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**The Impact of the Corona Virus (COVID-19) on Older Children and Adolescents Jill Savege Scharff, MD and Caroline Sehon, MD  
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WHO has now declared novel Corona virus (Covid-19) a pandemic. In children, the physical symptoms are usually mild unless the youngster has 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 anxiety. Older children and adolescents who have had previous separation, hospitalization and loss and most affected, but all of them are sensitive to the impact of these changes on their feeling of security and their peer social connection. They react to the stress experienced by their parents and caretakers.

**Common Ways Older Children and Adolescents React and How to Help Them**

Older children and adolescents will show their stress by their difficulties in regulating emotion and behavior. They may be moody, aggressive, or withdrawn. They may have difficulty sleeping or eating. They may sleep a lot and fail to take showers. They may feel dependent, like a younger child or react fiercely against that neediness. They may respond in a counterphobic manner as if invulnerable to the Corona virus, by taking unusual risks and even engaging in self-destructive behaviors (including substance use and staying physically close to friends). They may avoid their responsibilities like attending school/college. Adolescents may moan for a boyfriend or girlfriend.

**Dealing with Fear and Mood Swings**

- Be patient with their ups and downs, reassure them, explain to them that they will feel like themselves again
- Reassure them that the Corona virus pandemic will be contained eventually.
- Cut them some slack.
- Expect them to help the family efforts to follow the CDC guidelines <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html> (cleaning and disinfection, hand-washing, social distance etc.) Action is an antidote to unspoken fear.

**Routine**

- Maintain the routine of regular mealtimes
- Engage the youngster in family planning strategies that enhance health promotion behaviors
- Encourage outdoor time as sports activities get cancelled during nation-wide efforts at containment.
- Allow them screen time to stay in touch with friends on their (or your) cellphones
- Encourage doing virtual homework as a way to maintain social connection despite

physical distancing.

### **Spend Time**

- Join them in physical activity: go out for a walk, shoot hoops, dance to music
- Watch a movie and talk about it
- Encourage their social connections with peers via phone, internet, and/or video games

### **Talk**

- Talk about the epidemic and what the country is doing to contain the problem
- Listen to their responses and encourage further questions and daily conversation
- If they refuse to talk with you, listen to the news, or read and comment on the newspaper
- Limit exposure to the media, and encourage conversation about what they are hearing to combat misinformation and myths.
- Reassure them that you are following the rules to keep them safe
- Ask them to take responsibility for disinfecting and for social distance
- Engage in conversations about stigma, and possible prejudice and injustices occurring during pandemic

### **Keep in contact**

- If your child has to live with another family temporarily, maintain daily connection on Face time

### **Take care of yourself**

- Stock the refrigerator, eat well, accept help, and go outside for exercise and fresh air

### **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](http://www.NCTSN.org)
2. Centers for Disease Control (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html](http://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](http://www.healthychildren.org)

**Adapted from ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN and ADOLESCENTS DURING THE EPIDEMIC**

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