Tips for Parents Caring for Your Children during COVID-19

It is important to be able to discuss issues like coronavirus (COVID-19) with your children in an open and honest way. Your children have already heard and seen information about things that are happening. Try to limit what they see and hear (limit yourself as well) and have them check with you to help them understand myth from fact. When having conversations, it is necessary to find out what they know and what questions they may have.  

Children and adolescents may have different mental needs related to the current COVID-19 outbreak. As children and families are impacted, it is important to understand how to effectively listen and communicate with children and adolescents about what they are experiencing.

When speaking to children, be developmentally appropriate. Answer honestly and clearly and make sure your children know you are available to have ongoing conversations. When addressing mental health and stress, use language that makes sense for them and avoid making things too complex. Be sure to be open to any questions or thoughts your children may have. The work of children is play. Play with your children and look for themes of fear or danger where you can be reassuring, comforting, supportive and shift to positive outcomes.  

As parents and caregivers, you may help children by:

- Paying attention, be a good listener, acknowledge worries
- Allowing children to ask questions
- Limiting news exposure
- Encouraging positive coping activities such as:
  - Progressive muscle relaxation and controlled breathing
  - Using a journal or feelings tracker
  - Having children think of their friends who may be struggling and what they could do to help
  - Keeping routines and schedules, including creating school, homework, and social time
  - Scheduling and having positive family time
  - Write or draw a story/picture about defeating personified worries
- Modeling and highlighting the importance of self-care

**Family Bonding**

Although it might not always feel this way, kids typically listen to their parents more than anyone else in their life. Modeling positive behavior and bonding with your children, especially during a stressful time, can have a big impact on the health of your children and yourself. Bonding with
your kids can be as easy as having a meal together. Here are some other ideas for how you can bond with your family while social distancing.

Ideas for Family Bonding:
- Go for walks together, ride bikes, or rollerblade - you can still go outside as long as you are not interacting with people from outside your household
- Do arts and crafts together, like painting, drawing, papier-mâché, etc.
- Teach your children a new skill, or learn a new skill together, like origami
- Read books together
- Draw on the driveway with chalk. Make a chalk mural as a family, or write encouraging things for passersby to see
- As a family, write and then perform a play
- Watch a movie or TV show as a family and talk about what you watched after with your children.

Mental Health and Stress in Children and Youth

Mental health and stress can show themselves in many ways for children. Often, children express how they are feeling through their behaviors. Younger children may express fear and worry by withdrawing or becoming clingy with a parent or caregiver. They may have stomach aches or changes in sleeping habits. For older children, they may argue with others, disengage from family and friends or engage in other behaviors that are not typical for them.

Ways to Manage Mental Health and Stress:

1. Recognize signs of stress in your children: Examples include

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIORAL</th>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL</th>
<th>THINKING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having difficulty giving or accepting help</td>
<td>Headaches or other pain</td>
<td>Feeling anxious</td>
<td>Feeling confused</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase in irritability or worrying</td>
<td>Changes in appetite</td>
<td>Feeling angry</td>
<td>Trouble remembering</td>
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<td>Not wanting to talk or be with others</td>
<td>Easily startled</td>
<td>Feeling sad or depressed</td>
<td>Difficulty concentrating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having trouble relaxing or sleeping</td>
<td>Stomachaches</td>
<td>Not caring about anything</td>
<td>Difficulty with decision making</td>
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2. Connect with others
It is more important now than ever to find ways to connect. Reach out to your friends and loved ones and through social media, email, video recordings, and online platforms to help each other find comfort, peace, and hope in these stressful times. Encourage your children and families to do the same.

Reaching out to people you trust is one of the best ways to reduce anxiety, depression, loneliness, and boredom during social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. Reach out to members of your congregation who build you up and reach out to those you think may be lonely or need a friend during this difficult time. You can:

- Use the telephone, email, texting, and social media to connect with friends, family, and others.
- Talk “face to face” with friends and loved ones using Skype or FaceTime.
- Spend time with friends or loved ones in groups less than 10.

3. Help your children find practical ways to cope:

- Exercise and physical activity, daily if possible.
- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, or engage in pleasurable hobbies.
- Pray, meditate and count your blessings.
- Use time off to relax—eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family.
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often.
- Listen to uplifting, spiritual music.
- Learning and intellectual engagement—books, reading, limited internet.
- Positive family time—working to counter negativity.
- Alone time, outside if possible, but inside too; but remember, don't over-isolate.
- Be discerning in exposure to news media; find your balance in being informed and stepping away.
- When struggling with competing priorities and feeling pulled in all directions, build in brief pauses in your day to 1) de-stress; 2) collect thoughts; 3) let go of one task and prepare for the next; 4) savor life.
- Have you and your child name 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you smell, 2 things you can touch and 1 thing you can taste.
ATTENTION PARENTS: Self Care is also important during this time. Taking care of your children requires you to first make sure you’re taking care of yourself. Just as you’re instructed to put on your oxygen mask before helping others on an airplane, we all need to practice self-care in whatever way we can. Modeling this kind of behavior has the added benefit of teaching your children how to cope in a healthy way with difficult times.

- Use other grounding strategies