

MANAGING BIG FEELINGS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK



Finding effective ways to help your child cope with big emotions while you're home together has never been more important – or difficult! Here are some suggestions for what to do when your kids or teenagers express big feelings (e.g., sadness, anger, anxiety):

1 Validate, validate, validate

Start by acknowledging how your child is feeling in the moment. Remember, you are validating the feeling, not the behavior. You can validate that your child is sad, angry, or scared without validating that they hit their sibling.

"I can see how angry you are right now."

"A lot of people feel scared and anxious right now – it makes sense that you are feeling that way."

2 Make a coping skills plan for when emotions are overwhelming

A major part of successful coping is being prepared. Work with your child when they are calm to develop a coping plan for when they are feeling intense emotions. Help them identify which of the coping skills listed below work best for them. The plan should include:

- Warning signs that emotions are rising
- A list of 3-5 coping skills that they will use when they notice the warning signs
- Steps for how to seek support from adults (e.g., text Mom if she is busy working, ask Dad to go for a walk)

3 Create a coping kit

While you are creating a plan, it can be helpful for your child to gather the supplies needed to engage in the chosen coping skills. If they choose to look at pictures of cute puppies, eat a sour candy, and do a word search puzzle, collect those materials and put them in a specified, easily accessible place that you can direct them to when they are feeling distressed.

4 Practice coping skills when your child is calm

It can be difficult to use a new skill for the first time when emotions are running high. We recommend having children practice new coping skills before trying them out in the heat of the moment.

COPING SKILLS FOR KIDS AND TEENS

Coping skills to use when emotions are HOT

When children are at the height of distress, they usually are unable to think rationally or talk through their feelings, and their bodies are also overwhelmed - breathing heavily, heart pounding, sweating. These skills are helpful for calming down their bodies:

Temperature: Give your child an ice pack and tell them to place it across their face, under their eyes.

Intense Exercise: Have your child engage in 5 minutes of intense exercise (push ups, jumping jacks, mountain climbers, burpees).

Once their bodies are more calm, grounding is a skill that helps kids and teens regulate big emotions by redirecting their attention to the here and now:

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Colors: Instruct your child to name aloud 5 things that are blue in the room, then 4 things that are green, 3 things that are red, 2 things that are purple, and 1 thing that is yellow.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Senses: Instruct your child to name aloud 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch, 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can smell, and 1 thing they can taste.

Coping skills to use when emotions are WARM

When your child is feeling upset and overwhelmed, you can help them identify ways to soothe themselves using their senses:

Vision: Look at pictures of friends, watch a favorite movie, look at soothing images of nature.

Hearing: Listen to a favorite song, listen to old voicemails from friends/family.

Touch: Pet a family pet, cozy up in a nice blanket, take a bubble bath.

Taste: Eat a favorite meal, have a favorite kind of dessert, eat a favorite candy.

Smell: Use a fragrant lotion, cook a favorite food and focus on the smells in the kitchen.

Sometimes, kids and teens need to take a break from a distressing situation and engage in something else until they are able to re-engage.

Contribute to Others: Ask your child to do something nice for someone else, like writing a kind note to a friend or making a present for a peer.

Evoke Opposite Emotions: If your child is really angry, have them watch a funny YouTube clip; if they are sad, have them watch a scary movie.

Whatever they do, just make sure that it evokes a different emotion than the one they are currently stuck in.

Refocus Thoughts: Have your child pick a topic they like and then complete an A-Z list in which they write down something associated with the topic that begins with each letter of the alphabet (e.g., "topic - cars. A- Audi, B- BMW, C- Camero, etc.).

Create an Intense Sensation: Ask your child to place a super sour candy on their tongue, squeeze a stress ball really, really hard, or take a hot shower.

