



Managing Stress and Anxiety Related to COVID-19

OSF HealthCare recognizes and understands how the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) may be stressful for you and your children. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Children and teens react to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs



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How to support your family

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends you:

- Take time to talk with your family about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that they can understand. Visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) for accurate, up-to-date information.
- Reassure family members they are safe. Let them know it is OK if they feel upset.
- Share with them how you deal with your own stress so they can learn how to cope from you.
- Limit the exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children, especially, may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities. If you're working from home, try and stick to your normal routine.
- Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

Tips to lower stress and anxiety

- Use relaxation exercises like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and mindfulness. Breathing from the stomach can help with calming anxiety. Progressive muscle relaxation can be quick exercises that help to relieve stress and loosen muscles that tighten when anxious. Mindfulness involves thinking of a pleasant, calming image that creates feelings of peace and serenity.
- Exercise of any kind! Walking is a great way to get started.
- Eat a balanced diet. Don't skip meals and make sure to choose some healthy options.
- Encourage family members to take a nap, play with a pet, take a bath, listen to music, talk to a friend, write in a journal, talk on the phone, read, etc.
- Stay focused on goals each day even when they feel stressed or anxious. By helping family members successfully manage small amounts of anxiety you can help them develop a tolerance to it.

Connect with SilverCloud

OSF HealthCare wants to help you manage feelings of depression, stress, anxiety and panic and the causes of them. That's why we have SilverCloud, a free online tool designed to provide easy and immediate access for adults age 18 and older to a digital therapy program from the comfort of home.

SilverCloud is:

- Flexible – Available 24/7 on your computer, tablet or mobile phone.
- Empowering – Let's you take charge and manage your mental health and well-being.
- Easy to use – Interactive tools and activities make your experience interesting and motivational.

Learn more at osfhealthcare.org/silvercloud.



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