

Mental Health:

Coping and Connection for Children & Families During COVID-19

Children react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. Coping with COVID-19 calmly and confidently, can help you support your child. Here are some things you can do to support your child.

Get the facts about COVID-19.

Find a few credible sources of information. Understanding the latest facts about the outbreak and knowing where to turn for reliable information can help you talk to your kids open and honestly and help them think more realistically about the risk visit, <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx>

Check in with your child, encourage questions to make sense of the current situation.

- Start by asking your child what they know about this situation.
- Pay attention to what your child says and really listen with your head and heart.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and thoughts. If they have difficulty expressing their emotions in words, help them express their feelings through creativity (e.g., drawing, music).
- Accept their feelings without judging. Emotions come and go. It's okay to feel sad, upset, or distressed. In most cases, these feelings won't last long. It's how we act when we feel these emotions that can get us into trouble.
- Answer questions calmly, reassuringly, and honestly. Give answers that your child will understand for their age and ability.
- Correct misinformation.
- Avoid telling them not to worry. The goal is to help your child realistically evaluate risk based on reliable information.
- Focus on how they can protect themselves and others from getting sick.
- Ask your child to come to you if they have questions or concerns as they may hear strange things or see strange things and wonder if they are true.
- Provide comfort and be patient.
- Check on your child's feelings on a regular basis.

Encourage positive activities and thoughts of safety

Continue doing regular activities (e.g., having family meals, bedtime routines, games, movies, faith activities, keeping physically active, listening to music). It helps provide a sense of security and safety. Talk about all of the people who are working hard to prevent the spread of illness and how you and your child can help protect yourselves and the community too (e.g., good handwashing, coughing or sneezing into your elbow).

Self-care for parents and caregivers

The high volume of information, concerns, and potential uncertainty in these situations can be overwhelming. Care for yourself by keeping routines, eating healthy meals, getting enough sleep, keeping physically active, staying connected, and handling stress. Take deep breaths and breaks to handle stress. Be honest about your feelings and show that you can still do things, and finish tasks, even if you're feeling worried. Look for creative ways to adapt your go-to activities, as needed, (and perhaps discover new opportunities to enhance your wellness and self-care). You are best able to support your children when you take care of yourself too.

Limit media coverage

Keep informed but limit your time for media and social media. It can leave you and your children feeling overwhelmed. (<https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/screen-time-and-digital-media>)

Seek support and continued connections

If you need to isolate yourself from others, call, text, email, video conference, and communicate through social media. You can also try playing online games with friends or family to keep entertained and connected with others.

Keep active

Although it's tough to stay indoors away from friends and sports we enjoy, we can still keep those screens away and be active. There are a lot of physical activities that can be done in our homes with each other. Look with your loved ones for small space activities that would be fun and would keep you physically active. Here are two great ideas:

1. Riverbank – This is an indoor version of Red Light, Green Light that is a lot of fun.
 - Form a line with string, tape, or an item already on the ground.
 - The leader will yell “river,” “bank,” or “riverbank.”
 - Players hop forward when they hear “river” and backward when they hear “bank.”
 - When the leader calls out “riverbank,” players hop sideways with one foot in the river and one foot in the bank.
 - Add an additional physical activity component by having participants do jumping jacks when they make a mistake before rejoining the game.
2. Everyone Around Me
 - Form a circle with chairs or specific spots on the floor with tape or string.
 - Select one person to stand in the middle (without a chair or space) as the caller.
 - The caller shouts out a fact about himself or herself. Example: Everyone around me wearing a blue shirt.
 - Anyone wearing a blue shirt must find a new seat as quickly as possible, including the caller.
 - The person left without a chair or spot becomes the caller.

Adapted from: asphaltgreen.org

Be mindful of how you speak

Rather than placing blame on certain communities or groups of people, put people first. This is a person who has the COVID-19 virus.

Need more help?

If your child is having on-going trouble coping with their emotions or is experiencing symptoms of stress (e.g., problems with sleep, goes back to having separation anxiety, needs a large amount of reassurance, stops having interest in friends, does repetitive behaviours such as excessive hand washing) ask your healthcare professional for help.