

# Helping Kids Cope with COVID-19



During this time of extreme stress and worry, parents, guardians, and other role models are facing unique challenges in supporting children. How can we put children's minds at ease? How can we be there for them while allowing them to have their own space, especially when many of us are floundering ourselves?

**No matter your role, you probably feel concern anxiety over how the children in your life are experiencing the stressors of the pandemic.** Some children may be showing the signs of elevated anxiety, while others aren't expressing with their emotions in an obvious way. In any case, it's important to equip children with knowledge on how to deal with stressful situations without scaring them, communicate without overwhelming them, and to establish normalcy in otherwise unsure times without dismissing their concerns.

Below are some useful tips and activities to help yourself and children of all ages.

## Tips

### Lead By Example

- **Finds ways of coping with yourself.** Children are very perceptive and are likely to repeat what they see or hear. If you can manage your own mental health, that will allow you to take better care of children, as well as providing them with a role model.
- **Establish routines.** By putting in place concrete daily activities, you can create a sense of predictability for children that makes them feel safe. Some examples of these routines would be scheduling mealtime, playtime, school work, daily meals/family time, and breaks from TV.
- **Have honest and developmentally appropriate conversations.** Use vocabulary that children will understand and make sure to be direct. Now is not the time to use euphemisms or to beat around the bush. It is important to not scare your child, but you also need to be honest.
- **Make sure discipline is in the form of productive consequences.** Taking away a toy or kid's phone won't do much to help the situation. Instead, encourage them to write about their feelings or volunteer from afar. This allows them to learn a lesson while also contribute to the greater good.
- **Normalize the situation when you can.** Make sure your children are aware that everyone is struggling with the pandemic and that we're all in it together. Let them know that they're safe and again structure routines so children know what to expect, which helps ease anxieties.
- **Find ways to help, especially if you have the financial privilege.** Donate to food banks, emergency relief funds, and charities. If you don't have the money or resources, have your children create art to hang in your windows and find other ways you can help while still quarantining.
- **Stick to nap times.** Our natural flight or fight instincts have kicked in and it's hard to feel like we can do either of those things during quarantine, which causes the body to stress and tire. Allow you and your children to have the time you need to rest and recalibrate.

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## Allow Kids to Take the Lead

- **Validate your children's concerns.** Create time and space for children to express their concerns and ask questions. Children are a lot smarter than we give them credit for, so be honest and validate their anxieties.
- **Allow opportunities for collective decision making.** Life has become a lot more restrictive lately, so we need to be respectful of the independence and space some children require. Allow older children and adolescents the space to be co-creators of their schedules and boundaries. This will give them a sense of autonomy and control.
- **Encourage space for social interactions.** Teenagers are usually happier when they have control over their environment, and don't do well with forced conversations. Prepare and provide time for them to talk to you, on their own timetable.
- **Provide kids with breaks and alone time.** By giving children time to be alone, or even suggesting activities they can do alone, you can give children a sense of independence while also providing yourself with your own much-deserved alone time and breaks.

## Practise Mindfulness

- **Use grounding kits.** A grounding kit is a small collection of objects that stimulate the five senses. Dried lavender in cloth bags, cotton balls, or a piece of candy allow the user to focus on something they can describe and interact with freely. This provides an opportunity to be "in the now" rather than focusing on external issues.
- **Create personal thermometers.** Start or end the day by drawing a thermometer and coloring it in to represent moods. This allows everyone to track and share your moods and give an opportunity to discuss why we feel the way we do.
- **Teach the art of distraction.** If your child is overthinking or becoming obsessive over negative thoughts, employ "thought stopping" techniques—snapping fingers, singing a song, even saying "stop." Actions like these can interrupt distressful thought patterns and create an opportunity to move on.
- **Create a "gratitude inventory."** Focus on the positives and things to be thankful for. Even writing a list of things that bring joy helps to put things in perspective.

- **Practise breathwork and exercise.** Make time to release built-up tension and energy through deep breathing, yoga, (socially-distanced) walks, and exercise. Allowing time for these activities is a great way to release tension and nerves.
- **Have a daily art project.** Create or purchase coloring books, write in a personal journal, doodle, whatever allows everyone's creative sides to take over. Expression through art is a great outlet not only for children, but for everyone.

## RESOURCES:

- **The National Child Traumatic Stress Network** (<https://www.nctsn.org/>) is a great resource for the public, professionals, and others who care about children and children's traumatic stress.
- **The Child Mind Institute** (<https://childmind.org/>) provides multiple resources in regard to education and mental health for children of all ages.
- **The Mayo Clinic** (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/>) offers many sources on working with many disorders and mainly mental health issues.
- **A self-soothe box** (<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-make-a-self-soothe-box/>) is a great way for a child to create their own "Grounding Kit"
- **Mindful Kids: 50 Activities for Calm, Focus and Peace** is a book by Whitney Stewart with accompanying flashcards to engage younger children that is available from many retailers.
- **CHOC Children's** (<https://www.choc.org/programs-services/integrative-health/guided-imagery/>) has instructions on how to do guided imagery and mindfulness with your children.

