Toolkit: Helping Families Cope with the Corona-virus

Information & Communication

- **Keep updated about what is happening** with the outbreak and additional recommendations by getting information from credible media outlets, local public health authorities, and updates from public health websites (e.g., CDC in the US). **Don’t rely on social media.**

- **Seek support and continued connections from friends and family** by talking to them on the telephone, texting, or communicating through email or social media. Schools may have additional ways to stay in contact with educators and classmates. **Check in regularly with your children about what they have seen on the Internet and clarify any misinformation** – help them understand the current situation in a way they understand.

Scheduling & Activities

- **Even if your family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.** Keep your family’s schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.

- **Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better** in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities (prayer, participating in services on the Internet).

- **Have children participate in distance learning opportunities** that may be offered by their schools or other institutions/organizations.

- **Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting disease, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation such as a disease outbreak.**

Hygiene & Medical Care

- **Find ways to encourage proper hygiene and health promoting behavior with your children.** Include them in household jobs or activities so they feel a sense of accomplishment. Provide praise and encouragement for engaging in household jobs and good hygiene. Explain, however, that not every cough or sneeze means that they or others have COVID-19.

Self Care & Coping

- **Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of the situation** and focus on what you can accomplish. Shift expectations and priorities to focus more on what gives you meaning, purpose, or fulfillment.

- **Attempt to control self-defeating statements** and replace them with more positive thoughts.

- **Remember, you are a role model for your children.** How you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.
## Toolkit: Helping Families Cope with the Corona-virus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
<th>How to help?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Pre-school** | • Fear of being alone, bad dreams  
• Speech difficulties  
• Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting  
• Change in appetite  
• Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors | • Patience and tolerance  
• Provide reassurance (verbal and physical)  
• Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling  
• Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements  
• Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime  
• Maintain regular family routines  
• Avoid media exposure |
| **Ages 6-12** | • Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior  
• Clinging, nightmares  
• Sleep/appetite disturbance  
• Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)  
• Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest  
• Competition for parents’ attention  
• Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school | • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance  
• Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet  
• Regular exercise and stretching  
• Engage in educational activities  
• Participate in structured household chores  
• Set gentle but firm limits  
• Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community  
• Encourage expression through play and conversation  
• Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines  
• Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school  
• Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation |
| **Ages 13-18** | • Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)  
• Sleep/appetite disturbance  
• Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy  
• Ignoring health promotion behaviors  
• Isolating from peers and loved ones  
• Concerns about stigma and injustices  
• Avoiding/cutting school | • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance  
• Encourage continuation of routines  
• Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)  
• Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games  
• Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors  
• Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school  
• Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak |
Seeking Additional Help

If you or a loved one is having a difficult time coping with the outbreak and want to seek outside help, there are ways to get that help. For example:

- Get support regarding your anxiety or stress by speaking to a trained counselor at SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or by texting TalkWithUS 66746
- Contact your physician or your insurance company (if they have a consultation line) to ask health-related questions or to seek mental health support

Sources

- SAMHSA