

# HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD?

## Coronavirus Stress

Like adults, children of all ages need to process what is happening and find reassurance that everything will be all right. But unlike us, they have much less experience to draw on to do that. Children look to their parents or caregivers to help them understand and manage this experience. Though we don't have an exact blueprint for this either, there are some key ways we can help. Remember: **F.O.R.T.**

**Facts:** Children need to know, at an age-appropriate level, what's going on. Ask what they know or have heard, then share facts using language they can understand. Only offer as much information as they are asking for. Storybooks can be helpful with small children. You might watch the news or view online posts with your older child and then discuss it together.

**Openness:** Being honest and open tells a child that it's okay to discuss what happened, and it's okay to have questions and feelings about it. They learn they can rely on you to give honest answers, to be consistent, and to hear them. If we hide, lie, or only talk to other adults in private, children get the message that the topic is off limits and fears can grow. Very young children may not have the verbal skills to express their feelings. They may show them through play acting or drawing. You can help them name what they're feeling.

**Reassurance:** More than just saying, "Everything's going to be okay," give children real information to focus on. Talk about how your family is staying safe and keeping others safe by staying home. Talk about "the helpers" – doctors, nurses, first responders, scientists – who are helping people get well.

Actions also help our kids feel reassured. Creating routines, schedules and structure communicates that life is still following some predictable norms. Being connected and close as a family is also reassuring. Look beyond the forced closeness of stay-at-home guidelines to find quality time together. Try new things together. Have regular activities. Give them your undivided attention.

**Tools:** Children, like adults, want the feeling of powerlessness to go away. They want to find a place of emotional stability where they don't feel scared or sad. Talking through feelings and patiently allowing repeated questions is an example of how you can do this.

We can also help them learn active coping skills, such as talking back to anxious thoughts or using deep breathing to calm tension. Teaching them healthy hygiene rituals gives them a feeling of power over germs. Encouraging drawing and other creative activities gives them a way to express and respond to feelings. You can also help them find ways to help others. This can be an opportunity to get involved in a project that brings pride and takes away some of the feelings of helplessness.

You know your child's personality and behavior patterns. If you see changes that concern you, and they go on for more than a couple of weeks, consider contacting a mental health professional.

**Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can offer help and resources.**

**Together, all the way.®**



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