



## Supporting Children and Youth Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children of all ages have faced many types of loss. They have been unable to partake in their regular activities like seeing friends, playing sports or going to school. They have also had to miss important events like birthday get-togethers, family outings and graduations.

For children, the loss of normal activities and routines can lead to feelings of anxiety, fear and worry. Children thrive on routines because they are predictable and help them feel safe. For teens, social connections are a crucial part of development. The loss of regular socialization with peers due to physical distancing can be significant. Many teens are also dealing with the loss of milestone activities like prom or graduation, causing a range of emotions and reactions.

In addition to loss of social activities, many children have experienced COVID-19 illness and loss in their families and communities, along with hardship from job or income loss within their own homes. Additionally, the most recent incidents of racial injustice can affect their mental and emotional well-being, particularly for children and teens of color. As a parent, caregiver, educator or other trusted adult, you can support or teach a child or teen to use positive coping skills. If you see worrying signs, reach out for professional help. See the end of this document for [useful resources](#).

### **Supporting Children and Youth**

You have an important role to support and encourage a child or teen to try using positive coping techniques. One of the biggest things you can do is to acknowledge your own feelings and model how to take care of yourself. In doing this, you help them to build their own resilience. Here are some other ways to support children and teens:

#### **Supporting Children (ages 2 to 12)**

- Focus on what you are doing to stay safe. Kids feel more secure when they know there is a plan.
- Provide age-appropriate information on the COVID-19 pandemic and incidents of racial injustice. Try your best to answer their questions clearly and directly using child-friendly language. Create regular opportunities to address their worries and concerns.
- Help a child manage their emotions by helping them label their feelings and validating them.

- Establish and maintain a routine with your child from home. Maintaining a consistent and predictable schedule helps children feel safe.
- Set aside time to connect with your child. Play or share a favorite activity.
- Encourage them to remain connected with their peers and family members via phone or video chat.

### **Supporting Teenagers (ages 13 to 19)**

- Listen without judgement and acknowledge how they are feeling. Tell your teen that you support them and that you believe they can get through this.
- Ask for their ideas about ways they can connect with friends and find rewarding activities while physically distancing. Let your teen tell you what would be most helpful for them.
- Talk to them about safety without lecturing. Remind them that they have a part to play in keeping their family and friends healthy. Discuss ways they can safely interact with their friends.
  - Ask what concerns they may have. Listen without judgement if they are feeling socially isolated and encourage them to engage with friends remotely on a regular basis via platforms like social media or phone and video calls.
  - For those grieving the loss of normal routines like school or milestone events, find creative ways to celebrate these events like virtual (online) parties and special activities you can do from home.

### **Coping Techniques by Age Group**

Coping techniques for children and teens may look different than those used by adults. Most children and teens need to be taught what healthy coping mechanisms look like, potentially through behavior modeled by the adults around them. Here are some coping techniques that may be helpful for children and teens to learn and practice:

#### **Coping Techniques for Children (ages 3 to 10)**

- Soothing activities such as playing, listening to music and reading a story.
- Activities that can relieve anxiety and stress, such as squeezing a stress ball and taking deep breaths. Children as young as 18 months old can be taught how to pause and take deep breaths.
- Hobbies or activities that can serve as creative outlets like arts and crafts or physical activity.
- Staying connected with friends and family remotely.

#### **Coping Techniques for Adolescents and Teenagers (ages 11 to 19)**

- Staying connected with peers via phone, social media and video chat is critical for teenagers, who depend on these relationships for their well-being.

- Identifying people with whom they feel comfortable talking about their feelings or worries. This could include classmates, teachers or coaches.
- Engaging in physical activity such as yoga, walking and jogging.
- Limiting the amount of time spent talking about or listening to news or social media, particularly when feeling overwhelmed.

### **Behavioral Changes to Watch For**

Not all children and teens will respond to the stress and loss caused by the pandemic in the same way. While most children will be able to use healthy coping skills with the support of a caring adult, some may find this challenging. Here are some common warning signs that a child or teen in your life may be struggling with feelings of loss, anxiety or depression:

#### **Young and School-age Children (ages 3 to 10)**

- Excessive crying or irritability in younger children
- Tantrums or meltdowns
- Regression to behaviors they have outgrown (such as toileting accidents and separation anxiety)
- Difficulty staying focused or concentrating
- Unexplained headaches or body aches

#### **Adolescents and Teenagers (ages 11 to 19)**

- Excessive fears and worries
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors
- Use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs to cope
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomach aches, muscle tension and cramps, fatigue, trembling, flushing, sweating or hyperventilating

If these reactions continue or worsen, get help using our resources and services shared below.

### **Resources and Services**

- For tips on talking with children and teens, read this guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html)
- For tips on supporting children through grief and loss:  
[www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-supporting-children-grief-loss.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-supporting-children-grief-loss.pdf)

- NYC Well offers well-being and emotional support applications (apps) that can help adults, children and teens cope. Visit the “App Library” at [nyc.gov/nycwell](https://nyc.gov/nycwell) for online tools to help you manage your health and emotional well-being.
- If symptoms of stress become overwhelming for you or a child or teen you care for, you can connect with trained counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service that can help New Yorkers cope. NYC Well staff are available 24/7 and can provide brief counseling and referrals to in-person and telehealth care in over 200 languages. For support, call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text "WELL" to 65173 or chat online by visiting [nyc.gov/nycwell](https://nyc.gov/nycwell).
- For additional resources that address issues such as financial help, food, health care or insurance coverage, and more, see the [Comprehensive Resource Guide](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-communities.page) or visit [www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-communities.page](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-communities.page).
- For general information on COVID-19, including how to guard against stigma, visit [nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/health/coronavirus) or [cdc.gov/covid19](https://cdc.gov/covid19). For real-time updates, text “COVID” to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.

**The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.**

7.24.20