

Strategies for Helping your Child Cope with COVID-19: Guidelines for Parents

Consider the following strategies to help your family or children cope during COVID-19.

Keep explanations brief, while using simple and honest language:

- 1) If your child is asking questions repeatedly or their worries interfere with their daily activities, tell them that there will be a certain time each day when they will have your undivided attention to discuss their worries and their fears.
- 2) If your child comes to you and tells you they are anxious:
 - Show them that you hear what they are saying by acknowledging how they are feeling. Next, defer discussing your child’s worry until a predesignated time of day
 - For example, you could say something like, “I can see you’re really worried right now. We will talk about that more at 6 o’clock”
 - During that time, consider using child-friendly phrases like “strong germ” and “making people in the community sick”.

Encourage your child to continue with their daily activities (as much as possible):

- 1) Engage in typical morning routines, chores, meal times, and nighttime routines
- 2) Use visual timers or schedules to help children independently track their progress for the day
- 3) Maintain typical sleep schedules and screen time limitations



Promote positive child behavior by rewarding them for completing morning, afternoon, and/or all-day tasks:

- 1) Children pick movie for family movie night
- 2) Family board game night
- 3) Children pick special lunch/dinner meal
- 4) Extra screen time
- 5) Special art activity

Now is a great time to establish lifelong coping strategies to use for anxiety management:

Schedule 5-10 minutes to practice a new relaxation strategy with your child in a quiet and calm area of the house.

Deep Breathing

- First, breathe in through the nose and feel the belly expand while the chest remains flat.
- Then, breathe out through the nose and feel the belly contract.
- Tip: Try this one lying on your back with an object (e.g., phone, toy car) on your belly so you can see it expand and contract!
- Check out this link (<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html>) for guided videos for deep breathing



Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

- From head to toes: Think about each muscle, tighten it for 10 seconds, and then relax it.
- Check out this guide (<http://www.rainbowreach.com/Spaghetti%20Toes.pdf>) that uses the example of uncooked and cooked spaghetti to teach PMR to children!

Physical Exercise

- Walk outside
- Ride your bike

Guided Imagery

- Think of somewhere calming (e.g., lake, beach) and/or happy
- Then, have your child answer these questions: What does it look like? Who is there? What do you hear? What does it smell like? Are there any tastes?

Reassure children by promoting activities they can control during a time of uncertainty:

- 1) Praise children for washing their hands, not touching their faces, sneezing/coughing into their elbow, and helping clean the house
- 2) Model appropriate behavior by cleaning often and practicing social distancing

Check out the following references for more tricks/tips!

- 1) UM Health Blog: How to Talk with Kids about COVID-19:
<http://michmed.org/yO2W6>
- 2) National Association of School Psychologists: Talking to Children about COVID-19: <https://tinyurl.com/udox73h>

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