

Helping Your Family Cope During a Stressful Time

Talking to kids about overwhelming feelings

Knowing what to say to your kids during stressful times can be challenging. You aren't expected to have all the answers, but here are a few tips for starting the conversation:

- **Be aware of your own feelings and stay calm.** Kids look to adults for cues on how to behave or react. Try to be aware of your own feelings and stay calm and open-minded while talking to your kids. If you're feeling overwhelmed, wait to talk to your kids until you've had a chance to calm down.
- **Acknowledge your child's feelings.** Even if you don't agree or think what they're sharing is silly, those feelings are real to them. Let them know you understand by repeating back exactly what you hear, without judging or interpreting. It's important for them to express their feelings and to know their feelings are perfectly normal.
- **Avoid minimizing or dismissing.** It's natural to want to make kids feel better, but try to avoid saying things like "You don't need to worry about it." Dismissing their fear doesn't eliminate it—it only teaches them not to talk about it. Instead, acknowledge their feelings and help them manage them with the tips on the back of this page.

Using healthy habits to manage stress

During times of crisis, it's normal to feel overwhelmed with strong or uncomfortable emotions. Taking care of our bodies and minds is important for overall well-being, and even more so during times of stress.

Here are some tips to help you and your family practice healthy habits during this stressful time:

- ✓ **Be active.** While so many things feel out of our control right now, taking an activity break can serve as a welcome distraction, burn some energy and relieve stress. Take a short walk, do some jumping jacks, dance or put on a quick yoga video.
- ✓ **Limit screen time.** We are flooded with information and constant alerts on our phones, which can actually make us feel worse. Take a break from the news and social media by putting phones away during mealtimes and shutting them down at least an hour before bedtime.
- ✓ **Maintain routines as much as possible.** Having a routine and knowing what to expect can help create a sense of safety and security. Try to maintain consistent routines (keeping regular bedtimes, having family dinners, etc.) to keep life as normal as possible.
- ✓ **Do things you enjoy.** When we're stressed, one of the best things we can do is make time for activities that make us feel calm and happy. Whether it's going outside, singing your favorite music, reading a book or playing a family game, try to take time to help you and your family find a sense of enjoyment and calm.

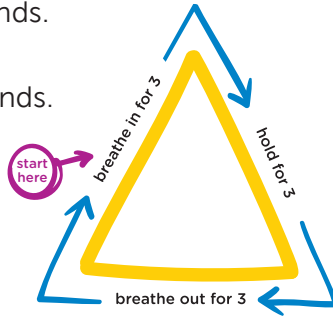
Coping with big emotions

Strong feelings can be overwhelming, but there are things you can do to help yourself feel calmer and more in control. Try the coping skills on the back of this page with your family. It's difficult to learn new things when we are anxious, angry or too distracted, so it's important to try new coping skills when everyone is calm. A skill that works one day may not work the next, so encourage your kids to try different strategies to build their coping skills toolbox.

Coping skills

Deep breathing helps us relax by slowing down our heart rate and calming the body and mind.

1. Start at the bottom left of the triangle. Put your hand on your stomach so that you can feel your stomach filling with air.
2. Inhale through your nose for 3 seconds.
3. Hold your breath for 3 seconds.
4. Exhale out of your mouth for 3 seconds.
5. You have just completed one deep belly breath!
6. Practice deep breaths for as many breaths as you need in order to feel calm and relaxed.



Progressive muscle relaxation teaches us to relax our minds and relieve our stress by learning to slowly tense and relax one muscle group at a time.

- Start by taking a deep breath (in through your nose and out through your mouth).
- As you inhale through your nose, tighten the muscles in your face by scrunching up your nose and mouth. Hold that for 5 seconds. As you relax the muscles, exhale slowly through your mouth.
- Then move through each muscle group (shoulders, arms, hands, stomach, legs, feet). Remember to inhale through your nose as you tense the muscle group and exhale through your mouth as you relax the muscle group.
- Notice how your body feels as you tense and relax.

Grounding teaches us to focus on the present moment instead of the thing that is causing us worry. Grounding helps us calm and manage our feelings quickly and effectively.

Start by taking several slow deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Next, use your five senses to notice and name:

5 THINGS you see + 4 THINGS you feel + 3 THINGS you hear + 2 THINGS you smell + 1 THING you taste




Guided imagery uses all five senses to move attention away from worry and stress and toward a more relaxed state.

- Start by taking a few deep breaths (in through your nose and out through your mouth).
- Imagine yourself in a place where you feel comfortable, safe and happy.
- Think about every detail that makes that place special for you:

 What do you see?

 What do you hear?

 What can you touch or feel?

 What do you smell?

 What do you taste?

- Take a few moments to enjoy your time in this place. You can return here in your imagination at any time you need to relax or feel safe.



Additional ways to cope include: listening to music or singing a song, making up a silly dance, having a drink of cold water, taking a quiet break, cuddling or playing with your pet, blowing bubbles, coloring or drawing, hugging a stuffed animal, reading a book with someone, playing a game, bouncing a ball, journaling, playing an instrument, jumping rope and hula-hooping.