

## 7 Ways to Help Kids Cope with the Impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has affected all of us to some extent, with adults often unable to recognize the different signs of anxiety, depression, or grief in children. The impact to children's mental health has been worsened by family and societal challenges, including increased substance use disorders, domestic violence, economic hardship (hunger and housing insecurity), racism, and xenophobia. Kids have missed traditional rights of passage like prom and graduation; sporting events; and spending time with their peers. Children who have lost a loved one during COVID-19 or those in traditionally underrepresented communities will face an even harder path.

The cumulative trauma our kids are experiencing from these adverse events is certain to have an impact. Even after the worst of the pandemic passes, there will be long-term impact to our children's mental health. The American Society of Pediatrics has declared [child and adolescent mental health a national emergency](#); and UNICEF's report, [The State of the World's Children 2021](#), calls on society to address COVID-19 related other mental health issues impacting children and adolescents globally.

### Signs Your Child Is Struggling

Young children are often unable to understand and explain to parents, teachers, and caregivers what is wrong. They cry, disrupt class, or show other behavioral changes. Older children may withdraw, lose interest in activities they have always enjoyed, skip class, show dropping grades, bully other kids, pick fights, or attempt suicide. Teens will often hide their feelings if they do not want to "burden" their parents with one more thing. This is not a fully inclusive list, so parents and caregivers should watch for signs of behavioral changes that could indicate a child or adolescent is struggling.

### Ways to Help Your Child Cope

There is not one single approach or solution that works in every situation, but here are some things to try to help your child or adolescent improve their mental health during and after the pandemic:

1. Talk to your child about how they are feeling. Truly listen to what they say – and what they don't say.
2. Watch for signs your child is overwhelmed. Ask what you can do to help. Listen to what others close to your child say. Sometimes a teacher or relative may notice behavioral changes you do not.
3. Help you child find an outlet for the anxiety or stress they are feeling. Exercise is always a great option, drawing or painting, playing a musical instrument, journaling, or learning a new skill or language.
4. Incorporate routines and rituals into everyday life. These become familiar anchor points to help alleviate stress and anxiety and promote a sense of security.

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5. Make self-care a team priority. Have family movie or game nights, take walks together, or find other ways to relive stress and reconnect.
6. Stay connected with extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) and close family friends. Children benefit from knowing their support network is strong. Even if you cannot meet in person, a phone or Zoom call will help.
7. Consider whether your child might benefit from professional help. Talk to your pediatrician about your child or adolescent's mental health. They can screen for depression and anxiety and recommend a counselor, if needed. If your family has lost a loved one, a grief counselor may be able to help your child (and the family) come to terms with your loss.

Our kid's mental health matters. While it is easy for adults to get busy with work and running the household, it is important for parents and caregivers to pay attention to how their kids are dealing with both normal and unusual stressors. Who knows? Connecting at a deeper level with your child now may even offer long-term benefits to your relationship.

#### **A Note About Suicide**

While the pandemic is still ongoing and research has not been finalized, initial studies show an increase in attempted suicides from 2019 (pre-pandemic). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suspected suicide attempts among adolescents increased by 31% in 2020 from 2019, with the largest jump (51%) among girls aged 12–17.

Not every individual who talks about suicide is serious about ending their life, though you should take it seriously. That said, not everyone who attempts suicide talks about it beforehand. If you feel your child is at risk, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK. If you prefer to text, you may text 'TALK' to 741741. They are available 24x7.