



COVID-19 Support for Schools

These are challenging times. Feeling stress about the COVID-19 pandemic is normal. A healthy amount of stress helps us react in a way that protects ourselves and our loved ones when needed. Too much uncontrolled stress, however, is unhealthy. **Our children are looking to us at every moment for how we respond and react to the changes happening daily.** They are watching how we respond to the news stories, how we tell them spring break trips are canceled, and how we communicate that school is closed.

Research tells us that the presence of a compassionate, safe adult calms kids and reduces their stress level. Managing stress is the most important step in taking care of your children's and your own mental health during this time.

Families and children can do the following to manage stress and anxiety associated with COVID-19:

- Set limits on your exposure to news and media related to COVID-19. Allow yourself to get the facts but avoid overexposing yourself as this can cause increasing anxiety and worry.
- Stay present. In uncertain times, it is not unusual to worry about the future. Try to keep perspective on what is going well.
- Focus on what you can control. Just as children find calmness when they have a sense of control, adults do as well. Attempt to control your family's routine, quality time together, modeling of good hygiene habits, and social distancing.
- Talk to each other. Engage, daily, in open check-ins and compassionate conversations. Listen to each other and attend to your needs and those of your family members.
- Enjoy being together as much as you can. Many caregivers don't often have the opportunity to watch their children learn. As we are home together, take the time to see their schoolwork and participate in their learning.
- Keep yourself healthy. Eat good things, drink lots of water, get plenty of sleep, get physical exercise, avoid excessive use of alcohol or other substances, take care of your mind and body.
- Social distancing does not mean social isolation. Stay connected to friends and family, virtually or by phone. We are maintaining physical distance to keep us all healthy; we must maintain our relational closeness to protect our mental wellness. Practice this daily.



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Here are some questions a child might ask. Answering truthfully with age-appropriate responses is perfectly ok:

- Q: Why can't I play on the playground with those two boys who are there? A: We need to take a break from playing closely with other kids so we can all stay healthy.
- Q: Why can't I see grandma? A: If we give grandma space like this, it can help make sure she stays healthy.
- Consider ways to help children stay connected to older relatives through phone calls or video chat. Read more [here for tips on doing this.](#)

Below are some tips for different age groups. For a comprehensive resource to help children understand and communicate about what's going on, visit SAMHSA's [Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks.](#)

Early Elementary-Aged Students

- Ask age-appropriate questions and provide age-appropriate responses. Do you have any questions about why we are not going to school right now?
- Limit the amount of information you initiate, let your child lead the conversation.
- Correct misinformation calmly. Relate the situation, such as coronavirus symptoms, to something they can understand, like a cold or the flu. When they are sick, their doctors take good care of them and help them get better, and that is what doctors are working to do now.
- Reassure your child that they are safe and adults are working hard to keep everyone healthy.
- Help your child feel a sense of control and teach them what they can do to keep your family and others healthy by practicing good hygiene (washing hands while singing twinkle, twinkle little star and catching your cough).



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Middle School-Aged Students

- Limit television viewing and exposure to social media. Much of what your adolescent might hear or see about COVID-19 may cause anxiety or could be inaccurate. Children and adolescents tend to personalize events and do not always have the larger context to process some of the information they may hear without experiencing a great deal of anxiety.
- Be honest and accurate. Provide facts about the symptoms of COVID-19, talk about the measures being taken to help people.
- Validate their feelings, fears, and anxiety. Don't be afraid to check in regularly. Ask how your child is feeling. Have they heard any new information about COVID-19 they would like to talk about? Be a safe and supportive outlet for your child.

High School-Aged Students

- Discuss the issue in a more in-depth fashion. Ask and answer questions.
- Together, look at appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help facilitate a sense of control and limit anxiety.

Resources:

- Some children or adolescents may be at greater risk of becoming preoccupied with questions or anxious about the COVID-19 crisis. This could be expressed through physical, emotional symptoms, or changes in sleep or eating habits. If you're worried about these signs, you can call the Colorado Crisis Services at 1-844-493-8255 or text "TALK" to 38255.
- [Support families in helping young children cope with the challenges that might occur during stressful emergency or disaster situations](#)
- [COVID19 and early childhood](#)
- Telehealth options are becoming increasingly available for ongoing support. For additional resources or to find a provider, visit mentalhealthcolorado.org.