

Emotionally Supporting Our Children



Advice to Help Children Cope in Challenging Times

Information is rapidly changing; for up-to-date information, visit:

www.dutchessny.gov/coronavirus

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Sources include:

Centers for Disease Control, The Child Mind Institute, National Association of School Psychologists, The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

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Children of today will tell the coronavirus story to their children and grandchildren. As families take precautions and have questions for which there are no clear answers, these uncertain times are an opportunity to make memories that can be woven into the fabric of your family. Those memories will provide testimony to your care and connection with your children no history book can.

Concern over Covid-19 can make children and families anxious. It is appropriate to acknowledge a level of concern, but it is also important to keep in mind that children watch adults for cues on how to react to stressful events. Children need to be reassured, but they also need some factual information so they do not imagine the worst.

TALKING

Realize – You aren't a superhero who can bust in and save the world. You are, however, exactly who your child needs. This unprecedented time is stressful for all of us. Be sure you establish a calm frame of mind before you talk to your child about his or her worries.

Reassure – Tell your child you love them. Point out that the medical community, volunteers, and the government are working to help those with the virus and to prevent it from spreading. Children may only hear about deaths. Indicate that most people do not become critically ill and do recover.

Be Factual – Share appropriate information based on age. Let your child's questions guide you.

Be Available – Simply being nearby will be reassuring and allow your child to ask questions they may have hesitated about earlier. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you make dinner. Young children often ask a question, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

Expect the Unexpected – Stress can cause children to react differently. A quiet child may act out; an outgoing child may become subdued.

Give Them Control – Let them know what they can do to protect themselves: practice good hygiene, eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise to stay strong against any illness. Giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

ACTIONS

Realize – School work may be too stressful online or alone. Offer support and breaks.

Make Memories – Play games, look at family photos, watch movies, build an indoor fort, teach a pet a new trick, have a cooking competition, dance, sing or just tell jokes.

FaceTime/Skype – Video call relatives and friends; text messages just aren't enough.

Exercise Together – Go for walks, ride bikes, do yoga. Physical exertion helps ease stress.

Share Musical Talents – Have your children teach you how to play their instruments.

Rediscover Snail Mail – Write letters as a family to veterans or those confined to a nursing home. Helping others makes people feel good.

Some simple things can help children feel safe and less stressed. First, it is important to establish a new routine and schedule. Humans are creatures of habit and gain comfort from knowing what to expect. Basic things like keeping bed times and meal times consistent will help. Scheduling specific time for school work and fun is also beneficial.



WHAT to WATCH FOR

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example: thumb sucking, bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Disrupted sleeping habits
- Irritability and "acting out" behaviors in teens
- Avoiding schoolwork
- Limited ability to pay attention and concentrate
- No interest in activities typically enjoyed in the past
- Complaints about unexplained pains or headaches

If the behavior continues and causes you concern, reach out to your primary care doctor or school district for professional advice.