

Tips for Helping Your Child During the Pandemic



With the increasing prevalence of the Coronavirus, you might be feeling vulnerable, concerned, or anxious about the spread of the virus and the effects on your family. Your child might also be feeling this way in response to changes in your mood, information they are hearing, or changes in their daily routine or environment. The following suggestions and resources are designed to help you support your child at this time.



#1: Be available

Your child might hear information about the coronavirus in school, from the media, or from other adults or children in their lives. It is important to let your child know that you are there to listen or help them when they feel anxious, scared or worried:

- ▶ Listen to your child's feelings, questions, thoughts or beliefs.
- ▶ Use age appropriate language when responding to your child's questions or concerns.



#2: Let them know they are safe

Make sure you are calm when talking with your child. Tell them that you and other adults in their lives are doing your best to make sure they are safe. Let them know that you can

listen and help if they start to feel worried, anxious or scared.

- ▶ Provide extra positive attention: provide hugs, cuddles, high fives, or positive comments to connect with your child and reassure them that they (and those they love) are OK.



#3: Teach your child things they can do to feel safe

Help your child know what they can do to feel safe if they start to feel anxious, scared or worried:

- ▶ Explain new safety routines:
 - "We are going to wash our hands for 20 seconds when we come home to get rid of the germs that could make us sick. Do you want to sing a song or count?"
 - "When you cough/sneeze, you should cover your mouth with your elbow (model). This will help keep me, your family, friends and teachers safe too."

- ▶ Help them think of strategies to use when they start to feel emotional.

- Create a safe place where they can go or activities they can do to feel calm.
- Use the **Tucker Turtle technique**.
English: https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/TuckerTurtle_Story_Home.pdf
Spanish: https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/TuckerTurtle_Story_Home_SP.pdf
- Practice **breathing exercises**.
English: <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Smell-Blow.pdf>
Spanish: https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Smell-Blow_SP.pdf

- ▶ Teach them to talk to an adult about their feelings.



#4: Keep daily routines as normal as you can

Just like us, children find safety in their daily routine. When you are staying at home, here are some things you can do:

- ▶ Keep a predictable schedule for meals, sleep, and nap times.
- ▶ Keep routines the same (e.g., if you read a book before bed every night, continue to do this routine the same way).
- ▶ Provide choices when you can. Providing children with choices can give them some feeling of control, and will help ease anxiety.
 - Do you want to wear your blue shirt or red shirt today?
 - Do you want to play with the puzzle or build with blocks?
- ▶ Communicate when things might look different and why. For example, take time to explain new hygiene routines, that you or your partner are working from home, or that you or your partner might need to help siblings with their school work.
- ▶ Recognize and affirm your child's feelings of fear, disappointment, frustration, or other strong emotions in response to the changes in routines.
- ▶ If you have a plan in place for addressing challenging behavior, follow it. It provides consistency for your child and family.



#5: Create a "Plan B"

Let your child know that some activities might be postponed or look different (e.g., going to school, food). Prepare some backup activities if there is a change in plans:

- ▶ Find ways to provide movement activities for your child:
 - Take a walk.
 - Ride bikes.
 - Have a dance party.
 - Go on a scavenger hunt around the house or on a walk .
 - **ABC walk**—find items for each letter of the alphabet.
 - **Rainbow walk**—find items for each color in the rainbow.
 - Play movement games like Simon Says.
- ▶ If your child's school or childcare closes, prepare engaging, yet simple, activities your child can do at home. If family members are available, they can join in too!
- ▶ Have some distraction games ready to play at a moment's notice. For example: "I spy something in the shape of a circle, I spy something that is a type of fruit, etc."
- ▶ Create a "When Dad is busy, I can..." poster so your child can select their own activity. Create the poster with your child by finding pictures of activity options online or by drawing pictures together.
- ▶ Help your child create an activity bin filled with things your child enjoys and can do independently.
- ▶ Set out two or three activities or toys your child enjoys and offer those activities or toys when you need to do other things.



#6: Build family time into the routine

Set aside family time or schedule a time for everyone in the house to connect.

You might:

- ▶ Color or paint.
- ▶ Play board games.
- ▶ Do puzzles.
- ▶ Bake or prepare snacks together.
- ▶ Take a virtual field trip together.
- ▶ Spend extra time doing the things your child loves to do.
- ▶ Plan time in your schedule to connect your children virtually with familiar adults such as grandparents, family members, and close friends.



#7: Be aware of changes in your child's behavior

Just like adults, in tough situations, children's anxiety or fear might show up as a new behavior. These behaviors might be challenging (e.g., temper tantrums, hitting their siblings) or more subtle (e.g., withdrawing, seeking comfort or attention).

- ▶ Validate your child's feelings and offer support. For example, if your child whines or starts crying, you might say something like, "It looks like you are feeling sad. I noticed you are crying a lot today. When I feel sad, a hug makes me feel better. Would you like a hug?"
- ▶ Look for patterns in behavior. Does your child start whining when you start talking about missing school? Does your child start hitting siblings when you start work on your computer? Paying attention to when the new behavior occurs might help you anticipate when they will occur.
- ▶ Set aside a "quiet" place in your home where your child can go when they need to calm down. Use this place as a way to help your child calm and feel safe with their feelings while at home.
 - Offer materials such as books, squishy toys, blankets, or stuffed animals.
 - Invite your child to choose the location and materials.
 - Redirect your child to the quiet place when you see them experiencing strong emotions.
 - Do not use this space as a punishment.
- ▶ Provide extra positive attention to your child when they are not displaying the challenging behavior. If your child has started whining more, provide additional attention when they are using their "big kid" voice to ask for things.
- ▶ Encourage your child to talk about their feelings, especially around the subtle changes (e.g., withdrawing, change in sleep patterns). Use feeling cards or books to talk about emotions.
- ▶ As children spend more time at home, develop a set of expectations and rules.
 - Write the rules down in a place where all family members can view.
 - Make sure to include a simple visual or picture for each rule.
 - Select rules your child will understand that might help with the new changes in behavior. For example, if your child has started yelling or hitting, family rules that might be helpful for the child are, "gentle hands, kind words, and inside voices."
- ▶ Remind children frequently of the expectations and rules. "I know you are feeling angry right now. But we need to use gentle hands when you play with your sister."

For more resources to support families and young children in coping with stressful emergency or disaster situations, visit:

ChallengingBehavior.org/Emergency