

Ministry of Women and Child Development
Government of India

Coping strategy for Children and Caregivers

Sudden disruption in the daily routine, no clarity about resumption of regular life, looming fear of possible loss while limiting social interaction are some of the aspects in today's time, which can impact mental Health adversely. The effect could be equally felt by children and adolescents. It is necessary to stay vigilant and tread cautiously while dealing with Children under these circumstances.

Children should stay close to their parents and family, as far as possible. If a child needs to be separated from their primary caregiver due to suspected illness of child or caregiver, it must be ensured that appropriate alternative care is provided and a social worker, or caregiver should regularly follow up on the child. During periods of unavoidable separation, regular contact with parents and caregivers should be maintained, such as twice-daily scheduled phone or video calls or other age-appropriate communication (e.g., social media depending on the age of the child).

It is important to stay positive as well as honest while communicating with Children. Parents and caregivers can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared. Following are some steps suggested for Parents and Caregivers in this regard:

- **Make yourself available.** Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions. It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them. Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.
- **Make it a point to talk with your child or teen, answer questions and share facts** in a way that your child or teen can understand. You can explain facts to younger children in a child friendly manner through comic strips which will help reduce anxiety. Focus on helping your child feel safe but be truthful. If your child asks about something and you don't know the answer, say so. The Parent/Caregivers should stay updated about facts.
- **Figure out gently what the child already knows and what are his/her fears.** Ask questions geared to your child's age level. This gives you a chance to learn how much kids know — and to find out if they're hearing the wrong information. Listening patiently will also help them vent their stress and emotions.
- **Follow your child's lead.** Some children may want to spend time talking. If the child does not seem interested or does not ask a lot of questions, do not insist. However, gently tell the child that you would be available in case they wish to discuss the issue. **Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily.** Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. It is very typical for younger

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children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

- **Remain calm and reassure your child or teen that they are safe.** Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- **Avoid blaming anyone for the situation.** It is important to avoid stereotyping any one group of people. Instead, explain the facts to the children in a scientific manner. State the truth honestly but refrain from exaggeration.
- **Limit your family's exposure to news coverage of specific event, including social media.** Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand. Speak to your child about how many stories on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information. Constantly watching updates on the status of specific events can increase anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information (i.e., information designed for adults) can also cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- **Put news stories in context.** Watch the news with your kids so you can filter what they hear. **When sharing information, it is important to make sure to provide facts** without promoting a high level of stress, remind children that adults are working to address this concern, and give children actions they can take to protect themselves.
- **Try to maintain regular routines.** If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- **Discuss their role and contribution in staying safe.** Tell them it is possible for each one of us to protect ourselves and each other by maintaining personal hygiene and social distancing, which will help children feel in control.
- **Talk about all the things that are happening to keep people safe and healthy. Keep Explanations Age appropriate.** Elementary school children need brief, simple information that should balance facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Junior school children might ask specific questions about whether they are truly safe and they may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Senior students are able to discuss the issue in detail and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of facts. Parents should provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of specific issues. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.
- **Children often worry more about family and friends than themselves.** For example, if they hear that older people are more likely to be seriously ill, they might worry about their grandparents. Letting them call or Skype with older relatives can help them feel reassured about loved ones.
- **Socialize through social media.** Let children make video calls to their friends, cousins and loved ones. Seeing everyone safe and healthy will reduce anxiety and despair. It will also provide a platform for virtual entertainment while being isolated.

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- **Let your child know that it's normal to feel stressed out at times.** Recognizing these feelings and knowing that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help children build resilience. Tell them stories about survival in human history.
- This is the **time to engage children in developmental /creative activities and also structure their day.** Engaging in a creative activity, such as playing, and drawing can facilitate this process. Children feel relieved if they can express and communicate their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Many such activities can be chosen from the **Interventions** section of the website <https://www.nimhanschildproject.in/>
- **Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well.** Connect with your friends and family members. Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children.

Look out for Stress response in Children:

Children are usually resilient by nature. Given reassurance by parents or persons they trust, they can safely tide over distress situations. However, all children do not respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Professional help should be taken in case such behavior persists.

Steps to be taken by Parents/caregivers to support themselves:

- **Take breaks** from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the stressful stories repeatedly can be upsetting.
- **Take care of your body.** Take deep breaths, exercise regularly, stretch, or meditate.
- **Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.**
- **Take time to unwind.** Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- **Connect with others telephonically or through social media.** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.