

The Impact of the Corona Virus (COVID-19) on Young Children
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WHO has now declared novel Corona virus (Covid-19) a pandemic. In children, the symptoms are usually mild unless the child has a pre-existing illness. More serious is the emotional impact of the changes they see around them -- the isolation of school closing, individual quarantine, and parental/family anxiety, and talk of illness, hospitals, and death. These are particularly hard for children with a history of previous separation, hospitalization or loss. All young children are sensitive to the impact of these changes on their feeling of security, and they also react to the stress experienced by their parents and caretakers, but they may not want to talk about their fears and distress, or may not know how to. But they will show their stress in various physical and emotional ways.

Children react with some or many of the following --frequent crying; difficulty staying still; problems falling asleep and staying asleep; nightmares; clinging to their caregivers; fears of being alone; repetitive play of taking care of dolls or stuffed animals (for instance, by wrapping, hiding, and covering); and emotional reactivity. They may feel angry and become aggressive, may withdraw, regress (for instance, losing their toilet training, switching from cup to bottle from solid to baby food, talking like a much younger child) or refuse food. Here's how to help.

Talk and listen

- Be patient, explain why the pandemic is happening, why their school is closed, play with them.
- Create an environment where children are welcomed to ask any and all questions, listen to their responses, and answer honestly using words and ideas that are pitched to their age, language and developmental stage.
- Give children access to accurate and current information.
- Be willing to repeat your answers to the child as the topic may too frightening to take in at first.
- Let children know that you are following the rules to keep the family safe as the top priority.
- Let the children know that people all over the world are working hard to help people affected by the Corona virus pandemic, and to interrupt further transmission.
- Reassure them that that this will pass but do not give false or unrealistic promises.

Routine

- Maintain the routine of regular mealtimes, bath-time, bed-time, playtime, and outdoor time.
- Add family handwashing, wiping surfaces, washing toys – useful action is an antidote to fear.
- Help them stay in touch with friends using Face time, Skype, or Zoom etc.

Spend time

- Encourage physical activity, throw a ball around, sing and dance together – activities that will help the child and your family feel better in other stressful situations too.
- Read quietly before bed.
- Limit screen time if you possibly can, or at least control access to suitable programs, such as stories.audible.com: “Social distancing meet kids’ free listening.”

Keep in contact

- If your child has to leave your house, maintain frequent connection on Face time, Skype, Zoom etc.

Take care of yourself

- Follow the CDC guidelines <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>
- Ask the children to help -- action is an antidote to fear
- Stock the refrigerator, eat well, accept help, breathe deeply, drink plenty of warm water, and go outside for exercise and fresh air, and if you can get it, sun.

Additional resources

1. National Child Traumatic Stress Network National Child Traumatic Stress Network Handout: “Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)”: www.NCTSN.org
2. Centers for Disease Control (CDC): www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html;
3. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry “Talking to Children about Coronavirus”
4. American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Children-and-Disasters/Pages/default.aspx>;
5. www.healthychildren.org;

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