



Understanding the Effects of Covid19 on Children and How They Cope

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Agenda for Today

1. Introduction
2. Background Information: What has changed for Children
3. Stress response: Flight, Fight, Freeze
4. What does Stress look like in Children
5. Coping: Family and Children
6. Questions

General Effects on Families

Financial Implications

- ▶ 71% of families are concerned about money due to pandemic
- ▶ 51% had to adjust their household budget
- ▶ 26% have lost wages

Social/Emotional Implications

- ▶ Child care
- ▶ Educators
- ▶ Recreation
- ▶ Maintain career, work activities
- ▶ The Boundaries are blurred
- ▶ 76% of parents note somewhat or extremely worried about their children's emotional and mental well-being

Effect to access for learning

- ▶ 94% of schools are closed and there is remains uncertainty about the Fall
- ▶ 2017 census showed that 1 in 7 children lacked internet access; lower income families had less access
- ▶ Schools disproportionately delivered online or virtual education

Mental Health Effects on Children

Children report:

- 34% are scared
- 27% are anxious
- 24% are confused
- 23% are stressed
- 22% are unhappy

Children say:

- 52% say they are bored at home
- 49% express feeling worried over a parent or loved one becoming ill due to COVID19

Access to care:

- About 21% of children ages 9-17 experience a mental health disorder
- Only 16% of these children receive services and about 70 to 80% of these services occur in schools

Parents often underestimate
the mental health needs of
their children

Stress Response

- FIGHT
- FLIGHT
- FREEZE

High Stress Levels

- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Memory and concentration problems
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Intestinal problems (e.g., diarrhea, constipation)
- ▶ Poor sleep
- ▶ Increased blood pressure
- ▶ Weight gain
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Depression

High Stress Levels in Children: Physical Symptoms

Physical symptoms can include:

- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ New or recurrent bedwetting
- ▶ Decreased or increased appetite
- ▶ Nightmares
- ▶ Sleep disturbances
- ▶ Upset stomach or vague stomach pain
- ▶ Other physical symptoms with no physical illness

High Stress Levels in Children: Emotional or Behavioral Symptoms

Emotional or behavioral symptoms may include:

- ▶ Anxiety, worry
- ▶ Not able to relax
- ▶ New or recurring fears (fear of the dark, fear of being alone, fear of strangers)
- ▶ Anger, crying, whining
- ▶ Not able to control emotions
- ▶ Aggressive or stubborn behavior
- ▶ Reverting to behaviors present at a younger age
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating
- ▶ Behavioral changes, such as moodiness, aggression, a short temper, temper tantrums, or clinginess-unwilling to let you out of sight
- ▶ Development of a nervous habit, such as nail biting
- ▶ Withdrawing from family or friends
- ▶ Refusal to go to school, Getting into trouble at school
- ▶ Hoarding items of seeming insignificance

Stress looks different at different developmental levels...

- ▶ **Young children:** thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.
- ▶ **Elementary school children:** irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.
- ▶ **Adolescents:** sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in interpersonal conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

Now, imagine a
child's life during
COVID-19...

- NO SCHOOL
- NO OR LIMITED ACCESS TO FRIENDS OR IMPORTANT FAMILY MEMBERS
- CONCERN ABOUT FAMILY... PARENTS, SIBLINGS, EXTENDED FAMILY AND FRIENDS
- THEY ARE ILL OR MAY KNOW PEOPLE WHO ARE ILL
- DISRUPTION OF SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES
- RESTRICTED TO HOME
- MEDIA EXPOSURE

Let's also
imagine a return
to school in the
Fall...

- Routines will not be the same at school (e.g., staggered starts)
- Lunches will not likely be in cafeterias
- Teachers, staff and students are likely to be masked
- Recess and gym activities will likely be changed
- Some schools may mix virtual/online and in classroom instruction
- Class sizes may be reduced
- Children will likely see teachers, staff and students miss school due to illness

Helping Children Cope

Start with yourself

Stress is contagious, if you
are stressed your child will
likely be stressed



Talk to your
children...

- ▶ Let your child's questions guide you
- ▶ Stay calm
- ▶ Listen
- ▶ Answer questions truthfully
- ▶ Offer reassurance, don't unnecessary details
- ▶ Offer accurate information, that is age appropriate
- ▶ Be aware of how you talk about COVID-19
- ▶ Explain social distancing
- ▶ Focus on the positive
- ▶ Establish and maintain a daily routines
- ▶ Provide clear directions and expectations
- ▶ Offer lots of love and affection

Be involved with
your child...

...have some fun!

Survey results indicate
that 72% of children
are looking forward to
spending time with
their parents and
family

- ▶ **Identify projects that might help others**
- ▶ **Demonstrate deep breathing and do it together**
- ▶ **Do yoga together**
- ▶ **Plan and cook healthy meals**
- ▶ **Identify family projects**
- ▶ **Spend time relaxing together**

Establish health habits and good hygiene

- ▶ Foster a sense of control by helping children understand how to reduce illness; this can reduce anxiety
- ▶ Encourage healthy eating to support a good immune system
- ▶ Encourage good sleep habits; a regular bedtime is important

A few additional ideas...

- ▶ Establish routines; children respond well to structure and when they know what is expected
- ▶ Monitor television and use of social media
- ▶ Don't be afraid to correct inaccurate information
- ▶ Use encouragement and rewards
- ▶ Reach out for help if needed

Questions...



A few resources to help...

- ▶ Take Five Mindful exercises by Growing Minds: <http://www.growingmindstoday.com/take5ive.html>
- ▶ CNN Sesame Street Special: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/13/app-news-section/cnn-sesame-street-abcs-of-covid-19-town-hall-june-13-2020-app/index.html>
- ▶ Family Guide for Coping with COVID-19 Pandemic: <http://www.7-dippity.com/other/covid-19.html>
- ▶ Coloring book for young children on the Pandemic: <https://piploproductions.com/trinka-and-sam-virus/>
- ▶ Free book on COVID-19: https://nosycrowcoronavirus.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/Coronavirus_ABookForChildren.pdf