

# Helping Parents Connect With Their Children During COVID-19

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## Objectives

- Define anxiety and review common reactions
- Review evidence base for trauma-informed care
- Learn evidence-based strategies for supporting family functioning during current COVID-19 outbreak

## Stress and Anxiety Defined

- **Anxiety:** emotion characterized by thought of worry, feelings of tension, and physical changes, such as sweating or increased respiration
- Anxiety is a **signal** (just like all other emotions)
- What's helpful/unhelpful?
- What creates anxiety? For most, it's the unknown, what ifs, what's happening next
- Traumatic situations do not guarantee trauma responses
- *Surfing the wave analogy*



## Common reactions in toddlers

- Fear of being alone
- Night-waking, sleep-onset association
- Regression in toileting, constipation
- Change in appetite
- Increased tantrums
- Increased clinging



## Common reactions in elementary-age children

- Irritability, increased whining
- Increased aggressive behavior
- Clinging to parent/caretaker,
- Nightmares/sleep disturbance
- Change in appetite
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches/stomachaches
- Withdrawal or loss of interest
- Competition for parent/caretaker attention
- Forgetfulness (home/school activities)



## Common reactions in adolescents

- "This is not that big of a deal."
- "Are we going to be okay? Is grandma going to be okay?"
- Irritability with following social distancing rules
- Boredom, isolation, agitation
- Interest to isolate





## Key ingredients related to healthy child/adolescent functioning

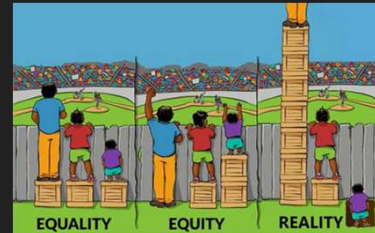
- **Support and involvement of parents/caregivers** (Dishion et al., 2008; Gardner et al., 2007; Howell et al., 2016)
  - **Monitoring/supervision, consistency, structure, positive reinforcement, "status-quo"**
- **Strong emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal skills** (MacPherson, Cheavons & Fristad, 2013)
- **Parental/caregiver mindfulness and awareness of own emotions** (Gouveia, Carona, Canavarro & Moreira, 2016; Parent, McKee, Rough, & Forehand, 2016)
  - **Modeling and responses**
- **Coordination between home and school to support positive behaviors across contexts** (Knopf & Swick, 2008; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996)
- **School attendance and engagement** (Spengler, Damian & Roberts, 2018)

## Trauma-Informed Care

- Best research evidence is rooted in cognitive-behavioral theory (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008; Gillies et al., 2013; Marsac et al., 2016)
- Trauma-informed care highlights facets within these evidence-based treatments
  - Safe environments (structure, consistency, expectancy)
  - Healthy relationships (modeling, experiential)
  - Psychoeducation and modeling
  - Coping skills
  - Choice when available
  - Healthy activities (behavioral activation)

## Home? Parenting? Capacity??

- Tailor recommendations and support to meet needs of your children and their families
  - Work collaboratively
  - Specific versus vague
  - Considering foundation
  - Setting families up for success
- Comfort associated with "home" varies for everyone
- Parenting strategies and presence of instructional control varies



## Supporting Adjustment in Primary Care

- Using our relationship with our patients and their families
- Acknowledge the healthy responses parents are already giving
- Use principles of motivational interviewing and behavioral activation
- Match recommendations with motivation/capacity of families

## Strategies we can give parents

- Healthy communication
  - Remain calm/neutral
  - Be available, validate emotions, invite conversation
  - Delivery of honest and accurate details (developmentally appropriate)
- Increase Engagement
  - Parent-child interactions
  - Monitor television/social media
- Routine/Consistency
  - Stick to routine, explain changes
  - Focus on how family is staying safe
- Practice self-care (parent adjustment = key!)

## Healthy Communication



- Assess what children already know, let child lead conversation
- Validate emotions
- Be honest

### Developmentally Appropriate Info:

- **Preschool and Early Elementary**
  - Brief, simply information, such as "adults are working really hard to keep you safe"
- **Upper Elementary and Early Middle School**
  - Separate rumors from facts
  - Discuss efforts in place to prevent spreading of germs
- **Middle School and High School**
  - Ask directly what they have interpreted through friends, media, and reactions of others
  - Discuss their thoughts of degree of severity and need for safety

## Increase Engagement



- **Ratio** of positive to negative interactions
- **Time together**
- **Quality** of statements
- **Attention** with purpose
- **Tolerances** in home
- Maintaining **expectations** (with flexibility)
- Mindful **modeling**
- **Monitor** media

## Consistency and Routines



- Finding balance for whole family
- Temporary routine is better than no routine
- Give choice when possible
- Explain changes ahead of time
- Focus on how family is staying safe



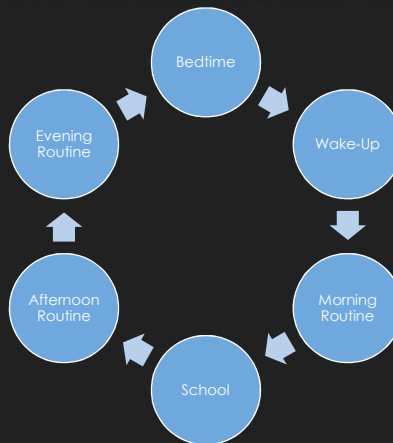
# Consistency and Routines

## Evening Routine

1. Dinner
2. Wash 2 dishes
3. rush teeth
4. Bath (if odd day – ask Mom if you don't know)
5. Put on PJs
6. Lay school clothes on dresser
7. Pick a book
8. Read with Mom
9. Go to bed

## Afternoon Routine

1. Put backpack on hook
2. Hang coat on hook
3. Wash hands
4. Have snack
5. Do homework
6. Play with Mom or friends



## Morning Routine

1. Put on Clothes
2. Put on Shoes
3. Go Downstairs
4. Eat Breakfast

All 4 by 7:30?

Earn 15 min of toys, TV, iPad, or quiet time

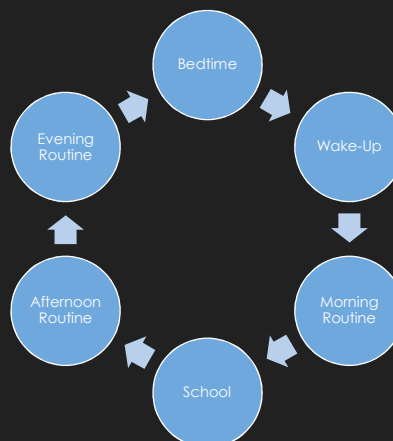
# Temporary routine > No routine

## Evening Routine

1. Dinner
2. Wash 2 dishes
3. rush teeth
4. Bath (if odd day – ask Mom if you don't know)
5. Put on PJs
6. Lay school clothes on dresser
7. Pick a book
8. Read with Mom
9. Go to bed

## Afternoon Routine

1. Put laptop in bag
2. Wash hands
3. Have snack
4. Pick activity
5. Do homework
6. Play with Mom or brother



## Morning Routine

1. Put on Clothes
2. Go Downstairs
3. Eat Breakfast

All 4 by 7:30?

Earn 15 min of toys, TV, iPad, or quiet time



## Strategies we can give adolescents

- Social DISTANCING versus social ISOLATION
- Routine – create one!
- Taking care of self: hygiene, eating, exercising
- We can ask:
  - *What activities have you previously done that you would want to get back into? What's a small step in that direction? What could you do now to get ready for that?*
  - *What are some things you would want to learn more about? How might you take steps to learn about how that works?*
  - *How could you take care of yourself when you're missing the people you care about or when you're worried about what's going to happen next?*

## Summary

- Children and adolescents are resilient
- Common reactions in children and adolescents vary
- We have a unique opportunity to connect with families
- We can encourage parents to:
  - Be available and speak honestly
  - Engage with their children, maintain expectations
  - Develop consistency in "new" routines
- We can encourage all families to practice self-care (including ourselves too!)



## Resources for Parents

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>
- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>
- <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/emergency/index.html>
- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3264-at-home-activity-guide>
- <https://alliedhealth.lsuhs.edu/clinics/docs/CarolineConquersherCoronoaFears31820.pdf>
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-teens-about-the-new-coronavirus-2020031419192>

## Resources for Healthcare Staff

- <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>
- [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)
- [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak\\_factsheet\\_1.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf)
- [https://www.aacap.org/App\\_Themes/AACAP/Docs/latest\\_news/2020/Coronavirus\\_COVID19\\_Children.pdf](https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/Docs/latest_news/2020/Coronavirus_COVID19_Children.pdf)
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-teens-about-the-new-coronavirus-2020031419192>

# Questions?

Thank you for attending!

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