

Providing Your Child Support During the Pandemic

Allow children to feel badly about the losses they have incurred or will incur as a result of this event.

Feelings just are – they are neither right or wrong, good or bad. Children and teens are likely to feel badly about the cancellation of prom, missing playdates, cancelled birthday parties, etc. Their feelings about personal loss does not mean they are incapable of seeing the bigger picture, or that they are insensitive to what others may be going through. It does not mean they are not appreciative of what they have. It just means they are hurting. They are grieving multiple losses – with the loss of normalcy being primary.

- Offer understanding and support – “I know you were looking forward to...” “It is so difficult not to see your friends.” “You’ve worked so hard for and now it is not going to happen as planned.”
- This is not the time to point out how fortunate they are – avoid telling them to look on the bright side, or comparing their lives to children in another nation. This is not about comparison, or who has it worse, it is about their feelings in the moment.
- Adding guilt only compounds sadness and anxiety – telling children that they are being self- centered or talking with them about the tragic impact on others is not helpful in the moment

Parents want to fix things for their children. We, as parents, must admit that we cannot fix this one. While we do not want to increase their anxiety, we do not want to act as though this will all be fine tomorrow.

- Child: “What if this never ends?”
- Parent: “I know this is so scary”
- Child: “Will we be stuck inside forever?”
- Parent: “I’m feeling stuck also. But not knowing is stressful. I know you’re scared”

Minimize media coverage – this is easier to do with younger children than with teens.

Answer questions honestly but tailor to age. For example, do not tell a 6-year-old about the rising death toll, but, if asked, do tell them that this is a serious illness.

Talk with children about that which they can control

- Wash your hands
- Social distancing

Talk with them about how they may be able to help or have a positive impact. Children, and adults, feel a loss of control and powerlessness. Helping them feel helpful may decrease anxiety

- Making cards for a nursing home
- Face timing relatives/friends that may be feeling lonely

Check in with children/teens:

- So as to minimize our anxiety, it may be easier to avoid checking in. “If they aren’t asking questions, then I won’t bring it up.” Children/teens may not ask questions for a variety of reasons. It is important that we check in without pressuring them to talk. “How are you doing?” “Would you like to talk about?”
- Often the most productive of dialogues do not happen with intention – in the care, during a game, etc. Meaningful conversations do not always have to be planned ad structured. Follow their lead.

Lower the bar on parenting:

- This does not translate into 12 hours of non stop TV or video games, but it does mean that it is not business as usual. While structure is important and can ease anxiety for children and teens, this is not the time to be rigid and inflexible. There may be some more negotiation in roles and responsibilities.
- You do not have to fill every moment with crafts and family games. I guarantee you that even Martha Stewart is off schedule.
- There needs to be more rest, play and fun as the climate of the world is so contradictory to the essence of childhood
- Allow for a little more distraction such as TV, Face timing, etc.
- This is not to say that all responsibilities are forgotten or ignored but prioritize and be a bit more forgiving

Talk about future plans so that children/teens recognize there is a future however avoid setting definitive dates/time frames. It is OK to say you are not sure when will happen but you are hopeful that it will

Recognize that children and teens may experience stress/anxiety differently than adults

- Children and teens may be more likely to 'act out' or behave in self-destructive ways. While such behaviors should not be ignored, it is most effective to address them with kindness and compassion. Rather than blaming or shaming, try to offer constructive alternatives to address their feelings
- Younger children may benefit from more physical activity, punching a pillow, drawing their fears/anxiety
- Older children may be encouraged to reach out to a close friend for support, distract themselves with a video, etc.

Younger children may be more inclined to reach out to their family for support while teens may turn to their peer group.

- Remember it is about the child/teen getting their needs met in a positive, safe way. If friends offer this to your teen, allow it to happen. Often our need to fix things, or be the one they turn to, overshadows what is necessary for them to feel better.