



Identifying Mental Health Concerns in Children Ages 0-5 and How to Help Them

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With changes and adjustments to our everyday lives due to the pandemic, it is normal for everyone to feel added stress, including young children. Some young children may experience a higher level of anxiety and stress compared to others.

Here are some warning signs that a child may be struggling during this time:

- Disturbances in sleeping patterns (e.g., taking longer than normal to fall asleep, waking frequently throughout the night).
- Increased aggressive behaviors (e.g., hitting others, throwing items, pulling their hair, hitting themselves on the head).
- Difficulties regulating their emotions, such as displaying frustration and anger more frequently, or having longer tantrums or meltdowns.
- Difficult to soothe when becoming upset (items, voices, or people that normally calm them down are not working now).
- Changes in how child responds to caregivers such as becoming clingier or more isolated/distant.
- Regressions on tasks they've already completed such as toilet training/bed-wetting, walking, or talking.
- Changes in eating patterns, such as eating a lot less or more than usual.
- Increased meltdowns during transitions (e.g., from activity to another, ending a game, at mealtimes or bedtime).
- Increased complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or other muscle tension.

If your child is exhibiting any of these warning signs during this time, here are a few ways you can support your child:

Help your child find words for how they are feeling: Young children may not have the words to express their emotions and often need adults to help them get comfortable using emotion words.

Validate their emotions and help them find healthy ways to express it through play, drawing, painting, etc.

Stick to a routine, even if that means establishing a new routine right now. Routine can provide a sense of structure and normalcy for children.

Stay calm if your child is exhibiting signs of aggression or having frequent tantrums. Displaying a calm demeanor models to children how to manage their own emotions and gives them a security that adults can handle their "big" emotions.

Provide ways to help your child calm down or lower their stress by co-regulating with them – read a book or play a game together, or ask if they need a hug, cuddle, or simply sit next to them until they feel calm again.

Speak with your child about COVID-19 in an age-appropriate manner, giving only necessary facts and reassurance in a calm tone.

Take care of yourself. Self-care in adults is needed regularly just like it is for children. Parents and caregivers often put their own self-care on the back burner and that can lead to burnout. Examples of how adults can engage in self-care activities during this time include:

- Drink enough water and eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods.
- Limit alcohol consumption.
- Aim to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night.
- If working from home, create a separate workspace. Try to keep the workspace away from where you sleep. Do not check work emails outside of work hours.
- Do some type of exercise, outside or indoors.
- Take deep breaths and stretch often.
- Set up an appointment with a counselor from The Village. Counseling is a powerful tool to maintain and enhance your mental health.
- Set and establish a routine at home. Incorporate self-care into your schedule.
- Focus your thoughts on the present and on what is within your control. Regular meditation can help ease an anxious mind.
- Listen to calming music or read books.
- Limit your information to reliable sources and be cautious to not overwhelm yourself with news content.
- Stay connected with those outside of your home through technology.
- Re-connect with your partner. Try to focus on quality instead of quantity. The Village has counselors that can help facilitate relationships where partners can feel safe and connected.
- Lean on your personal beliefs and faith for support. Check to see what online options your church has to offer.
- It is normal to not feel as productive and motivated during abnormal times. Be gentle and kind to yourself.
- Be cautious in criticizing yourself. Parenting is not a competition and unfortunately our society can portray it that way. It seems parents are told they are “doing things wrong” no matter what they do.

The bottom line is that parents need to be told what they are doing right more often. A parent doing their own self-care is beneficial for their child as it teaches their child the importance of self-care as well. One of the elements that affects a child’s happiness is the happiness of their parent/caretaker. Please make your wellbeing a priority. You matter, too.

For additional resources on how to support your child, yourself, and your family during COVID-19, check out the following websites:

- [The Village Business Institute COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [How to Talk to Kids about COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Book for Children](#)

If your child is struggling and you would like more support on how to assist them during this time, or you would like your child to be seen by a counselor, contact The Village EAP. Counseling sessions are offered online or over the phone, and employees covered by The Village EAP and their household members can access mental health sessions at no charge.

To set up an appointment, call 1-800-627-8220 or request an appointment online at TheVillageFamily.org