West Islip Health & Wellness Alliance

Winter/Spring 2021 Volume 35

Coping with Stress

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major effect on our lives. Many of us are facing challenges that can be stressful, overwhelming, and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Public health actions, such as social distancing, are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but they can make us feel isolated and lonely and can increase stress and anxiety. Learning to cope with stress in a healthy way will make you, the people you care about, and those around you become more resilient.

Stress can cause the following:

- **Feelings of fear, anger, sadness, worry, numbness, or frustration**
- **Changes in appetite, energy, desires, and interests**
- **Difficulty concentrating and making decisions**
- **Difficulty sleeping or nightmares**
- **Physical reactions, such as headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and skin rashes**
- **Worsening of chronic health problems**
- **Worsening of mental health conditions**
- **Increased use of tobacco, alcohol, and other substances**

It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are ways that you can help yourself, others, and your community manage stress.

Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress

- **Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including those on social media.** It's good to be informed, but hearing about the pandemic constantly can be upsetting. Consider limiting news to just a couple times a day and disconnecting from phone, TV, and computer screens for a while.

- **Take care of your body.**
  - Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.
  - Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.
  - Exercise regularly.
  - Get plenty of sleep.
  - Avoid excessive alcohol, tobacco, and substance use.
  - Continue with routine preventive measures (such as vaccinations, cancer screenings, etc.) as recommended by your healthcare provider.
  - Get vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine when available.
- **Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.**
- **Connect with others.** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- **Connect with your community- or faith-based organizations.** While social distancing measures are in place, try connecting online, through social media, or by phone or mail.

Helping Others Cope

Taking care of yourself can better equip you to take care of others. During times of social distancing, it is especially important to stay connected with your friends and family. Helping others cope with stress through phone calls or video chats can help you and your loved ones feel less lonely or isolated.

Mental Health and Crisis

If you are struggling to cope, there are many ways to get help. Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row. During times of extreme stress, people may have thoughts of suicide. Suicide is preventable and help is available.

If you are in crisis, get immediate help:

- Call 911
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- National Domestic Violence Hotline:1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522
- National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4AChild (1-800-422-4453)
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- Veteran's Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text: 8388255

The West Islip Health & Wellness Alliance strives to inspire the West Islip community to mobilize, unify and coordinate its resources to ensure the health and well-being of all residents.

We strive to...

- reduce substance abuse among youth
- create a strong collaboration within the community
- cultivate healthy attitudes and behaviors.

Visit us on the web at:
www.wi.k12.ny.us

Parenting in a Pandemic: Tips to Keep the Calm at Home

Fear, uncertainty, and being holed up at home more to slow the spread of COVID-19 can make it tough for families to keep a sense of calm. But it's important to help children feel safe, keep healthy routines, manage their emotions and behavior and build resilience. Here are some tips from the American Academy (AAP) to help your family get through the stress of the pandemic.

Address Children's Fears
Children rely on their parents for safety, both physical and emotional. Reassure your children that you are there for them and that your family will get through this together.

- **Answer questions about the pandemic simply & honestly.**
- **Recognize your child's feelings.**
- **Keep in touch with loved ones.**
- **Model how to manage feelings.**
- **Tell your child before you leave the house for work or essential errands.**
- **Look forward. Tell them that scientists are working hard to figure out how to help people who get sick, how to prevent it, and that things will get better.**
- **Offer extra hugs and say "I love you" more often.**

Keep Healthy Routines
During the pandemic, it is more important than ever to maintain bedtime and other routines. They create a sense of order to the day that offers reassurance in a very uncertain time. All children, including teens, benefit from routines that are predictable yet flexible enough to meet individual needs.

Use Positive Discipline
Everyone is more anxious and worried during the pandemic. Younger children may not have the words to describe their feelings. They're more likely to act out their stress, anxiety or fear through their behavior (which can, in turn, upset parents, particularly if they are already stressed). Older children and teens may be extra irritable as they miss out on normal events they looked forward to and activities they enjoy with their friends.

Some ways you can help your children manage their emotions and behavior:

- ***Redirect bad behavior.*** Sometimes children misbehave because they are bored or don't know any better. Find something else for them to do.
- ***Creative play.*** Suggest your children draw pictures of ways your family is staying safe. Make a collage and hang it up to remind everyone. Or, build an indoor fort or castle to keep the germs at bay, bringing in favorite stuffed animals or toys.
- ***Direct your attention.*** Attention--to reinforce good behaviors and discourage others--is a powerful tool. Notice good behavior and point it out, praising success and good tries. Explaining clear expectations, particularly with older children, can help with this.
- ***Use rewards & privileges to reinforce good behaviors.***
- ***Know when not to respond.*** As long as your child isn't doing something dangerous and gets attention for good behavior, ignoring bad behavior can be an effective way of stopping it.
- ***Use time-outs.*** This discipline tool works best by warning children they will get a time-out if they don't stop. Remind them what they did wrong in as few words—and with as little emotion—as possible. Then, remove them from the situation for a pre-set length of time (1 minute per year of age is a good guide).

Take Care of Yourself
Caregivers also should be sure to take care of themselves: eat healthy, exercise and get enough sleep. Find ways to decompress and take breaks.

Take a breath. In addition to reaching out to others for help, the AAP recommends parents feeling overwhelmed or especially stressed try to take just a few seconds to ask themselves:

- Does the problem represent an immediate danger?
- How will I feel about this problem tomorrow?
- Is this situation permanent?

In many cases, the answers will deflate the panic and the impulse to lash out physically or verbally at children.

Reach out to your pediatrician with any concerns you have about your child's behavioral or emotional well-being and managing your family's stress.

West Islip Cares

RESPONSE of Suffolk County is a nationally accredited, community-based agency that provides a free, confidential and anonymous hotline available to anyone who needs to talk. (631)751-7500

Family Service League's Alcohol and Chemical Dependency Treatment Program provides comprehensive services for adolescents and adults. Its programs provide screenings, assessments, treatment, and evaluations to assist in determining what level of care is needed to support outpatient recovery and maintain abstinence. (631)647-3100

The NYS Child Abuse Hotline receives telephone calls alleging child abuse or maltreatment within New York State. The Statewide Central Register relays information from the calls to the local Child Protective Service for investigation, monitors their prompt response, and identifies if there are prior child abuse or maltreatment reports. (800)342-3270

Mental Health During COVID-19: Signs Your Child May Need More Support

How is your child coping during COVID-19?

Invite your child to talk about how they are feeling. Feeling depressed, hopeless, anxious, and angry may be signs they could benefit from more support during this difficult time.

Keep in mind that adolescents and young adults may try to hide their struggles because of fear, shame, or a sense of responsibility to avoid burdening others. Younger children may not know how to talk about these feelings but may show changes in their behavior or development.

Recognizing signs of stress in your child

Signs of stress and mental health challenges are not the same for every child or teen, but there are some common symptoms.

Infants, toddlers and young children...

may show backward progress in skills and developmental milestones. They may also have increased problems with:

- fussiness and irritability, startling and crying more easily, and more difficult to console.
- falling asleep and waking up more during the night.
- feeding issues such as frantic nippling, more reflux, constipation or loose stools, or new complaints of stomach pain.
- separation anxiety, seeming more clingy, withdrawn, or hesitant to explore.
- hitting, frustration, biting, and more frequent or intense tantrums.
- bedwetting after they're potty trained.
- urgently expressed needs while seeming unable to feel satisfied.
- conflict and aggression or themes like illness or death during play.

Older children and adolescents...

may show signs of distress with symptoms such as:

- changes in mood that are not usual for your child, such as ongoing irritability, feelings of hopelessness or rage, and frequent conflicts with friends and family.
- changes in behavior, such as stepping back from personal relationships. If your ordinarily outgoing teen shows little interest in texting or video chatting with their friends, for example, this might be cause for concern.
- a loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed. Did your music -loving child suddenly stop wanting to practice guitar, for example? Did your aspiring chef lose all interest in cooking and baking?
- a hard time falling or staying asleep, or starting to sleep all the time.
- changes in weight or eating patterns, such as never being hungry or eating all the time.
- problems with memory, thinking, or concentration.
- less interest in schoolwork and drop in academic effort.
- changes in appearance, such as lack of basic personal hygiene (within reason, since many are doing slightly less grooming during this time at home).
- an increase in risky or reckless behaviors, such as using drugs or alcohol.
- thoughts about death or suicide, or talking about it.

How your pediatrician can help

Staying in touch with your pediatrician is more important than ever during this pandemic. If you have any concerns, ask your pediatrician's office about checking on your child's social and emotional health. This can be especially important for children facing higher rates of illness or risk from COVID-19, such as minorities and those with special health care needs. Pediatricians can screen for depression and ask about other concerns like anxiety or trouble coping with stress. The doctor may also ask about these symptoms in other family members, as this can impact your child's health, and whether they know anyone who has become sick with COVID-19. It's important to offer your teen some privacy to talk with the pediatrician during the visit to ensure they have the chance to speak as openly as possible.

Dealing with the loss of a loved one to COVID-19

Children, adolescents, and families who experienced the loss of a loved family member or friend to COVID-19 are at increased risk for mental health challenges. They may need special attention and professional counseling to manage their loss and grief.

A Word About Suicide Risk

Rates of suicide for both adolescents and adults increase during times of high stress. In addition to screening for depression, your pediatrician can screen for suicide risk.

Remember, not everyone who considers suicide will talk about it, and not everyone who talks about suicide will act on their words. However, any talk about suicide should be taken seriously. If you are worried about your child, it is critical to make your home safe by removing weapons and ammunition from the house and securing medications in a locked cabinet.

Seek help immediately by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or texting the Crisis Text Line by texting 'TALK' to 741741. Reserve 911 for situations where self-harming actions are happening or are about to happen. In a non-crisis situation, talk with your pediatrician about any concerns you have about your child's mental health.

Supporting your child

Your pediatrician can offer guidance on ways to best support your child and help them build resilience. Some children or adolescents may need more time and space to express their feelings, for example, or gradual conversations and other activities besides talking, such as painting or drawing to express themselves and manage stress. Others might be more comfortable with direct conversations or activities. They may need to talk to a trusted adult about how to keep up social connections safely, or their feelings of boredom, loss, and even guilt if they have sometimes not kept up safe physical distancing.

Taking care to set the tone

Parents set the tone in the household. Expressing extreme doom or fear can affect your children. It can be challenging to stay positive, especially if you're struggling with your own stress. But try to stay positive and relay consistent messages that a brighter future lies ahead. It helps to set aside time to take care of yourself when possible, and seek the support you may need for your own mental health. Explore relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and yoga or stretching. Build in down time for the whole family, enjoying a nap, movie time or simply spending time together.

Keep lines of communication open between you and your child, and don't hesitate to talk with your pediatrician about ways to help maintain your family's mental health during this challenging time.

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West Islip Health & Wellness Alliance

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Suffolk County's Social Host Law

What is the Social Host Law?
The primary purpose of the Social Host Law is to deter underage drinking parties or gatherings where adults knowingly allow minors to drink alcohol or alcoholic beverages. The law applies to any adults (including parents) who are over the age of 18 and knowingly allow consumption of alcohol by minors (any person under the age of 21).

Why is this law needed?
This law provides a legal basis for holding adults responsible for knowingly allowing parties for individuals under the age of 21 to occur at a place under their control, whether or not they provide the alcohol.

Who can be charged?
Anyone who is over the age of 18; and Owns, rents, or otherwise controls a private residence; or a permanent or temporary domicile, including a home, apartment, condominium, cooperative unit, trailer home, recreational vehicle, mobile home, overnight accommodations at a hotel, motel, campsite or short-term rental property; or other dwelling unit of any kind, including yards and open areas adjacent to these locations;

Knowingly allows the consumption of alcohol or alcoholic beverages by any minor on such premises; or

Fails to take reasonable corrective action upon learning of the consumption of alcohol or alcoholic beverages by any minor on such premises.

What is "Reasonable Corrective Action?"
Reasonable corrective actions shall include, but are not be limited to:

- Making a prompt demand that the minor(s) stop drinking the alcoholic beverage or leave the premises; and
- If the minor refuses to comply with the request, the adult must promptly report the underage drinking to: Local law enforcement; or any other person with greater degree of authority over the minor (e.g. the minors' parents or guardians, etc.)

What are the penalties?
1st Offense: Fine not to exceed $500

2nd and subsequent offenses: Misdemeanor—fine up to $1,000 and/or a term of imprisonment not to exceed one year