



## Tips for Supporting Your Child During COVID-19

Julie Nicholson, Julie Kurtz, LaWanda Wesley and Hannah Shack

**Support your child to feel safe.** Provide extra nurturing and reassurance and reinforce messages of safety as often as you can.

**Stay calm.** Stress is contagious and children will be impacted by the mood of the adults around them. When you remain calm and reassuring to your children, you will help them to feel safe and to prevent or limit the activation of stress chemicals throughout their developing brains and bodies. It is important not to talk about your own fears and worries with your child or in close proximity where they can hear you as this can cause deep distress for them.

**Maintain consistent and predictable routines as much as possible.** In stressful times, consistency and predictability is calming for children. Following daily routines—consistent times for meals, play, book reading, bath and bedtime as much as you can manage—supports children to feel a sense of order which is soothing and reassuring to children in times of change.

**Acknowledge what your child is feeling.** If a child shares something that is bothering them, do not respond, “Oh, don’t be worried,” or “That is silly” because he may feel embarrassed or shut down. Simply confirm what you are hearing: “Yes, I can see that you are worried.” Let your child know it is okay to experience a range of emotions and that it is common to express them in different ways—for example, a person may feel sad but not cry or they may say hurtful words when they are scared. What children need most is someone to listen and help to express what they are feeling with someone who cares. Don’t worry about knowing exactly the right thing to say and try to avoid jumping in to fix it or make it better. Just be present, listen and help them express how they feel. The research shows listening with compassion is the strongest medicine for calming down the stress response system.

**Avoid or reduce exposure to news coverage.** When young children hear news or see video or photos about stressful and/or traumatic events on TV, radio, newspapers or in social media, they often feel they are directly threatened. It is best if you can share information with them about COVID-19. Be honest and brief. Encourage your children to ask you questions. If you listen carefully, you will learn what is confusing and/or scary for them. You can provide enough information to clear up misunderstandings and share all the actions being taken to keep them safe (washing hands, staying home, helpers working hard in the hospitals etc.).

**Help children learn strategies to relax their bodies.** Help your child learn the signs in their body when they are feeling stressed (a racing heart, butterflies in their tummy, sweaty hands etc.) and strategies for calming their nervous systems. Examples include taking deep belly breaths, stretching or yoga, rocking, swinging, humming lullaby or petting a dog or cat.

**Help children have fun.** Ensure your child has opportunities each day to engage in activities they enjoy that create feelings of joy and normalcy for them. Drawing, spending time outside, reading their favorite storybooks, telling a joke or helping you fold laundry or make dinner offers moments for connection and fun. Model for children how part of managing a stressful experience is taking time to laugh, act silly and lighten things up with humor and playfulness.