

MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19



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How to Support your Children's Mental Health

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The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has caused ongoing challenges in individuals lives but especially for children and adolescents. This global pandemic has created ongoing stress, fear, grief, and uncertainty.

This may lead children and/or adolescents to have a difficult time coping emotionally. Many families have also experienced financial instability, stress, and family health concerns due to COVID-19. As schools start opening, mental health support has been highly recognized. Schools have prioritized the importance of mental health and established multiple resources for students to seek mental health support. These resources may include: School Counselors, Mental Health Clinicians, School Psychologist, Student Support Specialist, and Intervention Center Specialist. If your child needs mental health resources, reach out to your school to be referred to a mental health program.

References

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Signs-your-Teen-May-Need-More-Support.asp>
https://www.childlife.org/docs/default-source/covid-19/covid19-family-guidebook-full---4112020.pdf?sfvrsn=62848a4d_0x
<https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>

Recognizing the signs

Every person is different, meaning mental health challenges are not all the same. Some common symptoms for *children* may include but are not limited to the following:

- Changes in mood that are not usual in your child. For example, irritability, feeling hopeless or rage, and frequent conflict with family and friends.
- Changes in behavior. For example, if your teen is usually outgoing but suddenly stops showing interest in the things they use to enjoy such as spending time with family or friends, texting, or video chatting,
- Loss of interest in activities they previously enjoyed.
- *Hard time falling asleep or sleeping all the time*
- *Change in appetite*
- *Problems with memory, thinking, or concentration*
- *Decline in academic effort and less interest in schoolwork*
- *Changes in appearance. For example lack of basic personal hygiene*
- *Increase in risky or reckless behaviors*
- *Thoughts of suicide, or talking about suicide*

Talking to your child

Invite your child or adolescent to talk about how their feelings and emotions. Many children and adolescent may feel a sense of anxiousness, depression, anger, or hopelessness during this pandemic. It is important to note some children may not feel comfortable talking about their feelings and emotions right away. If your child or adolescent is having difficulty doing so, allow them the space to gradually express their feelings when they feel comfortable. Ways to help your child or adolescents feel comfortable talking about their feelings may include talking, painting, drawing to express themselves and manage stress, and activities if they feel comfortable doing so. If your child or adolescents is still having difficulty expressing their feelings and emotions, have them reach out to another trusted adult. Some examples may be a family member, school staff, or a counselor.

Dealing with loss

If your family has experienced the loss of someone due to COVID-19 there may be an increased risk for mental health challenges. If you need special attention, seek support from a professional counselor that could help you manage the loss and grief of the loved one. Contact your school to be referred to appropriate resources.

Coping skills and activities with the family

Take a moment to practice gratitude. Gratitude is when you take a moment and appreciate what you value, who you love and care for, and things we are thankful for. According to Positive Psychology, individuals who practice gratitude report lower levels of depression and stress. This results in higher satisfaction in social relationships which could be long-lasting.

Practice this gratitude exercises with your family:

Draw 10 small hearts. Fill those hearts with love for yourself and those around you. Write nice things in each heart about you and the people you care for. For example, write things you're good at, things you're grateful for, nice things people would say about you and affirmations. If you are having a difficult time, draw things that bring you love, courage, warmth, and happiness.

References

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Signs-your-Teen-May-Need-More-Support.asp>
https://www.childlife.org/docs/default-source/covid-19/covid19-family-guidebook-full---4112020.pdf?sfvrsn=62848a4d_0x
<https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-exercises/>