



HENRY FORD
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Helping Children Process their Feelings During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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In recent weeks we have heard several alarming new developments about the impact of COVID-19 on children. As cases continue to rise, uncertainty is often increased by new discoveries and changing facts. Children are affected by these events and may become anxious about whether they or someone they love will become ill or die. During this time, it is very important to keep a few things in mind when you talk with your children. How you decide to engage your child is essential to their emotional well-being, comfort and safety. Remember you are their role model and they are looking to you for guidance and support.

Each child is different. How he or she processes information may consist of many cognitive distortions about the virus based on their developmental stage and amount of exposure to information. Cognitive distortion occurs when irrational thoughts fuel negative thinking patterns and emotions. One way to help combat this is for parents to be mindful of the news content they allow their children to watch. Parents can be supportive of their children of all ages by providing them meaningful opportunities to express their fear and anxieties without judgement.

Perhaps you and your family already have frequent conversations. However, due to the pandemic, I suggest tuning in even more often. Just as you are dealing with underlying stressors and emotions, children experience similar feelings and may not have verbal or cognitive skills to express themselves.

Some ideas to help you better address your child's emotional needs during the pandemic are:

- Welcome and encourage questions so your child will feel at ease.
- Utilize family time for creative projects as a form of expressing internal conflict.
- Identify age appropriate content to view and discuss the virus.
- Plan and prepare meals together.
- Empower kids to practice CDC recommended guidelines as leaders in the home to combat COVID-19.
 - They can do this by hand washing, refilling hand sanitizer bottles, taking inventory of masks and/or practicing social distancing activities. This helps children feel vested, resilient and more confident.

One additional tool to use is mindfulness. Mindfulness simply is being present in the moment and keenly aware of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and your environment. It is an excellent way for a family or child to intentionally tune into their emotions through a meditative process. It's a very helpful technique to consider when stress levels are high, intrusive thoughts dominate, anxiety increases, and fear is a common factor. Mindfulness will help your child learn to focus on his or her emotions in order to process them, cultivate healthy coping skills and self-regulate their feelings. Taking a few moments out of the day can make a difference. It's worth the effort and it's worth the time. It's for peace of mind.

If you notice a shift in your child's demeanor, look for some of these symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Sleep disturbance
- Clinginess
- Regressive behaviors they have otherwise outgrown
- Increased worry
- Substance abuse
- Nervousness
- Feelings of unusual sadness
- Unexpected angry outbursts
- Withdrawal from family members

This is not a full range of symptoms but is meant to heighten awareness since these are all possible indicators your child may be emotionally distressed. By using some of the techniques above, you can make a difference in helping to manage their feelings and develop healthy coping skills. However, should symptoms broaden or increase, seek support from a mental health professional.