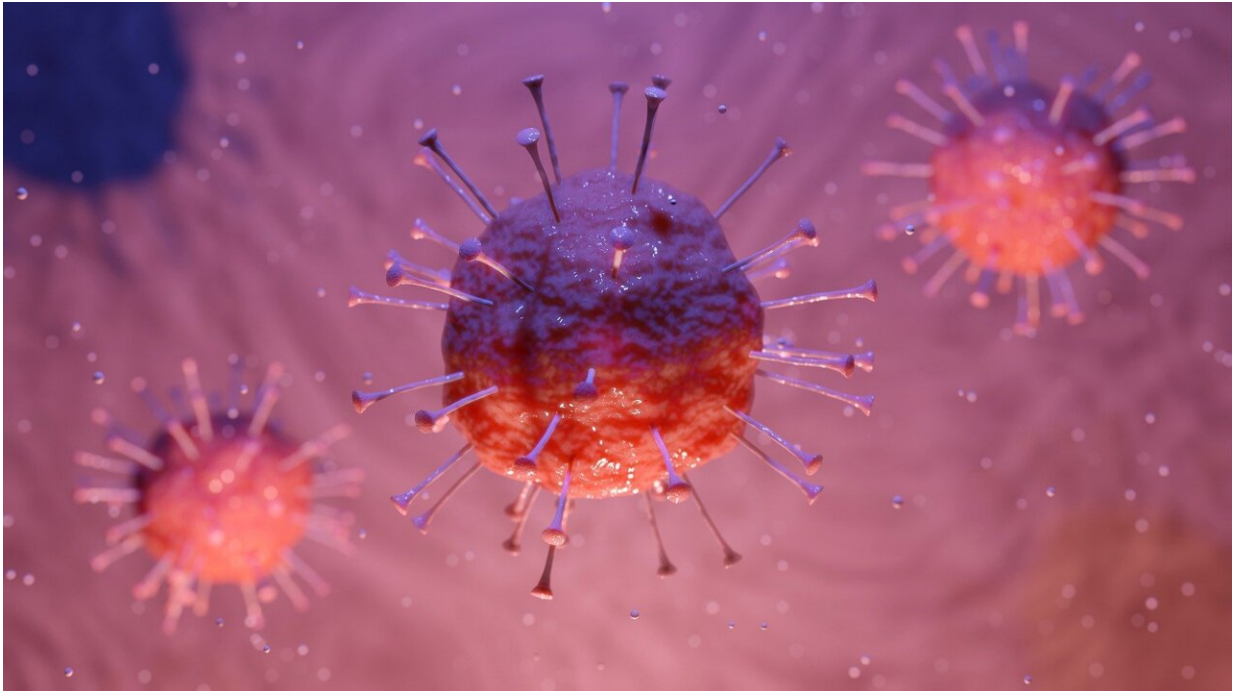


Helping kids cope with COVID-19

April 3 2020, by Alison Satake



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The coronavirus, or COVID-19, outbreak has impacted people all over the world at the same time. Unlike other disasters that may affect one region or specific community, the global-scale of this pandemic is unusual. The uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation makes it more challenging for families to plan and reassure their children. In addition, the isolation and social distancing required to flatten the curve of the pandemic, makes it harder to reach out for social support for

parents and children, which is a powerful coping strategy.

Under these circumstances, it is typical for [children](#) to react in different ways and to varying degrees. Reactions can include minor or major changes in how children feel emotionally and physically, how they function or behave, what they think about and how they get along with others. These changes are normal, and recovery is the norm. Therefore, in most cases, reactions are temporary and gradually decrease as the days and weeks go by, especially if children have been given the appropriate support during and following the event. There are many things parents and caregivers can do to help children cope. LSU Department of Psychology Assistant Professor Anna C. Long has compiled this information sheet to offer guidance for parents and caregivers on how to support children during the pandemic.

How to respond?

It is important to pay attention to your child's cues and follow his or her lead. Overreacting or forcing your child to talk may make it harder for them to cope and recover.

1. Reaffirm your child's physical wellbeing and perceptions of safety. The first and most important way to support children's wellbeing is to provide them with any practical help, [emotional support](#) or physical comfort they need. Help your children believe they are safe by taking care of their basic needs, providing accurate reassurances, minimizing exposure to potentially disturbing media coverage and being selective about the facts of the event that you share.

2. Maintain a daily routine. Keep to a consistent schedule and behavioral expectations for your child, as this helps to provide a sense of normalcy and security. The predictability and structure provided by routines help your child get into a rhythm and feel that things are under

control.

3. Be prepared to be more readily available for your children. Let your children guide the information you provide based on their questions. The goal should be to help your child understand the event based on their age and maturity level. Balance the information you provide with accurate reassurances about what is being done to help things get back to normal. Be honest and provide **ONLY** verified facts in concise and simple language. Avoid providing unnecessary or sensational details or blaming others, and dispel myths or rumors. Finally, if necessary, prepare your child for common reactions to stressful events. Let your child know that people react in different ways. People may feel different (e.g., sad, worried), act differently (irritable, hyper, more tired), have trouble focusing or getting along with others. People can have trouble sleeping or be more or less hungry. People can get headaches or stomach aches. All of these reactions and others are normal. Normalize stress reactions for your child. Let your children know these reactions are temporary and are the way our bodies respond to change and stress.

4. Foster your children's resilience. Help your child identify strategies to cope positively. Promote their use of active positive coping strategies through modeling, co-participation and discussion. The goal is to prevent them from using avoidant or maladaptive styles of coping. A few examples of positive coping strategies include scheduling positive and meaningful activities that they enjoy, promoting helpful thinking or reducing unhelpful thinking, identifying tasks that empower or build self-confidence, providing ways to support emotion regulation and relaxation, and staying connected to friends and family.

5. Take care of yourself and manage your stress. How adults react to the crisis can have a significant impact on children, especially young children. Therefore, it is critical for caregivers to take care of their own

wellbeing in constructive ways and remain calm and reassuring to the extent possible. Children's contact with adults who are struggling to cope adaptively or have lost emotional control should be minimized.

Note: Content for this handout was generated using the following resources:

National Association of School Psychologists (February 29, 2020). Talking to children about COVID-19 (coronavirus): A parent resource. Retrieved from: [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <http://www.nctsn.org>

Additional Resources:

Talking With Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks:
<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/SMA14-4886>

Coping With Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks:
<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Coping-with-Stress-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/sma14-4885>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19):
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>

Handwashing and Hand Sanitizer Use at Home, at Play, and Out and

About: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/hand-sanitizer-factsheet.pdf>

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