



COVID-19 RESPONSE

PARENTING THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Help children cope with stress about COVID-19.

With all of the new information being shared about the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, it is easy for parents to become overwhelmed. More time at home with family members can be positive, but the expanding roles of parents as teachers, child care providers and more can cause stress for the whole family. Below are tips that may help parents.

WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO FIRST?

Calm yourself so you can calm your child. Before parents can talk to children of any age – including teenagers – they need to be calm themselves. The calming process starts with being attentive to your own thoughts and feelings. If you are sad or angry, feel like screaming or crying or can't stop negative thoughts, try one of the practices outlined below. Reach out for professional help if these steps don't increase your ability to cope and be calmer.

- **Monitoring** – pay attention to negative thoughts and feelings
- **Self-Care** – take time to nurture relationships, exercise, sleep, de-clutter and organize
- **Breathing** – breathe in to the count of four and out to count of seven to calm mind and body
- **Mindfulness** – practice mindfulness, meditation or prayer to reduce anxieties
- **Self-Kindness** – replace self-criticism with self-understanding and patience

WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO FOR CHILDREN?

Parents are the primary filters for the information that reaches children. In times of disaster and tragedy, parents need to be particularly attentive to the fact that they must filter out information that can be overwhelming and filter in love and reassurance.

CONTACT

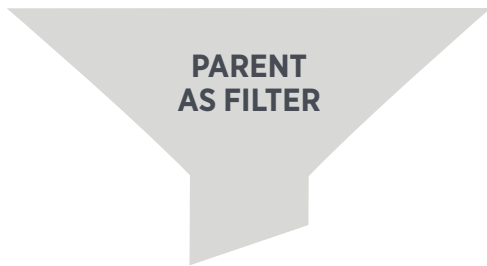
- ▶ **Laura Hubbs-Tait**
Extension Parenting Specialist
laura.hubbs@okstate.edu
405-744-8360
- ▶ **Jens E. Jespersen**
Human Development and Family
Science Graduate Student
jens.jespersen@okstate.edu
- ▶ **Find more information:**
humansciences.okstate.edu/fcs

FILTER OUT

Anxious, terrified and angry faces
 Scary images • Loud sounds
 Crying • Yelling • Screaming

FILTER IN

Supportive responses to events
 Responses to children's thoughts and feelings
 Good coping behaviors



**EVENT:
 COVID-19**

"I am here to care for you"
 Comfort and encourage
 Meet basic needs
 Maintain routines
 Love



**CHILD
 BEHAVIORS**

Exercise
 Help others (at a distance)
 Support relationships

**CHILD
 THOUGHTS**

Listen
 Answer truthfully



**CHILD
 FEELINGS**

Accept negative feelings
 Help manage feelings
 Soothe and calm

Adapted from Active Parenting-4th Ed; fredrogers.org; Help Kids Cope

WHAT SHOULD PARENTS FILTER OUT?

- Anything that affects your child negatively. You may see this in their thoughts, feelings or behaviors.
- If your child seems overwhelmed or out of control, increase your filtering. When talking things over, try to answer questions simply – in this case less is usually better.

WHAT SHOULD PARENTS FILTER IN?

- **Love and support** – Show your child how much you love them. Do all you can to be comforting and encouraging.



- **Expressing feelings** – Accept that your children may be scared or concerned by the things they hear or see. It is okay for them to feel sad, angry, afraid or confused. You can help them manage feelings by accepting them and encouraging them to talk. Help them learn to take deep, calming breaths or play a "let's pretend" game where they blow themselves up like a balloon (deep breaths) and then sail over the countryside while slowly letting out their air and gently sitting on the ground.

- **Good coping behaviors** – Physical activity and exercise are excellent for reducing stress and staying healthy. Keep up relationships with distant relatives through phone, text and chat.



HELP THEM MAINTAIN THEIR BASIC ROUTINES

There are ways for parents to adapt routines just a little bit and still keep the overall structure the same. The familiarity of structure and routines is reassuring to children.

- State clear rules and limits and provide reasons
- Re-establish clear routines for meals and bedtimes
- Encourage friendships through video chat, messaging or appropriate social media
- Promote physical activity at home
- Encourage helping others at a distance to maintain connections and build hope

WHERE CAN PARENTS TURN FOR MORE INFORMATION?

There are many excellent resources that have already been published for parents and children.

How to talk with your children about how they can avoid getting and spreading COVID-19:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>

What to watch for in your children and teens and how to support children and teens:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Detailed list of stress responses for preschoolers, school-aged children, and teens:

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

Potential responses to expect from children of different ages:

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>

Activity book for children ages three to 10 developed for responding to natural disasters:

https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readywrigley/documents/RW_Coping_After_a_Disaster_508.pdf

Activity pages for children:

https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/pdf/coping_activity_page_english-p.pdf

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