

Managing Anxiety and Stress

It's terrifying to learn that an illness such as coronavirus (COVID-19) is spreading across the world. The early stages of a pandemic can be especially anxiety-provoking. During this time, you don't know how widespread or deadly the illness is going to end up being. The way you cope with stress and anxiety can go a long way toward ensuring that you're taking helpful action in managing your mental health. Here are ways to help you ease anxiety surrounding coronavirus.

Feelings of fear, anxiety, sadness, and uncertainty are normal during a pandemic. Fortunately, being proactive about your mental health can help to keep both your mind and body stronger. Such an event can be extremely difficult not only for adults, but also for children in general and more specifically for children with disabilities. Following, are some tips and websites to provide information and help you deal with anxiety and stress during these uncertain times.

Anxiety and stress can be very real for children. Many children can work through their anxiety by finding a circle of trusted friends, being active in extracurricular activities or sports, or talking to a trusted adult.

But what about children with disabilities? Working on coping mechanisms or finding a group of sympathetic peers may be a difficult, leaving parents to ask, how can I help my child cope with anxiety and stress if they have special needs?

One Step at a Time: Helping with Executive Function

Children with anxiety who also have special needs may find it hard to prioritize tasks, meaning that everything is important, or nothing is. Too many tasks at once may leave an anxious child with special needs feeling overwhelmed or paralyzed. For example, how would you ask your child to clean her room? Here we may recall the saying, "what's the best way to eat an elephant?" The answer, of course, is "one bite at a time." Children with special needs who suffer from anxiety might require help with their executive function skills, prioritizing what is important and where to start. Instead of "clean your room!" start with, "Your room needs to be cleaned up. Start with picking up the dirty laundry on the floor and put it in the basket," then stand by to guide the process. When the clothes are picked up, move on to the Lego pieces or toys. Helping your child set realistic goals in pursuit of a larger goal will permit a sense of progress and accomplishment and reduce the "all or nothing" feeling that fuels anxiety and stress.

Determining Your Happy Place

Daily life will be different until children can return to school and their usual routines. This sudden change may trigger anxiety, fear, and uneasiness. It might be difficult to be cooped up at home with limited opportunities to leave the house. Finding a soothing, calming activity or object may help ease tension during this time. Determining your child's happy – safe – place might take some trial and error, but allowing your child that time to take deep breaths and regroup, might be the fuel your child needs to get back on track and eventually overcome those uneasy feelings.

The concerns and questions you have as a parent about your child's physical, mental, and behavioral health are both valid and important, as no one knows your child better than you do. The Westchester School can help be a trusted partner when it comes to the education and care of your child especially in dealing with anxiety and stress surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tips for Talking to Kids about Coronavirus (COVID-19)

- Remain calm and reassuring
- Remind your child that adults are there to help them
- Make yourself available for extra time together and attention
 - Keep the lines of communication open
- Monitor TV-watching and news updates from social media - constantly watching or reading about the COVID-19 outbreak increases anxiety

Best Ways to Stay Healthy and Manage Anxiety

- Get plenty of sleep and eat as healthfully as possible
- Review and model basic hygiene practices
- Get exercise to relieve stress and promote a healthy immune system
 - Right now, it is okay to go for a walk outside and practice social distancing
 - Youtube has a wealth of exercise/activity break videos for kids and adults that the whole family can do together
- Use mindfulness practices (many apps with free trials: Calm, Breathing Bubbles, Stop Breathe and Think, and many more)
 - Yoga
 - Deep breathing
 - Meditation/Guided imagery
 - <https://www.choc.org/programs-services/integrative-health/guided-imagery/>
- Use creative/productive outlets
 - Art projects
 - Music
 - Stay busy!
 - https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/stuck-at-home-activities?_ul=1*124yy4y*domain_userid*YW1wLWdwc2h5ckJdUJfTnczWTZtYnNqQnc.

Social Stories

<https://theautismeducator.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-1-1.pdf> (printable)

https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3W8Y_5xkRUNLqTDeBPYglzR2B1apRW02JG9mR91NNkdd8Xg-EKb5j2hQU

BrainPOP Video

<https://www.brainpop.com/health/diseasesinjuriesandconditions/coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR0I29jZv6WJYWvTBUEsKu9owZuixTYRxOTm97oogtmD5NjBfuT1JOS-Xfw>

Articles/Resources for Parents

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/coping.html>

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

<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/covid-19-research-findings>

https://mcusercontent.com/c2523f4cbcd5f394e2158b43f/files/d92de91b-bf7f-4cf8-86fb-44957ab46970/MHPSS_COVID19_Briefing_Note_FINAL_26_February_2020.pdf

<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters/pandemic-resources>

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Taking-Care-of-Your-Behavioral-Health-During-an-Infectious-Disease-Outbreak/sma14-4894>

https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR0owH_tqwXYe53h91ce1yVHxb8SuEpryGplmEVXJYX1fyQrc7GGKu84VUg

<https://www.wholechildcounseling.com/post/coronavirus-resources-for-kids-parents-counselors-and-educators?fbclid=IwAR1pyt5nY2tWq0RysxG-hXyRb-3xbyjCgP-aFkxiJaBccJkR1cuVg-JvXxs>

https://www.autismfl.org/?fbclid=IwAR21xTKfJTwdGQU96iYhcWEx4vMTp6H1TkDW72_-NuC0wHMGkwmTm_5Clyk

https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/pep20-01-01-006_508_0.pdf

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)