

Tips for Supporting Student Wellness During COVID-19

What should I tell my child about coronavirus and why schools are closed?

It is important that families talk with children regularly about the COVID-19 outbreak in order to provide appropriate information, answer questions, and help process worries. Key points can include:

- Coronavirus/COVID-19 is a sickness, similar to the flu but **much less common than flu; most people who get it do not become very sick.**
- **Children and teens who get the virus generally have only mild to moderate symptoms** and recover without any need for medical care from a doctor's office or hospital.
- Coronavirus/COVID-19 can spread easily from person to person, so **schools are closed to prevent a lot of people from getting sick all at once.** So far, very few people in the U.S. have it.
- We don't yet know when schools will re-open, but when they do, teachers will help students adjust. **Students all around the world are out of school right now, so you are not alone, and you will not be behind other students.**
- **Our family is taking steps that will help keep you safe** like handwashing and social distancing.
- It is **normal and okay to have different feelings at once** — excited to be out of school, sad not to see teachers or friends, disappointed that events are cancelled, worried about what will happen next, bored at home, concerned about relatives — but I will help you manage your feelings.
- Even if I have to be gone for work or for other important reasons, I am going to make sure you are cared for; **I'm not going to leave you.**

For more information on how to talk with your child, see these resources:

- Talking to Children About COVID-19: A Parent Resource (available in 7 languages) (NASP): <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-covid-19>
- PBSNewsHour: 10 tips for talking about COVID-19 with your kids: <https://www.pbs.org/talking-about-covid-19>
- Coronavirus: How to talk to your Child (English/Spanish, and with audio read out (KidsHealth): <https://kidshealth.org/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>
- Talking to kids about the Coronavirus (English/Spanish, and with video) (Child Mind Institute): <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>
- Key Facts about Coronavirus (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/facts.html>

What is normal behavior for children and teens right now?

With schools suddenly closed, many students feel cut off from social networks and are experiencing confusion, stress, worry, and disappointment. **The following reactions are common, but if they continue for 2 weeks or more, or are very significant changes from their normal behavior, it may indicate that your child or teen could use your help to manage what they are feeling.**

Grades Pre K - 2	Grades 3 - 6	Grades 7 - 12
Excessive energy / Hyperactivity Frequent crying / Tearfulness Separation anxiety Increased whining Developmental regression (for example, toileting accidents)	Excessive energy / Hyperactivity Excessive worry / Repeated questions Frequent crying / Tearfulness Separation anxiety Increased whining Boredom	Excessive worry / Repeated questions Poor concentration Irritability / Anger Difficulty sleeping Fatigue Boredom

What can I do to help my child or teen cope?

TRY TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S DAY PREDICTABLE:

Determine sleep schedules and help your child stick to them. Children and teens need about 9-11 hours of sleep per night. For more information on healthy sleep, visit www.sleepeducation.org.

Try to provide structure. A consistent schedule can help kids and teens know what to expect and adjust. Knowing how the day will go can help you get through it more easily, too.

For younger children (PreK-Grade 5):

- **If multiple caregivers will be in your home, post a visual schedule** so kids know who will be taking care of them and when you will be available. Review the schedule every day.
- If possible, find some time during the day when you ask children not to interrupt you unless there is an emergency. **You need this time to process your own feelings and take care of yourself.** Help children understand when these times are and what they should do during those times.

FIND WAYS TO MAINTAIN SOCIAL CONNECTION:

Social support is critical for getting through difficult experiences. **School-aged children should have opportunities to connect with classmates, friends, or relatives every day, if possible.** Find ways to help your child make a phone or video call, write letters or emails, send text messages, and leave the house when possible to see that other community members are also outside (while following [CDC recommendations for social distancing](#)). If it is not possible to help your child or teen connect with peers, one strategy that may be helpful is to talk with them about the connection they now share with millions of kids around the world. They truly are all in this together, and this moment will be in the history books from this day forward. That sense of connection may be helpful.

HELP YOUR CHILD BUILD A TOOLBOX OF SAFE, EFFECTIVE COPING SKILLS:



Coping skill 1: Stay physically active

Staying active is one of the most effective ways to stay mentally healthy and to cope with worry, sadness, and isolation. **During this uncertain time, physical activity is especially important for all children and teens, but making it possible may require creativity right now.**

Help your child brainstorm ways to stay active that work for your family setting. Some ideas might include:

- Going outside for a walk, jog, or bike ride
- Trying an online fitness workout or workout with a friend over the phone
- Playing hopscotch
- 30 minutes of family fitness (jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups)
- Dancing to a favorite playlist
- Walking up and down staircases

If your family is not used to being physically active or if you have health conditions that make it difficult, this coping skill may feel hard. It's okay if you can do only a little bit. **Setting and tracking goals for physical activity can help, and achieving even small goals can be empowering.** Also, try to notice if your own feelings of worry, hopelessness, or despair feel a little bit better during or after physical activity, and help your child notice, too.



For a short video about the mental health benefits of physical activity, see:

<https://www.youtube.com/TRAILS/physical>

Recommended websites to help children and teens use physical activity to feel better:

1. TRAILS Physical Activity Materials: worksheets, handouts, videos, and more!
<https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/behavioral-activation>
2. GoNoodle: Movement and mindfulness videos created by child development experts.
<https://www.gonoodle.com/>
3. American Heart Association-NFL Play 360: Quick videos, featuring NFL players:
<https://play60.discoveryeducation.com/videos>
4. KidsHealth Easy Exercises for Teens: <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/easy-exercises.html>
5. 30-Minute Hip Hop Fit Workout: <https://www.youtube.com/HipHopWorkout>



Coping skill 2: Make time for mental rest

Everyone around the world is experiencing increased worry right now, including children and teens. You can help your child take mental breaks by practicing a few minutes of relaxation or mindfulness together or teaching them how to do this on their own. **Research shows that even 5 minutes a day of relaxation practice can help reduce stress, decrease inappropriate behavior, boost concentration, and improve sleep.** Here are a few strategies you can try at home:

Grades Pre K - 2	Grades 3 - 6	Grades 7 - 12
<p>Animal yoga: Pretend to be different animals, and shape your body into curled up and stretched out positions. Imagine being that animal feeling cozy in places of safety, or relaxing in nature.</p> <p>Slow breath: Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 2, breathe out for 4 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times while lying down or sitting comfortably.</p> <p>Tighten & Relax: Move through each major body part, slowly tightening (10 seconds) and relaxing (10 seconds) the muscles in each one.</p>	<p>5 Senses: Spend 30 seconds focusing on each sense (sight, smell, sound, etc.) and observe what you notice.</p> <p>Imaginary vacation: Close your eyes and pretend you are in a favorite place – a beach, your room, a hot air balloon – and imagine, tell, or write about what it is like there.</p> <p>Mindful eating: Hold a piece of food in your hand (raisin, M&M, etc.) and look at, feel, and smell, it. Then put it on your tongue and notice its smell, taste, and texture before chewing and swallowing.</p>	<p>Body Scan: Mentally observe your whole body, one part at a time. Note where you feel tension, pressure, pain, or calm. Try to spread the calm throughout your body.</p> <p>Loving Kindness: Create a statement of forgiveness, kindness, wellness, or love and send it to yourself. Then in your mind send that message to loved ones, friends, family, neighbors, your community, and finally, the whole world.</p> <p>Tolerating Emotional Waves: Focus on the image of difficult emotions being like waves that come and go. You can ride the wave of each emotion, just tolerating it when it's present, and trusting it will eventually roll on and give way to a moment of calm afterwards.</p>

For a short video about relaxation, see: <https://www.youtube.com/TRAILS/Relaxation>

Recommended websites for children and teens to support relaxation, mindfulness, or meditation:

1. TRAILS relaxation materials: worksheets, handouts, videos, and more!
<https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/relaxation>
2. TRAILS mindful materials: worksheets, handouts, videos, and more!
<https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/mindfulness>
3. Kids Health: Relaxation Techniques <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/relaxation.html>
4. American Psychological Association: tips for building resilience
<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience>
5. Go Zen: 50 Calm Down Ideas <https://gozen.com/50-calm-down-ideas-to-try-with-kids-of-all-ages/>
6. Mindfulness for Teens (includes videos and guided meditations) <http://mindfulnessforteens.com/>



Coping skill 3: Coping with big thoughts

When faced with stress or uncertainty, our brains are designed to focus on warning signs of danger. This “fight or flight” response increases our heart rate and makes us feel uneasy and tense. One way to feel better is to identify the source of our anxiety, and use careful thinking skills to calm back down. **You can help your child or teen learn to recognize worried thoughts and focus on more helpful thoughts instead.**

- Step 1:** Help your child identify their thoughts
(Ask: If you were a cartoon, what would your thought bubble say right now?)
- Step 2:** Help your child figure out if this thought is fully true, somewhat true, or not really reasonable
(Ask: How do you know this is true? Let’s find out more about this. How likely is this?)
- Step 3:** After discussion, help your child come up with a believable, but less worried thought
(Ask: What could you tell yourself instead that would help you feel less worried? What would you tell a friend who was having the same thought, to help them realize it wasn’t fully true?)

For a short video about coping with worried thoughts, see:

<https://www.youtube.com/TRAILS/Thoughts>

Recommended websites for children and teens to support coping with worried thoughts:

1. TRAILS Cognitive Coping Materials: worksheets, handouts, videos, and more!
<https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/cognitive-coping>
2. Observing our Train of Thoughts video <https://www.youtube.com/Train-of-Thoughts>
3. Reach Out: Challenging Negative Thoughts:
<https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-challenge-negative-thoughts>
4. Wellcast: Automatic Thoughts: <https://www.youtube.com/AutomaticThoughts>
5. HereToHelp: Healthy Thinking: <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/healthy-thinking>



Example worried thoughts about COVID-19	More helpful coping thought
<p>"I am going to get very sick."</p>	<p>"I am taking steps to stay healthy." "Even if I do get sick, this virus does not usually make children and teens very sick." "This virus is still very rare, much more rare than flu."</p>
<p>"My family is not safe."</p>	<p>"My family is doing a lot to keep us safe right now." "My family is following advice from very smart people who know what is best to keep us healthy."</p>
<p>"We are going to lose our housing because we won't have enough money to pay for it."</p>	<p>"All the people in charge of our community are working hard to make sure families have what they need." "There are a lot of services working right now to help families pay bills, find food to eat, and keep their homes." "It is unlikely, but if we did lose our house, my family would still be with me and would help keep me safe. It would be very hard but we would get through it together."</p>
<p>"I won't be able to deal with being so scared or isolated from my friends or relatives."</p>	<p>"I have experienced difficulty in the past. I am strong and can get through even really hard situations." "This situation might be scary or upsetting, but it's okay if I need help to get through it. Lots of people are asking for help right now, too." "I can still communicate with my friends or relatives by phone, video calls, texts, emails, and even sending letters or packages." "I'm not alone – kids all over the world are going through exactly what I'm going through right now."</p>
<p>"I can't leave my house without risking illness."</p>	<p>"The best health information right now advises people to leave their houses but just not come in close contact with others or create groups of more than a few people." "I can leave my house to go for a walk, go for a drive, ride my bike, sit on my front steps, and lots of other activities." "When I go out, I can take precautions and follow guidelines about how to be safe."</p>

TEACH CHILDREN AND TEENS TO RECOGNIZE HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY COPING:

It is normal to reach for coping strategies that provide immediate relief. However, some things that make us feel better quickly are unsafe or make us feel worse later. These can include sleeping more than 10-12 hours per day; spending more than a few hours per day watching TV or videos, going on social media, or playing video games; substance use or abuse; or self harm (such as cutting). **Help your child or teen recognize the ways they are coping and explore whether the strategies are truly helpful or not.** Good questions to help evaluate a coping skill include:

- Does this calm me down if I am worried, or help me feel better if I am sad?
- Are there any negative side effects – either right away or later?
- Does this hurt anyone or put anyone in danger, including myself?
- Does this help connect me to friends or family members that I trust?
- Is this something that my teacher or doctor would want me to do?
- How is this like or unlike ways that my family encourages me to cope?

What should I do if I am worried about domestic violence or abuse?

ESTABLISH A SAFETY PLAN WITH YOUR FAMILY:

When families are under a lot of stress, the risk of abuse and violence can increase. **All families can benefit from talking about safety planning, but especially families with a history of violence or abuse.** The following advice is from the National Domestic Violence Hotline:

- **Teach children when and how to call 911** – this includes any time they are afraid anyone in their home is in physical danger.
- **Instruct children to leave the home if things become unsafe at home, and make sure they know where to go.**
- **Come up with a code word that you can say when they need to leave the home** in case of an emergency – make sure children know not to tell others what the secret word means.
- **In the house: Identify a room they can go to when they're afraid.** If possible, help them come up with something they can think about when they're scared.
- Instruct them that if someone is behaving violently, **they should stay out of the kitchen, bathroom and other areas where there are items that could be used as weapons.**
- Teach them that although they may want to protect a parent, **children and teens should never intervene when an adult is physically aggressive.** Tell them **it will never be their fault** if an adult hurts someone and they did not stop it.
- **Help them to make a list of people that they can go to for help.**

In an emergency, always call 911 first. Other resources for families experiencing violence:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline and Chat: 1-800-799-7233 www.TheHotline.org
- National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453 www.ChildHelp.org



Remember, the best way to take care of those you love, is to take care of yourself, too. During this stressful time, it is important that you do your best to treat yourself with kindness and compassion. As much as you can, try to: get adequate sleep, eat nutritious meals, build in both physical activity and moments of relaxation during the day, stay connected to sources of support, and reach out for help when you need it.

If you are worried about your child's ability to cope, these resources may be helpful:

MICHIGAN STATEWIDE RESOURCES

[Michigan Department of Health & Human Services](#)

[Mental health services by county](#)

[Health departments by county](#)

[Community Mental Health Association of Michigan](#)

[School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan](#)

NATIONAL RESOURCES

[Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)

(Managing Anxiety and Stress)

[Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)

(Taking Care of your Emotional Health)

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

1-800-273-8255

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

(Emotional Well-being During the COVID-19 Outbreak)

[Anxiety & Depression Association of America](#)

Questions About COVID-19?



Call the COVID-19 Hotline at 888-535-6136,
7 days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Email COVID19@michigan.gov 24/7. Emails
will be answered 7 days a week, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



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