

## Possible Children's Reactions to COVID-19 & Ways to Address Them

### Preschoolers (ages 4-7)

Possible Reactions	Ways to Help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● regressive behaviors (e.g. bed wetting, fear of being alone)</li><li>● decreased verbalization</li><li>● Change in appetite</li><li>● Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging</li><li>● increased anxiety</li><li>● self-blame</li><li>● Play out illness related stories with their toys</li><li>● Ask questions repeatedly</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Patience and tolerance</li><li>● Provide reassurance (verbal and physical)</li><li>● Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ You can use characters in a story to correct any misunderstandings they have about the virus</li></ul></li><li>● Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements</li><li>● Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime</li><li>● Maintain regular family routines</li><li>● Avoid media exposure</li><li>● Explain cause and effect (e.g. washing hands will <u>help</u> stop the spread of germs, not necessarily <u>will</u> stop)</li><li>● Provide simple explanation to child's questions</li><li>● Help child label and name their emotions by labeling and naming your own</li></ul>

## Elementary school aged children (ages 7-12)

Possible Reactions	Ways to Help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● decreased academic performance</li> <li>● Decreased attention/concentration</li> <li>● Decreased attendance/interest in school</li> <li>● Irritability or whining</li> <li>● Increased aggression</li> <li>● disruptive behaviors</li> <li>● somatic complaints (e.g. headaches, stomachaches)</li> <li>● sleep/eating disturbances</li> <li>● social withdrawal/loss of interest to interact with peers</li> <li>● Competition to gain parental attention</li> <li>● Guilt (e.g. others are sick and I am not; don't want to voice concerns from fear of upsetting parents, friends, and others more)</li> <li>● Depression</li> <li>● Difficulty verbalizing distress</li> <li>● Anxiety</li> <li>● Forgetfulness about chores and/or new information learned from school</li> <li>● Understand the impact of medicine and hygienic behavior but still forgetful of these practices</li> <li>● Concerned about impact on other people or on wider changes to life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Patience, tolerance, reassurance</li> <li>● Encourage play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet</li> <li>● Encourage regular exercise and stretching (get those endorphins, aka, "happy brain chemicals" flowing)</li> <li>● Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)</li> <li>● Participate in structured household chores</li> <li>● Set gentle but firm limits</li> <li>● Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions; include what is being done in the family and community; ensure explanations are accurate e.g. not all coughs are something to worry about right now</li> <li>● Encourage expression through play, drawings, stories and conversation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ E.g. feelings jar; questions jar- can be addressed at nightly family meeting</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Normalize feelings appropriately and talk about how you're addressing ways to help with their worries and feelings</li> <li>● Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines</li> <li>● Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</li> <li>● Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation</li> <li>● Make sure child doesn't take on adult roles in an effort to help others</li> </ul>

## Middle and high school (ages 13+)

Possible Reactions	How to Help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● decreased academic performance</li> <li>● Decreased attention/concentration</li> <li>● Decreased school attendance/interest</li> <li>● Avoidance and withdrawal</li> <li>● high risk behaviors or substance abuse</li> <li>● Isolation from peers and loved ones</li> <li>● emotional numbing</li> <li>● Depression e.g. agitation, decreased energy</li> <li>● Somatic complaints (headaches, rashes etc.)</li> <li>● sleep/eating disturbance including nightmares</li> <li>● Ignoring health promotion behaviors</li> <li>● Concerns about stigma and injustices               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Highly distressed about how illness is having a broad impact on people</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Seek out information independently from parents</li> <li>● Take advice from friends or other social influences on how to act at this time</li> <li>● Increased awareness of how illness and health behavior fits with what is important to them</li> <li>● Desire to find ways to help others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</li> <li>● Encourage continuation of routines</li> <li>● Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use open ended questions such as, “What did you think of the news that said...?”</li> <li>○ Provide information that you come across from a <u>reputable</u> source and gather their thoughts</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Support social opportunities and discussion with peers through telephone, Internet, video games etc.</li> <li>● Offer choice and promote independence within the context of what is possible and appropriate in the home</li> <li>● Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors</li> <li>● Suggest ways to help others in ways that are safe and appropriate</li> <li>● Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</li> <li>● Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak</li> <li>● Offer reframes about worries- how can we think about this differently to find some positive in this situation? e.g. This is a good time for our family to reconnect</li> </ul>

## References

- National Association of School Psychologists (2015). *When grief/loss hits close to home: Tips for caregivers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/addressing-grief/when-grief/loss-hits-close-to-home-tips-for-caregivers>
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- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2020). *Parent/caregiver guide to helping families cope with the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak\\_factsheet\\_1.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf)