

COPING STRATEGIES FOR THESE STRANGE TIMES

Strategies to help children cope in this uncertain time

- **Maintain a routine** – Try to keep a consistent time for sleep/wake and meals. Have children get dressed for the day and help plan some part of their day. Children attend school for about six hours per day, that does not imply they receive six hours of academic instruction.
- **Limit access to news media** – Young children do not need to watch/listen to news. The news right now is quite overwhelming in terms of content and amount. Reassure them that parents are monitoring the changing guidelines and will keep children safe. Teens may want to watch the news to get their own information. Watching together and encouraging conversation about what they are hearing can be a great learning experience for them.
- **Find ways to keep in touch with friends** – Children miss their friends and being together in school. Using technology to help them keep in touch and talk to each other will bring some sense of normalcy to their day.
- **Find an “other” focus – how can I make someone’s day better?** There are so many things we cannot do right now; it is easy to get stuck here. Encourage children to use their talents such as writing and drawing to reach out to a neighbor who lives alone or a grandparent who is not able to visit. Helping others increases a child’s self-confidence and self-esteem.

Framework for thinking about children’s needs and developing your own strategies

Perspective – Parent/Adult vs Child. Remember we are each looking at this situation through our own lens. Parents have an ability to take a perspective that children do not have. It is easier for parents to look at (or be overwhelmed by) the big picture. Children tend to be more focused on today, this moment. It will be important to consider their perspective when developing strategies for coping or interventions for problematic behavior.

Setting Expectations

- **Do your best, most of the time.** Nobody is perfect. We didn’t have a perfect routine before the health crisis, and we are not likely to have one now. If children are getting good sleep most nights, one late night, will not be the end of the world.
- **What is my best? Some days it is better than others!** If I get good sleep, eat a healthy breakfast, have my basic needs met, I will likely perform at an optimal level. If I do not

sleep well, feel ill, and am worried about caring for my family's basic needs, my best might look different. When children are experiencing significant changes in their routine and uncertainty about what will change and when, they may not be at their optimal level of performance on academics or behavior.

- **What is the goal or priority today?** Sometimes if we get through the day and everyone is mostly happy and healthy, that is a win! Some days we need to prioritize our mental and emotional health over academics or a spotless house.

Play is learning for children

- Children use play to master concepts and develop skills. They use play to master new vocabulary, try out a character, build communication and motor skills. Children and parents can play together to help build confidence, competence, and positive social skills.
- Let children help with cooking, coloring, and crafting. Cooking can reinforce reading skills and math skills if you are using a recipe. You can also use these activities to develop skills of planning and organization. Coloring and crafting encourage creativity.

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