



Coping Under Covid-19: Managing Behavior and Having a Safety Plan for Children and Youth with Behavioral Health Needs When Staying at Home

Social distancing and staying at home presents additional challenges for families caring for a child or youth with mental, emotional and behavioral health needs. The inability to go out and meet with friends, participate in activities and go to school can escalate behaviors at home. Additionally, the fears about the virus may heighten depression or anxiety for some children and youth.

Parents can help ease tensions and volatility at home by thinking through some practical strategies.

1. **Set realistic expectations** – identify which behaviors you can let go of under the circumstances (shouting) and which behaviors are not acceptable (hitting a sibling). If your child has a behavior plan look at ways you can adapt it to your current situation.
2. **Walk away** –to avoid a confrontation quietly leave the room when possible and allow your child to calm him/herself down.
3. **Agree on a safe space** – if behaviors begin to escalate having a place for your child to separate and cool off allows him/her to do what is soothing to them such as watching a video. Have them identify the space and possible activities ahead of time to avoid confusion and disruption.

4. **Use your support systems** – if possible use technology to connect your child with their friends or support system, perhaps a grandparent or friend. Connect with your support system as well to avoid caregiver burnout.
5. **Engage the family** – if one child has significant behavior challenges engage the family in a conversation to help everyone understand that it may be necessary to put up with some behaviors in order to avoid outbursts.
6. **Acknowledge feelings** – this is a time of heightened anxiety for everyone. A child with depression or anxiety may experience additional anxiety at this time. Talk about what is happening and share information based on your child's developmental level to process the information. You may want to limit news coming into the house to avoid increasing anxiety.
7. **Validate losses** – missing friends and activities is a big loss for children and youth. Some may also miss celebrations or school events. Acknowledge how important these are and come up with ideas for different ways or times to celebrate.
8. **Give yourself grace** – know that parenting is difficult under the best of circumstances. There will be good days and bad days and the goal is to get through these times of Covid-19 with the least disruption.

RESOURCES

CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

• **Supporting Kids During the COVID-19 Crisis:** Tips for nurturing and protecting children at home
<https://childmind.org/article/supporting-kids-during-the-covid-19-crisis>

• **How to Avoid Passing Anxiety on to Your Kids**
<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-avoid-passing-anxiety-on-to-your-kids/>

CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK

• **Parent Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus**
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-caregiver-guide-to-helping-families-cope-with-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-ch>

• **Guía de ayuda para padres y cuidadores para ayudar a las familias a enfrentar la enfermedad Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)**
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/parent-caregiver-guide-to-helping-families-cope-with-the-coronavirus-disease-2019-sp>