

Strategies for Helping your Child Cope with COVID-19: Guidelines for Parents

Consider the following strategies to help your family or children cope during COVID-19.

Keep explanations brief, while using simple and honest language:

- 1) If your child is asking questions repeatedly or their worries interfere with their daily activities, tell them that there will be a certain time each day when they will have your undivided attention to discuss their worries and their fears.
- 2) If your child comes to you and tells you they are anxious:
 - Show them that you hear what they are saying by acknowledging how they are feeling. Next, defer discussing your child’s worry until a predesignated time of day
 - For example, you could say something like, “I can see you’re really worried right now. We will talk about that more at 6 o’clock”
 - During that time, consider using child-friendly phrases like “strong germ” and “making people in the community sick”.

Encourage your child to continue with their daily activities (as much as possible):

- 1) Engage in typical morning routines, chores, meal times, and nighttime routines
- 2) Use visual timers or schedules to help children independently track their progress for the day
- 3) Maintain typical sleep schedules and screen time limitations



Promote positive child behavior by rewarding them for completing morning, afternoon, and/or all-day tasks:

- 1) Children pick movie for family movie night
- 2) Family board game night
- 3) Children pick special lunch/dinner meal
- 4) Extra screen time
- 5) Special art activity

Now is a great time to establish lifelong coping strategies to use for anxiety management:

Schedule 5-10 minutes to practice a new relaxation strategy with your child in a quiet and calm area of the house.

Deep Breathing

- First, breathe in through the nose and feel the belly expand while the chest remains flat.
- Then, breathe out through the nose and feel the belly contract.
- Tip: Try this one lying on your back with an object (e.g., phone, toy car) on your belly so you can see it expand and contract!
- Visit this link (<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html>) for guided videos for deep breathing



Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

- From head to toes: Think about each muscle, tighten it for 10 seconds, and then relax it.
- Check out this guide (<http://www.rainbowreach.com/Spaghetti%20Toes.pdf>) that uses the example of uncooked and cooked spaghetti to teach PMR to children!

Physical Exercise

- Walk outside
- Ride your bike

Guided Imagery

- Think of somewhere calming (e.g., lake, beach) and/or happy
- Then, have your child answer these questions: What does it look like? Who is there? What do you hear? What does it smell like? Are there any tastes?

Reassure children by promoting activities they can control during a time of uncertainty:

- 1) Praise children for washing their hands, not touching their faces, sneezing/coughing into their elbow, and helping clean the house
- 2) Model appropriate behavior by cleaning often and practicing social distancing

Check out the following references for more tricks/tips!

- 1) UM Health Blog: How to Talk with Kids about COVID-19:
<http://michmed.org/yO2W6>
- 2) National Association of School Psychologists: Talking to Children about COVID-19: <https://tinyurl.com/udox73h>

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Teryn P. Bruni, PhD, BCBA
Plain language editing: Karelyn Munro, BA

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 03/2020