

Henry County Health Center:



Helping Children Cope with COVID-19

As adults, we are all trying to adapt to the uncertainty and evolving changes during this COVID-19 Pandemic. Children will look to adults for ways to handle and cope with these changes, and it is our duty to help them in anyway we can. Listed below are some ways and ideas on how to help our children cope during these uncertain times:

- Remain calm and listen to their concerns
- Remember when you are talking to others about COVID, they are always listening.
- Explain social distancing. Children may not understand why they can't be with their friends. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends: *Tell your child that your family is following the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which include social distancing. Social distancing means staying away from others until the risk of contracting COVID-19 is under control. Showing older children the "flatten the curve" charts will help them grasp the significance of social distancing. Explain that while we don't know how long it will take to "flatten the curve" to reduce the number of those infected, we do know that this is a critical time—we must follow the guidelines of health experts to do our part.*
- Have your child take a deep breath with you. Hold your breath for a few seconds and then slowly exhale. This will relax the body and help redirect focus.
- Stick to daily routines. This allows children to feel that they have some control in their world.
- Find ways that they can help out. One example is have them make cards or draw pictures for individuals that are in senior living homes.
- Limit their access to the news or social media that discusses COVID-19.

- Let your children ask questions as often as they need to. It might take some time for them to grasp what all of this means.
- Be honest with them and explain the situation at a level they can understand. Children will often create their own explanation that might be much worse than reality.
- Model good hygiene practices for them. Sing the “Happy Birthday” song 2x’s while washing your hands. Show them how to ‘sneeze’ into their elbow if there are no tissues around. By offering guidance on how your child can prevent infection, you are fostering a sense of control in their life and this will then help reduce their anxiety.
- Be aware of your child’s mental health. NASP states: *Most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members, even if showing signs of some anxiety or concerns, such as difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Some children, however, may have risk factors for more intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors. Risk factors can include a pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one. Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks.*

***Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, 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.*

- Lastly, go outside and play with your child. Being outside and being able to get their mind off the issue, is a great way for them to cope. Exercise is a great way for the whole family to deal with the stresses that are brought on by this pandemic.

From all of us here at Henry County Health Center we wish you and your family good health.