

Tips for Keeping Children Safe as We Transition



As guidelines are loosening and public spaces are reopening, it can be challenging to know how to guide children through the transition. But it's as important as ever to continue keeping kids and teens physically safe and to watch for mental health issues like stress.

- 1. Continue to teach and model basic hygiene behaviors:** During this transition, it is essential to keep up with behaviors that prevent COVID-19. Inside the home, continue to wash your hands frequently. Avoid touching your face. And wipe down high-touch surfaces. Encourage children to do the same. Outside, maintain social distance. Keep hand sanitizer and masks with you in case you must spend time in an area where it is difficult to practice social distancing. For younger children, consider ways to make these behaviors fun. Create a 20-second song about handwashing. Or make a game in which whoever touches their face the least wins a reward.
- 2. Clearly communicate your expectations:** Keep your children updated by clearly telling them what you expect them to do both inside and outside the home. This is especially critical for teens who may start going to school or social events without you. Stress the need to continue practicing smart preventive behaviors such as coughing or sneezing into a tissue or elbow, staying away from those who are sick and avoiding large group gatherings.
- 3. Help your child stay socially connected — with limits:** While you may begin to see others in person, make sure to limit your child's time with other children. Also limit time with high-risk individuals, including those who are 65+ and those who have chronic conditions. Help your child stay connected with people they can't see in person through text messages, phone calls, the internet or even letters.
- 4. Help your child stay active and healthy:** Encourage children to exercise, eat healthy and get plenty of sleep. This will help boost their immune system and minimize stress. If it is OK in your region, encourage your children to spend time outside. Modeling this behavior is a good way to help your children build these habits.
- 5. Create a flexible but consistent daily routine:** Many children will continue to have a lack of structure into the summer, which can result in increased stress. Having a routine helps kids feel more secure and be better behaved. Work with your kids or teens to help plan the routine for the day, as this will make them more likely to follow it. Make sure you allow time for structured activities as well as free time. Include exercise as a part of each day.

6. Monitor your child for signs of stress: It's important to recognize the stress that your child may be experiencing. Contact a mental health professional if your child shows any of the following symptoms for more than two weeks:

- **Preschoolers:** Thumb sucking, bed-wetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior and withdrawal.
- **Elementary school children:** Irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration and withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents:** Sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior and poor concentration.

7. Take time to talk: Many children are worried about COVID-19, so be willing to talk about it. Keep these tips in mind:

- Be open and listen, asking children open questions to find out what they already know.
- Be honest. Think about how old your child is and how much they can understand.
- Be supportive, as your child may be scared or confused. Give them the space to share their feelings and help them feel secure.

If you are concerned about how stress may be affecting your child, speak with your child's doctor for guidance.

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