

## *Activities that Help Children with ADHD, ASD, & Other Learning Disabilities Cope with Changes Resulting from the Coronavirus*

### *Older Children and Teens with ADHD/Learning Disabilities (Higher functioning)*

#### **1) Stepping Outside the Box**

- <https://www.changetochill.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SteppingOutsideTheBoxWorksheetFINAL-1.pdf>
- This activity teaches older children/teens about how to cope with a negative circumstance, a changing situation, or a problem. It describes how you can become overwhelmed by a problem, but if you step outside the box, you can think more clearly, make better decisions, and avoid becoming too emotional to think things through.
- Parents can do the activity on a separate sheet too and discuss with their child the concept of stepping back and re-thinking situations where they become emotionally overwhelmed or frustrated.
- After the activity, let your child reflect. Then, parents should first ask the child their feelings about the concept of stepping outside the box. It's tempting to tell your child about how meaningful this message is, but remember that your child has their own ideas, too, and it will be more of a learning experience for them if they can share their own thoughts, feelings, and insights on the topic. Once they have ample time to share, parents can step in and validate the child's opinion followed by offering their own insights.
- In any future moments where the child struggles emotionally, parents can remind them of stepping outside the box activity and how taking a deep breath, stopping, and thinking can help calm their emotions and better cope with stressful or emotionally overwhelming situations.

#### **2) The Unplug Activity**

- This activity is great for kids of any age, but particularly the older ones who may use devices, especially smartphones, for several hours daily.
- Unplug means that children participate in an activity (ideally 1-2 hours or longer if possible), but leave their phone and all devices behind.
- Children can go outside or participate in any activity that engages the senses (e.g., listening to music, dancing, cooking, building/creating, gardening, taking a walk outside). Parents should instruct their child to notice things around them, things that children may not notice when they are distracted with devices.

- Ask your child to notice specific scents, temperatures, colors or sceneries, sounds, and tastes. This is a mindfulness exercise that helps reduce stress, worries, and anxiety and helps improve gratitude during difficult times or times of change.

### *Younger Children of All Ability Levels*

#### **3) Kids Learning About Coronavirus**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkUICIFE45M>
- This video provides a child-friendly explanation about the coronavirus.
- The video uses various illustrations that young children can understand. It explains what the virus is, how it enters the body, and how it can make people sick.
- Younger children, in particular, may ask quite often about why they can't go to certain public places or see their friends. This video helps explain things and parents can later refer to the video when children ask questions.
- Parents should also encourage their young child to explain what the coronavirus is, in their own words. This is a great opportunity to gauge children's understanding and clarify any confusion.

#### **4) Safe Place Pillowcase**

- This activity helps create a place of safety and comfort for children who become stressed or emotionally overwhelmed especially when required to stay home or stay indoors for long periods of time.
- Take an old, solid, light-colored pillowcase where your child can draw. Use gloves and coverings for clothes and with permanent markers, allow the child to draw people, places, and objects that help them to feel safe. They can write words of encouragement below the picture (or parents can help with this part).
- Make sure to wash the pillowcase before the child uses it. The ink from the permanent marker will remain, but the scent will be eliminated.
- Parents can encourage their child to hug or lie with their safe place pillowcase.
- Some examples of drawings include: Animals or pets; their family home; pictures of family members and friends; a ball or other object that represents a sport; a location they enjoy visiting, like the beach; and words drawn on the pillowcase such as "love," "count to ten," and "it will be okay."

*National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Recommendations for Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting From COVID-19*

- **Be a role model.** Children will react to and follow your reactions. They learn from your example.
- **Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19.** Your discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease your child's fear. If true, remind your child that your family is healthy, and you are going to do everything within your power to keep loved ones safe and well. Carefully listen or have them draw or write out their thoughts and feelings and respond with truth and reassurance.
- **Explain social distancing.** Children probably don't fully understand why parents/guardians aren't allowing them to be with friends. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. Showing older children the "flatten the curve" charts will help them grasp the significance of social distancing. Explain that while we don't know how long it will take to "flatten the curve" to reduce the number of those infected, we do know that this is a critical time, and we must follow the guidelines of health experts to do our part.
- **Demonstrate deep breathing.** Deep breathing is a valuable tool for calming the nervous system. Do breathing exercises with your children.
- **Focus on the positive.** Celebrate having more time to spend as a family. Make it as fun as possible. Do family projects. Organize belongings, create masterpieces. Sing, laugh, and go outside, if possible, to connect with nature and get needed exercise. Allow older children to connect with their friends virtually.
- **Establish and maintain a daily routine.** Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being. It also helps children and other family members respect others' need for quiet or uninterrupted time and when they can connect with friends virtually.
- **Identify projects that might help others.** This could include: writing letters to the neighbors or others who might be stuck at home alone or to healthcare workers; sending positive messages over social media; or reading a favorite children's book on a social media platform for younger children to hear.
- **Pay attention to what children see or hear on television, radio, or online.** Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.
- **Teach children everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs.** Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick. Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash. Get children into a handwashing habit. Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose,

coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.

- **Get Moving:** Being in the house all day is very difficult for everybody. Try incorporating physical exercise into your routine at home, a dance party is always a fun idea!

*Talking to Children about the Coronavirus from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)*

1. Create an open and supportive environment where children know they can ask questions. At the same time, it's best not to force children to talk about things unless and until they're ready.
2. Answer questions honestly. Children will usually know, or eventually find out, if you're "making things up". It may affect their ability to trust you or your reassurances in the future.
3. Use words and concepts children can understand. Gear your explanations to the child's age, language, and developmental level.
4. Help children find accurate and up to date information. Print out Fact Sheets from the CDC or WHO.
5. Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may also be a way for a child to ask for reassurance.
6. Acknowledge and validate the child's thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Let them know that you think their questions and concerns are important and appropriate.
7. Remember that children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about their own safety and the safety of immediate family members. They may also worry about friends or relatives who travel or who live far away.