



# COVID-19 & MENTAL HEALTH



# Possible Reactions to Disaster or Traumatic Events: Children Ages 0-5 Years Old

- May revert to younger behaviors (ex. thumb-sucking, wetting the bed)
- May suddenly fear strangers, darkness, monsters
- May become clingy
- May attempt to understand the stressor by telling exaggerated stories
- May complain of aches/pains that cannot be explained
- Eating and sleeping habits may change

# Possible Reactions to Disaster or Traumatic Events: Children Ages 6+

- May seek out extra attention from caregivers
- May stop doing expected tasks (schoolwork or chores)
- Older children may experience guilt that they cannot take on adult roles

# Tips for Talking: Children Ages 0-5

- Provide a lot of physical and verbal support
- Take a deep breath before holding or picking them up, and focus on them
- Get down to their eye level and speak in a calm, gentle voice
- Remind them that you will take care of them
- Remind them that they are safe

# Tips for Talking: Children Ages 6+

- Ask them what worries them
- Spending more time with them than usual and giving them a break from work/chores can be helpful for a short while
- Returning to routine is important! Give them age-appropriate tasks so that they can participate and feel useful
- Allow them quiet time to write or draw or express themselves creatively

# Process Stress and Trauma With Your Child

- Most children want to talk about a trauma, so let them. Accept their feelings and tell them it is okay to feel sad, upset, or stressed. Crying is often a way to relieve stress and grief. Pay attention and be a good listener.
- Allow them to ask questions about what has happened
- Children may better cope with a trauma or disaster by helping others. They can write caring letters to those who have been hurt or are struggling; they can send thank you notes to people who helped. Encourage these kinds of activities.

# Process Stress and Trauma With Your Child

- Let children know that they are not to blame when bad things happen.
- It's okay for children and youth to see adults sad or crying
- Model self-care, set routines, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, exercise, and take deep breaths to handle stress.

# Warning Signs: What to Look For When it's More Than Just Stress

- Feeling sad or withdrawn for longer than two weeks
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities
- Experiencing sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, often with a racing heart or rapid breathing
- Severe mood swings or drastic changes in personality



# Resources

- Recognizing Mental Illness in Children: <https://medlineplus.gov/childmentalhealth.html>
- Talk About Mental Health: <https://mentalhealth.gov/talk/parents-caregivers>
- Coping With Stress: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>