



BRADLEY COUNSELING CENTER

HELP KIDS COPE WITH COVID-19 CHANGES

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No school. No daycare. No playdates with friends. The COVID-19 crisis has turned our children's lives upside down, while stoking fear and sparking a range of reactions. Many parents wonder what their kids are really thinking and feeling—and how to best help them through these turbulent times.

Rest assured: kids are resilient. Often, they adapt to change more quickly than adults. That being said, some children who never had anxiety before are displaying it now—along with a host of other behaviors.

So, how can parents get a bead on what their kids are feeling and help them cope with difficult emotions? While every child is unique, here's a few points to keep in mind.

KIDS EXPERIENCE CRISES DIFFERENTLY THAN ADULTS

Yes, children are experiencing fear and anxiety now, but they may also be experiencing other reactions: anger at not being able to see their friends, loneliness due to not having playdates, and boredom because "there's nothing to do." Or, they may worry you by having little reaction at all. Good news: these are all very normal human reactions.

Whatever your child is experiencing, reassure her that it's okay; it's normal. Make sure she knows that there are things she can do to gain some control over what's bothering her. For example, if your child is afraid of getting sick, emphasize that handwashing and social distancing will help her stay healthy. It may also help to confide that you have those feelings, too, and share your strategies for managing them.

KIDS CAN SENSE WHEN WE'RE LESS THAN TRUTHFUL

When kids keep asking when the shutdown will end, it's tempting to answer "soon." However, kids take their cues from us, and they often know when we're sugarcoating information.

A better approach may be to acknowledge that no one knows exactly when the shutdown will end, but that many smart people are working on it. Confirm that it will, at some point, be over—and in the meantime, you'll get through it together.

SOME KIDS WILL ACT OUT, NOT SPEAK OUT

Not all kids can or will tell you what they're thinking—but they may show you. During times of stress, younger

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children may have more meltdowns or tantrums. Chances are, they're picking up on what's going on, but don't know how to verbalize their unease. Older children may become moody or isolate themselves. In addition, some kids may suddenly develop trouble sharing their toys, become clingy, or start testing limits—all signs that they may be struggling with fear or anger. Recognize it for what it is, and offer your child a healthier way to express himself, such as talking, drawing, or another creative activity.

GIVE YOUR CHILD PERSONALIZED COPING TOOLS

As a parent, you know your child best. Talk to your child about COVID-19 the same way you talk about other things. Be honest, but emphasize the positive: that healthcare professionals are making many people better and researchers are working hard to find a cure.

Together, brainstorm some coping strategies that will appeal to is your child's interests. Make a list of things you can do together: go on nature walks, plant a garden, watch silly movies, play family sports and games. Set up some video playdates with friends. Having things to look forward to can give kids a calmer, happier mind-set.

SEEK HELP IF YOUR CHILD NEEDS IT

Unfortunately, some emotions can't be dealt with alone. If you think you need professional help, don't wait. For example, counselors at Allendale's Bradley Center are providing teletherapy to help both adults and children navigate this crisis. Lake County residents can also visit 211lakecounty.org to find other local providers. Help is available, even during the shutdown. You just need to ask.

Bio: Dr. Sandra Clavelli, PsyD, Clinical Psychology, is Director of Clinical and Outpatient Services as Allendale Association in Lake Villa. Allendale's Bradley Counseling Center is currently offering phone and video teletherapy services to adults and children struggling with COVID-19 issues, experiencing other mental health concerns, or looking to build on their strengths. For more information, visit Allendale4kids.org or call 847-356-3322.