

Parents Lead Toolkit

PARENTING DURING A

PANDEMIC

A North
Dakota
Behavioral
Health
Initiative

PARENTS LEAD.ORG

About Parents Lead

PARENTS LEAD

Our mission is simple: to support parents in promoting the behavioral health of their children.

Parents Lead is an evidence-based prevention program that provides parents and caregivers with a wide variety of tools and resources to support them in creating a safe environment for their children that promotes behavioral health. What is behavioral health? It's defined as a state of mental/emotional being and/or choices and actions that affect wellness. Put simply, it's our health and well-being.

The parent-child relationship is essential to the development and well-being of children. In fact, healthy bonding and attachment between parent and child is one of the biggest factors preventing behavioral health issues like underage drinking, drug use, depression, and anxiety.

Through four primary parental behaviors, all parents can make a difference in the lives of their children:

1. Ongoing communication
2. Effective monitoring
3. Positive role-modeling
4. Engagement and support

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Back to School During a Pandemic

Starting a new school year is a stressful time under the best of circumstances, let alone during a pandemic. Some of the best ways to support our children through another transition is to engage in open communication and role model healthy behaviors.

Lead By Example

Children often take emotional cues from key adults in their lives, and times like these provide great opportunity to role model problem-solving, flexibility, positivity, and compassion for self and others. Let your child know that everyone is facing these struggles and remaining kind and patient will provide cushion on a rocky road. Be aware of how you are talking about the pandemic to others when your child is around. Voice that it's ok to feel overwhelmed at times. Teaching your child positive coping skills such as talking about fears and identifying emotions as they arise can help them gain a sense of understanding and reduce anxiety.

Listen

Give your child the gift of your ears! Provide a space for your child to talk with you about their questions and concerns about what school will look like. Encourage your child to vocalize their thoughts and feelings by checking in with them regularly. Remain calm, understanding that their feelings can change often. Let your child's questions guide your conversations.

When Your Child is Going Back to School

- ✓ Find out as much as you can about what the school has planned so you can prepare your kids—and yourself.
- ✓ Outline, as best as you can, what their new daily routine will be, and how drop off and pick up will go.
- ✓ Talk to your child about safety changes they will experience, such as wearing masks, differences in recess and lunchtimes to encourage social distancing, having less kids in their class, etc.
- ✓ Practice wearing a mask with your child. Have a daily "Mask On!" moment. Make a plan to wear masks around the house at certain times of day, like from 10-11 am, or during certain activities, like setting the table for meals. Have your child help you decide when.
- ✓ Practice washing your hands together and applying hand sanitizer as this will be an even bigger part of their daily routine.
- ✓ Add a family photo or a small special object to your child's backpack to help keep them grounded when they are away from home.
- ✓ Remind your child (and yourself!), their school will do everything it can to keep everyone safe.
- ✓ Maintain healthy habits such as practicing mindfulness activities, eating right, getting enough rest and enjoying the fresh air outside together whenever possible.

When Your Child is Distance Learning

Understand your role: You are not expected to take the place of your students' schoolteachers. Instead, you should play a support role. A good rule of thumb is to keep your children engaged and thinking critically. Even though staying home from school might feel like a holiday, remind your children that they are not on vacation. Remember that distance learning at home and learning at school won't look the same — and that's okay. Organic learning can happen in daily family life and that this is a unique opportunity to prioritize home and family, all while supporting your child's learning.

Stay in touch: Teachers will mainly be communicating regularly through our online platforms and virtual learning environments. Make sure everyone knows how to find the help they need to be successful. Stay in contact with classroom and support teachers, school leaders and counsellors but understand it may take a day or two for us to respond. If you have concerns, let someone know

Make space for learning: Your children will achieve their best work in a quiet, comfortable, and dedicated space devoted to learning. Ideally, this will be a different space than where they normally play games or watch television

Set clear expectations: Parents should build time into their remote workday to assist with their students' learning and schedule other activities they know their children will be able to do independently. Consider scheduling "office hours" when you're available for school-related questions. For some children who really struggle with focusing, a basic visual checklist of tasks needed for a particular activity will be helpful. For example, if the child is asked to watch a lesson, read a prompt, and then provide a written response to the prompt, the checklist would have keywords for each of these required activities: watch, read, write. The child would check off each task with you as it is completed, and receive some positive praise or another reward when finished.

Take regular digital recesses: Make sure your children take plenty of breaks from computers in order to get time away from screens. Set alarms similar to those students would encounter at school and encourage them to get up, get some fresh air, have a snack and participate in physical activities. Kids need to move their bodies frequently throughout the day. Allow time for exercise before your child is expected to focus on a distance learning task. Some children are able to better focus on tasks when standing. Consider having your computer or tablet be on a raised surface so that your child can stand.

Don't forget to have fun and prioritize well-being over academics: It is rare for parents and children to have this much time together, so turn it into an opportunity for bonding. Kids learn best when they feel safe and secure. Remember, your relationship with your child is what's most important at this time.



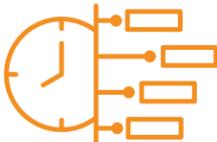
When Your Child Needs Additional Support

Know Your Rights

- ✓ Schools are still required to provide their students with special education.
- ✓ Request an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan meeting to clarify services, supports, and accommodations during this time.

Adjust Expectations

- ✓ Don't be afraid to change your child's learning goals for the year. That may mean reevaluating your child's IEP. Even if the goals remain the same, the way in which each child achieves them looks different, especially with the change to distance learning. For example, perhaps one child answers a question with a written response while another creates a video, draws a picture or responds verbally.
- ✓ During distance learning, it is important to know your child's accommodations and practice using them at home. Your child's IEP plan lists the accommodations and/or modifications that help them succeed at school.
 - Common accommodations include extra time, small group activities, and frequent breaks. Break tasks or assignments into smaller pieces and have your child take breaks as needed. Breaks can be physical or quiet and relaxing.
- ✓ Remember that you know your child best. Are there supports they need to help them pay attention? Would it be helpful to have headphones? A fidget toy? Highlighters?
- ✓ Sometimes multiple, complex accommodations and/or modifications may be required. Assess what is being asked of you and your family; determine your abilities and resources; advocate for what you need; and, ask for realistic expectations and activities for supporting your child during this time
- ✓ A simple trip to the grocery store can turn into a lesson.
- ✓ Analyzing a box of cereal can help with language skills, while adding up calories on a candy bar can teach simple math.
- ✓ Playing board games as a family is another way to engage a child and improve a host of skills — social, analytical, critical thinking and sometimes even math.



Keep a Schedule — As Best You Can

- ✓ Maintaining a consistent routine is essential for assisting children in feeling stable during distance learning. Make it visual to help your child keep track of what's going on.
- ✓ Mix up the traditional schedule by adding in plenty of breaks for small rewards, like a snack, a few minutes of TV time or a quick walk outside. Reward your child by including activities they enjoy to maintain motivation.
- ✓ Use a timer— when it goes off, reading time is over and playtime can begin.
- ✓ Limit distractions and arrange a quiet space for your child to work.
- ✓ Continue to support social-emotional learning and skill development.



Use Everyday Examples to Learn

- ✓ A simple trip to the grocery store can turn into a lesson.
- ✓ Analyzing a box of cereal can help with language skills, while adding up calories on a candy bar can teach simple math.
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Teleworking with Kids at Home

FINDING BALANCE

Juggling a full-time job and parenting can be hard. Working remotely while schools and childcare facilities are shut down has blurred the line between responsibilities to our employers and our families. As parents, we strive to create a healthy and safe environment for our kids. Structure and stability are important components in supporting the behavioral health of our kids. One of the biggest pitfalls of the "new normal" is disruption of routine. To help create a positive environment for everyone, work on putting together new routines for a sense of stability. These new routines can be simple or more detailed, the important thing is to keep open communication and work together – both with your colleagues and your family. Be gentle with yourself and those around you and reach out for help when it's just not working.



Helpful Tips to Create a Sense of Stability

- ✓ Remember your morning routine? Bring it back. Save pajama days for the weekends and get dressed! Have your coffee, make breakfast, whatever it is you did before the transition. Routine helps keep the mindset of business as usual.
- ✓ Visit with your employer about the ability to adjust your schedule to balance home and work life more evenly. If you can, spread your hours out to fit your and your employer's needs. Perhaps you could put most of your hours in when the kids are sleeping, like early mornings, during naps, or after bedtime.

More tips on back

Helpful Tips to Create a Sense of Stability (cont.)

- ✓ Communicate with your peers and prepare them for interruptions, like drop-ins from your new in-house coworkers. Remember that everyone is facing new challenges and if there's one silver lining of this pandemic, it's that people are finding themselves more understanding towards others and their life situations.
- ✓ A key component of remote work is having a designated workstation. This will increase productivity and focus. Have conversations and set boundaries with your children regarding this area and be especially clear if there is an important meeting or task you must attend to, be sure to let them know beforehand.
- ✓ Creating a daily schedule for the family can help decrease boredom and sleep deprivation. Work with your kids to create the daily schedule – they will be more likely to follow-through if they are part of the creation.
- ✓ Now is a great time to cultivate your child's independence. Have snacks on hand and if they're able, encourage them to help themselves. Create an activity box filled with art supplies that don't require adult supervision. Let them know that whatever they take out, they are responsible for putting away. Give daily chores based on your child's capacity and reward their achievements. While it is still important to limit screen time, this might be an opportunity to let them relax with their favorite show or video game.
- ✓ Set aside time each day to enjoy and interact with your kids; including them in tasks like making dinner or folding laundry will increase this time and teach them lifelong skills! Some days just don't go as planned. If you're having one of those days, reach out to a loved one to see if they can virtually babysit for a bit. Set up a video call and have them interact from afar, while you focus on getting some work done. For ideas on this, check out our tips for a virtual playdate - parentslead.org/sites/default/files/SocialInteraction.pdf



Supporting Your Child's Mental Health While Social Distancing

Social interaction is an important part of wellbeing and there are ways to nurture peer relationships besides regular video chats, phone calls, and texts.

- ✓ Video call with Caribu — caribu.com At caribu kids can read books, play games, and color together during a video call.
- ✓ Pogo Games — earlyaccess.pogo.com Play games that range from classics, such as Yahtzee and Monopoly, to newer quest adventures.
- ✓ Messenger for Kids: Designed for kids from ages six to twelve, this app allows parents to control contacts while kids can do challenges, draw, and play with filters while connecting with their friends and family members.
- ✓ Netflix Party: A google chrome extension, Netflix Party synchronizes playback and allows kids to watch their favorite programming together, with chat windows they can discuss what they're watching.
- ✓ Playing on a video call: Texting and phone calls, or even using video to chat to catch up can get dull. Especially for younger children. Use the ability to see other people as an opportunity to play together in different ways. Kids can play games like hangman and Pictionary successfully from a distance. Give them modeling clay or building toys and challenge both sides to construct an object (e.g. "make a cat!"). Have at home scavenger hunts, whoever brings the item back to the screen first wins! Smaller children might like to have online show and tell parties, or even have set crafts they can complete with their parent's help. When you're done show your friends what you made!
- ✓ Help your kids pick a pen pal. They can write to their friends, send it off, and see how the world communicated before cell phones and the internet were a thing!
- ✓ Write a letter or make a card for a neighbor and drop it off by their front door.



There are many things we can do as individuals or families to stay active and support our mental health while also being ND Smart and following social distancing guidelines.

1. Start a gratitude journal.
2. Enjoy the beauty of North Dakota – take a hike, a bike ride, or rive a scenic route.
3. Read a book. E-Books or check out materials are available through local libraries.
4. Do a virtual museum tour!
 - Museums from home: mentalfloss.com/article/75809/12-world-class-museums-you-can-visit-online
5. Go to the zoo online.
6. Go to a virtual amusement park!
 - Disney World: disney.com/blog/2018/03/disney-parks-launches-first-ever-360-degree-panoramas-on-google-street-view/
 - Lego Land: legoland.dk/en/accommodation/hotel-legoland/virtual-tour/
 - Sea World: <https://www.visitorlando.com/en/things-to-do/virtual-tours/seaworld-orlando>
7. Check out online recreational exercise facilities for live streaming videos from workout instructors.
8. Dance to fun guided songs such as The Cha-Cha Slide, Cupid Shuffle, Hokey-Pokey, Chicken Dance, etc.
9. Family Game Night!
10. Watch a craft tutorial on YouTube and make a craft for someone.
11. Pray/meditate/watch online church services.
12. Talk to your therapist/counselor via a telehealth program.
13. Plant a flower or herb garden.
14. Find a recipe and cook something new.
15. Play or learn to play a musical instrument.
16. Make a scrapbook – document this time.
17. Do a guided meditation through an app or online video.
18. Do a scavenger hunt or have a picnic in your backyard.
19. Use sidewalk chalk to draw pictures and write encouraging messages.

Supporting Your Child When They are Grieving the Loss of Activities

This year's school year is going to look different. Even if your child is able to participate in their usual extracurricular activities, those activities will likely look different. Because of these changes, your child may feel sad, disappointed and even angry that their school year and activities aren't going to look as they had planned.

Grieving

- ✓ Encouraging your child to grieve the loss of these activities is critical and an important step.
- ✓ Grief can be a tough process because there's no answer or quick-fix cure. While there are the five stages of grief, most people don't go through them in the same way or even in the same order.
- ✓ Three considerations while talking with your child experiencing disappointment:
- ✓ Resist pushing away feelings, instead take the time to feel them.
- ✓ Recognize that grief is more like a roller coaster than a Ferris wheel; there will be good days and bad days and in between-days.
- ✓ Be compassionate and don't succumb to the pressure to "get over it already."

Self-Care

- ✓ "What psychologists know is that when we are under chronically difficult conditions, it's very helpful to divide the problem into two categories: things I can do something about, and then things I can do nothing about," says Dr. Damour.
- ✓ You can't avoid disappointment and you can't run from loss, but what you can do is decide how you're going to react to the loss and that is everything.
- ✓ Something that can help your child while grieving a loss is to encourage them to distract themselves with other activities they enjoy.
- ✓ Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories.
- ✓ Take care of your body. Exercise, meditate, breathe!
- ✓ Make time to relax. Think about the activities you enjoy and do them as often as you can.
- ✓ Connect with others. Talking to people, while practicing social distancing, and keeping a positive outlook can be beneficial to you as well as the other person.





Co-Parenting DURING A PANDEMIC

Rapidly changing circumstances and recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic can make it difficult for families to chart the best course for shared parenting responsibilities.

Children are perceptive to and affected by your emotions and preserving your child's overall wellbeing is top priority. The only thing that is clear is that both parties, no matter what frustrations arise, should make every effort to work together in a compassionate and civil manner.

Being flexible with your standing parenting agreement during this time will help the family unit function more smoothly. Sticking to a plan which never accounted for a pandemic will no doubt allow avoidable problems to arise, remember everyone is facing these struggles without prior guidance or experience

Helpful Parenting Plan Adjustments

- ✔ If you notice strain on your co-parent, offer to take the kids on "their" time without holding it against them or expecting reciprocity.
- ✔ If both parents are working remotely, agree to more evenly share parenting time while the kids are home from school.
- ✔ If both parents are working outside of the home, agree on a designated caregiver who is not a risk for your children or themselves.
- ✔ Communicate any changes in scheduling promptly so conflicts can be handled proactively.
- ✔ Try utilizing a shared calendar to stay on top of unusual schedules. Keeping kids in the loop and explaining what is going to happen and why will help diminish anxiety of the unknown.
- ✔ Make sure to secure documentation of changes to the parenting agreement in any concrete form, such as emails or texts.
- ✔ If you or your co-parent is at a heightened risk of exposure, have an open and honest discussion about how this could temporarily impact the custodial schedule. Discuss options and agree on if/then scenarios which could arise.
- ✔ If a child's parent is infected but not incapacitated by the illness, it may make sense for the child to remain with that parent during the infectious period, in hopes of limiting further community spread.

What if I feel my co-parent is a risk?

Some parents may have fears over what would happen if they were forced to limit their children's exposure by suspending their co-parent's time. It's as important to be honest about any exposure you've had as it is to never assume anything about the other parent's exposure. Both can be equally detrimental in very different ways.

When considering a temporary suspension of parenting time, ask yourself if there's clear evidence that a parent or household member:

- ✔ Is infected with Coronavirus
- ✔ Was directly exposed to the virus
- ✔ Has traveled to a high-risk area
- ✔ Is not following recommended transmission reduction practices

If there is no proof that any of these situations apply, and there is not a government issued quarantine or shelter in place protocol in effect, it may be difficult to justify the suspension of parenting time, especially if the other party is not in agreement.

If you still feel your child is at risk, remember failing to comply with court orders always poses legal risk. It's important to first make every attempt at reaching a compromise. If your co-parent feels that distancing is an unfounded request, it would be wise to consult with your attorney or ask to meet through an online mediation company before making final decisions.

If unagreed actions taken during this time are brought to the attention of the courts down the road, a judge will have to decide if the matter was truly in the best interest of the child. If a parent's concerns were found to be unsupported, there could be repercussions. It is uncertain if there will be leniency granted due to the nature of the time.

If you do reach an agreement to limit face to face parenting time due to concerns of exposure, ensure regular contact is maintained. Remember, your child's wellbeing is your number one responsibility and they still need that parental interaction.

It's imperative that respectful, solution focused communication is ongoing. This crisis offers the chance to bring your best to the forefront, to rise to the occasion and model the sort of behavior you hope your children will learn. Give them the gift of cohesiveness when their lives are in flux and anxiety is high. Be intentional on laying the foundation for a healthy working relationship with your co-parent, your future will thank you.



How to Talk to Kids if a Family Member Becomes Seriously Ill with COVID-19

With media coverage and obvious changes to our daily routines, even the youngest children are aware that something big is happening. Your child may express anxiety over the unknown, or more specifically, fear of a loved one getting sick. If a loved one does get sick, acknowledge your child's feelings, whatever they are. Your child may want to help their family member while they are sick, but with strict contact guidelines they won't be able to physically be around them. Let them send letters, cards, art projects, and if your loved one is well enough- try out a video chat. If you need to seek out professional help, many facilities are offering telehealth services and can aid in dealing with heavy topics.

Remember that you are your child's number one source of strength and comfort. Taking care of yourself will better allow you to take care of your children, so make sure you have healthy outlets for all the different emotions you're feeling as well.



When Speaking About Your Loved One's Illness

Before starting the conversation, prepare yourself for success by maintaining awareness of your child's verbal abilities and previous experiences with illness and death. Keep in mind your child's attention span and find a time where you can tune out distractions. Be clear that the conversation is important, and keep it as focused on positivity as possible.

Explain in a factual manner what COVID-19 is, using reputable sources like the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). If your child voices concerns, respond honestly, trying to spare them from pain may only leave them more confused. Most importantly, be adamant they will always be taken care of.

Understanding a Child's Capacity of Understanding



Toddlers

Because a toddler's verbal skills are only just starting to develop, they still primarily experience the world through their senses. A child this age has very little understanding of illness and death. What they do understand is changes in environment, routine, and emotion. A child may recognize the absence of a caregiver or an increase in tension, amongst other changes. You can comfort your toddler by keeping things as familiar as possible, and with snuggles and love- lots of snuggles and love.



Preschool to Early Elementary

Children this age are beginning to develop an awareness of critical illness and death, but death's permanency may still escape them. Because understanding is limited, you may find yourself repeating things and having conversations you've already had.

Kids in this age range can be deeply affected by a loved one's illness yet continue to participate in normal childhood activities. One clue into what level of stress your child might be feeling is if you witness regression in development. This is quite common and usually temporary, so it's no immediate cause for alarm. Younger children often won't be able to identify their feelings and will express them through behavior, like being more whiny or defiant than usual. Kindly remind yourself it's a way of handling big feelings. If you see these things happening, keep conversations going, focusing on togetherness and hope.



Elementary

Children this age are beginning to understand how the body works, what it means to be seriously ill, and how different people respond to disease in different ways. They realize the finality of death on a deeper level and recognize it usually occurs later in life. Keep the lines of communication open and expect a lot of questions, if you don't have an answer now, ensure you'll find one. Elementary aged kids may benefit from expressing their emotions through art therapy, reflective play, or journaling.



Tweens and Teens

By this time, children have likely experienced the death of a loved one or someone they know. Early experiences with death shape how they experience a loved one battling a serious illness. This can affect moods, sleeping and eating patterns, schoolwork, and other daily behaviors. Kids this age may envy the willingness of younger children to reach out for support which can create volatile emotions to surface. You may need to make repeated efforts to connect and talk about their feelings surrounding the situation. Don't give up. If your effort is futile now, give them time to think, and revisit the conversation later. Giving your teen undivided attention, focusing on non-COVID issues can create a space for open and honest sharing. Don't fret if you just can't get your child to open up, but make sure they have some outlet through another trusted adult or their peers.

Source:
McClement, S., & Stenekes, S. (2019, March). Talking with Children and Youth about Serious Illness. Retrieved from http://www.virtualhospice.ca/en_US/Main Site Navigation/Home/Topics/Topics/Communication/Talking with Children and Youth.aspx

Talking to Your Child about COVID-19

The World Health Organization officially declared coronavirus a pandemic. Health experts predict that the virus and its impact on our communities are just beginning.



Early Childhood

You play an important role in helping children and teens better understand what's happening and help them manage their own related worries or anxiety.

Here are some tips that can help:

Even though babies and toddlers may not know what is going on, they may pick up a parent's worry and anxiety with their "sixth sense."

- ✓ Try to stay calm around babies and toddlers.
- ✓ Maintain normal routines as much as possible. Routines are reassuring for babies.
- ✓ Shield babies and toddlers from media coverage as much as possible.
- ✓ Look for non-verbal signs that your toddler may be anxious. This might include being scared to go outside or to daycare, extra weepy, clingy, or irritable. Provide extra reassurance and time together.
- ✓ Take the lead from your toddler. Don't talk about it unless they show signs of distress or ask questions.

Preschool

You play an important role in helping children and teens better understand what's happening and help them manage their own related worries or anxiety.

Here are some tips that can help:

Preschoolers may be more tuned in to what is happening. They may have questions about germs, doctors, and even death.

- ✓ Safety is a primary concern for this age group. Reassure them that adults are in charge and working to keep people safe, healthy, and secure.
- ✓ Preschoolers are also concerned about the health of parents, relatives, and friends. Reassure them that everyone is doing what they can to stay healthy and take care of others. Remind them that they can stay healthy by washing hands and make hand-washing fun with songs.
- ✓ Preschoolers are not always able to distinguish fantasy and reality. Limit media exposure.
- ✓ Look for non-verbal signs that your preschooler may be anxious. This might include being scared to go to preschool, extra weepy, clingy, or irritable.
- ✓ Bedtimes are very important. Stories, books, and tuck-ins are crucial.
- ✓ Try to maintain your children's normal routines and rituals when possible. If school, daycare or events are canceled, try to create and stick to other routines when you can.
- ✓ Give them lots of hugs and physical reassurance and limit media coverage.
- ✓ Take the lead from your preschooler. Don't insist on talking about it a lot unless they show signs of distress or ask questions.



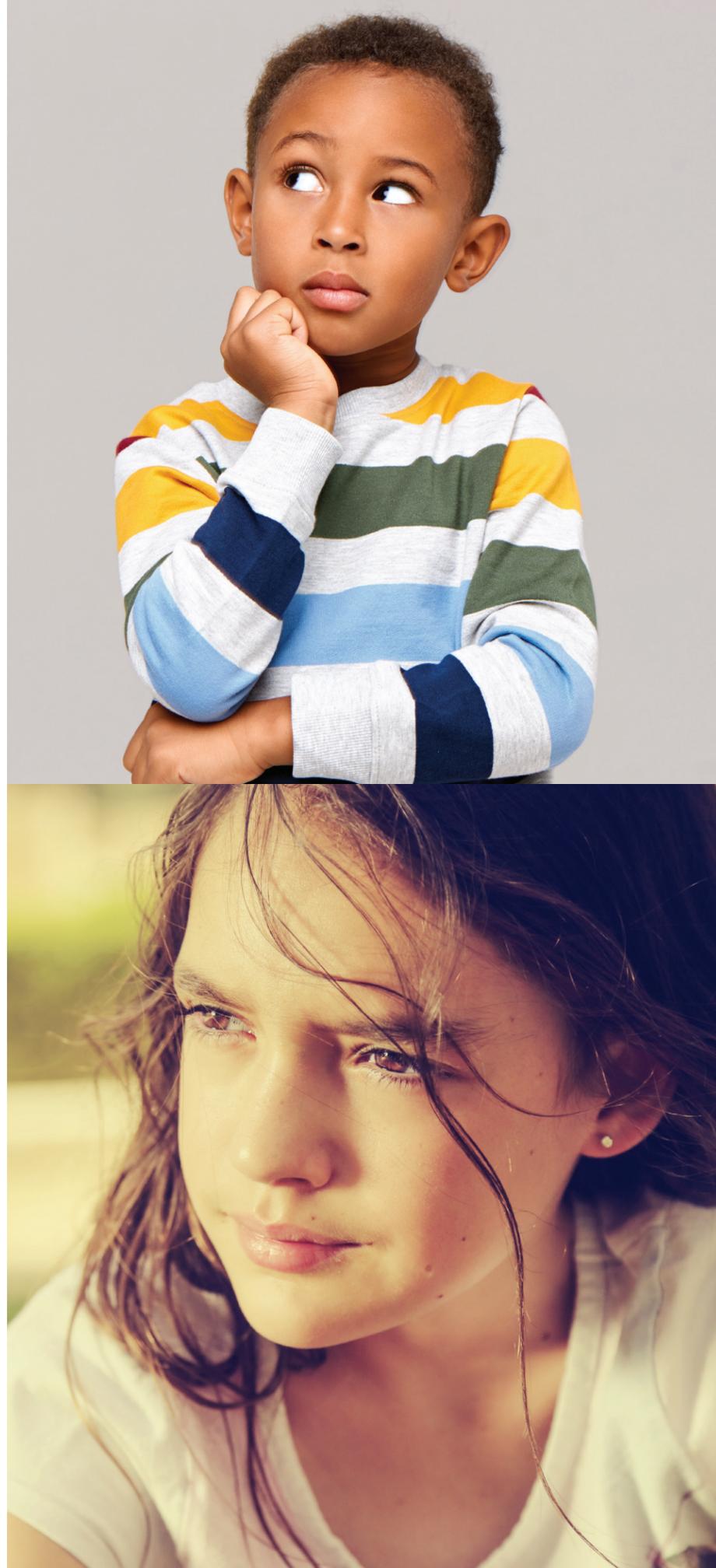
Elementary School

You play an important role in helping children and teens better understand what's happening and help them manage their own related worries or anxiety.

Here are some tips that can help:

School-age children will be more aware of what is going on. They have probably had discussions at school and with friends.

- ✔ Talk to your elementary age children. Explain what happened while reassuring them that you and your child's teachers will do everything to keep them healthy and safe.
- ✔ Children this age are also concerned about their own health, as well as that of family and friends. For example, they may have heard that kids aren't impacted by coronavirus but that older people are, triggering fears about grandparents. They may be worried about money if they know adults are off of work. Try to spend extra time together. This will provide extra reassurance.
- ✔ Don't be surprised if they are more irritable and touchy. Be extra patient.
- ✔ Limit media coverage.
- ✔ Try to continue normal home routines, especially at bedtime. If routines are disrupted due to school or after school activity closures, explain that this is part of the precautions grown-ups are taking to prevent people from getting sick. It doesn't mean that all of their teachers and friends are sick.
- ✔ If fear persists, point out all the things adults are doing to help and to prevent the virus from spreading. Children like to be helpful and feel like they can do something from hand washing to writing letters to nursing homes.
- ✔ Ask them if they have any questions. If they do, stick to the facts and tell them what you know without exaggerating or overreacting. Use these resources to help them learn more about the virus:
 - *"Understanding Corona Virus and How Germs Spread" – Brains On Podcast (plus a kid-centered series on news literacy called "Prove It.")*
 - *"Just for kids: A comic exploring the new coronavirus" – Minnesota Public Radio*



Middle School

You play an important role in helping children and teens better understand what's happening and help them manage their own related worries or anxiety.

Here are some tips that can help:

Children this age will be very aware of what is going on. They have probably seen news coverage and discussed the virus at school or with friends.

- ✔ Talk to your middle school children and answer any questions. This will help you determine how much they know and may help you correct any misinformation they might have.
- ✔ Acknowledge any feelings of anxiety, worry, or panic.
- ✔ Children this age will be more interested in what might happen in the future. Stick to the facts and don't burden them with your own anxiety about uncertain dystopian scenarios.
- ✔ Some children may act out scary feelings through misbehavior. Others may become more withdrawn. Pay attention to these cues and ask them to tell you about their feelings.
- ✔ Talk to your kids about what they see on TV or read online and help them understand which sources are reliable and which aren't when it comes to information about the virus.
- ✔ Talk about how events like this can surface harmful stereotypes and discrimination against certain people and populations. In this case, talk about the importance of disrupting anti-Asian sentiment and xenophobia in coverage of and response to the coronavirus.
- ✔ Seek out positive media. Watch, read, and share stories about ways people are responding to the virus in collaborative ways to keep communities safe.
- ✔ Help guide your child's worry into things they can do – like learning more about how to prevent the spread of the virus including washing hands and getting enough sleep. Use these resources to spark conversations
 - *"Understanding Corona Virus and How Germs Spread": Brains On Podcast (plus a kid-centered series on news literacy called "Prove It.")*
 - *"Just for kids: A comic exploring the new coronavirus": Minnesota Public Radio*

High School

You play an important role in helping children and teens better understand what's happening and help them manage their own related worries or anxiety.

Here are some tips that can help:

High school students have probably had conversations with their peers and teachers. They might have fears about what this will mean for their own health, schooling, schedule or safety.

- ✔ Questions about health, the economy, and public policy are all legitimate issues for this age group. It is important to discuss these topics with them if they are interested.
- ✔ Acknowledge any worry, anxiety or fear they have and remind them that these feelings are normal.
- ✔ Help guide your teen's worry into things they can do – like learning more about how to prevent the spread of the virus including washing hands, getting lots of sleep, or making concrete plans of what you will do if work or school schedules are disrupted.
- ✔ Some teens may want to block out the whole thing. It may appear that they do not care. This might be masking real worries. Ask questions and be ready to listen. Some teens may make jokes. Humor can be a way to help them cope but discourage them from using humor as the only way to talk about the virus.
- ✔ Stick to the facts in your conversations and talk to your teens about what they see on TV or read online. Point them towards reliable sources of information like the CDC website, www.cdc.gov.
- ✔ Talk through the difference between going online to get informed versus media over-use that can fuel anxiety. Enforce a tech curfew at night and encourage them to take media breaks.
- ✔ Some teens may be very interested in discussing the political or economic implications of the pandemic. Engage them in learning and critical thinking about the coronavirus.
- ✔ Talk about how events like this can surface harmful stereotypes and discrimination against certain people and populations. In this case, talk about the importance of disrupting anti-Asian and xenophobic sentiment in coverage of and response to the coronavirus.
- ✔ Don't use your teen to process your own anxiety. Reach out to other adults to process your fears about the virus or the economic disruptions that it is causing.



Media Use & Your Child

Studies show that children who watch five or more hours of TV per day are much more likely to try cigarettes and alcohol.

Benefits of Media Use

- Stay connected with friends and family.
- Enhance creativity through the sharing of ideas, music, and art.
- Meet and interact with others who share similar interests.
- Research school projects and communicate with teachers.
- Play interactive games.

Risks of Media Use

- Excessive media use has been associated with obesity, lack of sleep, school problems, aggression and other behavior issues.
- The media can be a hub for cyberbullying.
- Personal information (name, birthdates, interests, school name, location etc.) can be easily shared online which can make youth easy targets for online predators.
- Youth may receive online advertising or access to websites that are not age appropriate (e.g. – one missed keystroke “legs” instead of “lego” can direct kids to a slew of websites which may contain inappropriate material).

Reducing the risks

Start Talking: Get involved in a way that helps your child understand you respect their privacy but want to make sure they are safe.

Monitor Media Use: Become familiar with any media your child is involved in (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat etc.) and monitor their use and interactions.

Promote Family Values: Co-view TV, movies, and videos with children and teenagers, and use this as a way of discussing family values. Spend time together online to teach your kids appropriate online behavior.

Set Clear Rules: Establish a family home use plan for all media (for example: enforce media free meal time and a bedtime “curfew” for media devices, etc.). Limit the amount of total entertainment screen time to <1 to 2 hours and discourage screen media exposure for children < 2 years of age.

Role Model: Set a good example. Your own interactions with technology can go a long way toward helping your kids use media safely.

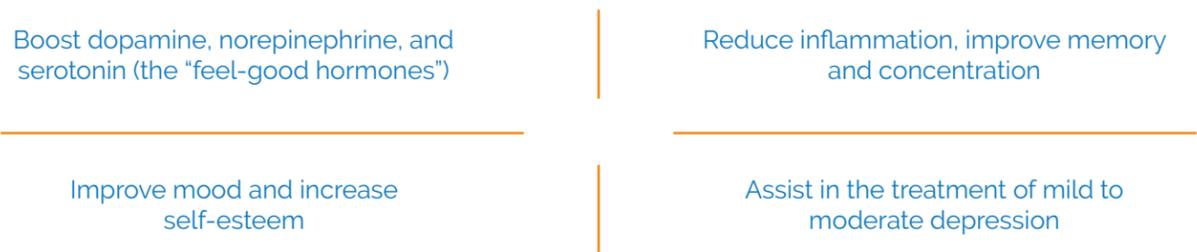
Sources: Teaching Kids to Be Smart About Social Media (Kidshealth.org – from Nemours); reviewed August 2014; How to Make a Family Use Media Plan (Healthychildren.org – from AAP); last updated May 5, 2015; Children, Adolescents & the Media (American Academy of Pediatrics – policy statement from 2013); Internet Safety (Kidshealth.org – from Nemours); reviewed January 2015; <http://www.justmommies.com/gradeschool-kids/parenting-gradeschool-kids/kids-and-electronics-how-much-too-much#ixzz3eeYSNBio>



Getting Movement in during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is altering the way we function in all aspects of our daily life. Getting your body moving and encouraging your kids to move their bodies can be one way to curb the stress of it all! Regular physical activity is not only associated with better immune function but also improved mental health.

Exercise changes the way our brain functions and can:



Be a Positive Role Model by Moving Your Body!

Lead by example. Children learn habits from watching what their parents do. By role-modeling an active lifestyle, not only will you improve your own well-being, but you will show your kids the importance of their own health. If you don't know where to start, here are some tips on how to clock more active minutes:

- ✔ Make physical activity a lifestyle not a task on the to-do list. Think of ways to sneak in activity by incorporating movement into your daily routine.
- ✔ Start small. Jumping into high-intensity or high-volume exercise can lower immune function, not to mention set the stage for failure to maintain such high demands.
- ✔ Research shows that moderate levels of exercise are best for most people. (Moderate means you are breathing heavier than normal but are not out of breath, and your body feels warm but is not overly sweaty).
- ✔ Set a small goal, achieve it. Repeat. Accomplishing even the smallest fitness goals will help your confidence and increase the likelihood of sticking to your plan.

Engage with Your Kids While Encouraging Physical Activity

The CDC recommends kids ages three to five aim for at least three physically active hours each day, and kids ages six to seventeen aim for at least one hour of moderate to vigorous activity.

- ✔ Chores count! Encourage the whole family to do chores together – sweep the floor, dust, do yard work.
- ✔ Just walk. Around the house, the yard, the neighborhood, or find a trail to hike- walking and jogging are the simplest forms of movement. Remember if you go explore together to be mindful of social distancing guidelines.
- ✔ Put music on and have a dance party! Let your child pick the music.
- ✔ Ask your kids how they want to move. You might learn something new!
- ✔ Try creating your own obstacle course – inside or outside – and use a timer to see who completes the course the fastest.
- ✔ Take turns leading your own exercise class, creating body weight routines that incorporate exercises like squats, lunges, pushups, ab moves, or stair climbs. No equipment necessary!
- ✔ Look online for free classes to try together. Try yoga, it's especially great for stress relief.

References:
https://www.exerciseismedicine.org/assets/page_documents/EIM_Rx%20for%20Health_%20Staying%20Active%20During%20Coronavirus%20Pandemic.pdf
<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/the-mental-health-benefits-of-exercise.htm>
<https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/children/index.htm>





Identifying Signs of Stress IN YOUR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Young people, like adults, experience stress. It can come from a variety of sources including academic pressure, making and sustaining friendships, or managing perceived expectations from their parents, teachers, or coaches. Some stress can be positive in that it provides the motivation to tackle a big test, presentation, or sports event. Too much stress, however, can create unnecessary hardship and challenge. Adults can sometimes be unaware when their children or teens are experiencing overwhelming feelings of stress. Tuning into emotional or behavioral cues is important in identifying potential problems and working with your young person to provide guidance and support to successfully work through difficult times.

Watch for negative changes in behavior

Youth of all ages, but especially younger children, may find it difficult to recognize and verbalize when they are experiencing stress. For children, stress can manifest itself through changes in behavior. Common changes can include:

- acting irritable or moody
- withdrawing from activities that used to give them pleasure
- routinely expressing worries
- regularly complaining about school
- crying more than usual
- displaying surprising fearful reactions
- clinging to a parent or teacher
- sleeping/eating too much or too little

With teens, while spending more time with and confiding in peers is a normal part of growing up, significantly avoiding parents, abandoning long-time friendships for a new set of peers, or expressing excessive hostility toward family members, may indicate that the teen is experiencing significant stress.

While negative behavior is not always linked to excessive stress, negative changes in behavior are almost always a clear indication that something is wrong. Adults will want to pay attention to these behaviors and determine an appropriate response or intervention.

Here are some tips on ways to recognize possible signs of stress



Understand that "feeling sick" may be caused by stress

Stress can also appear as physical symptoms such as stomach aches and headaches. If a child makes excessive trips to the school nurse or frequently complains of symptoms (when they have been given a clean bill of health by their physician), or if these complaints increase in certain situations (e.g., before a big test) that child may be experiencing significant stress.



Be aware of how your child or teen interacts with others.

Sometimes a child or teen may seem like his or her usual self at home but be acting out in unusual ways in other settings. It is important for parents to network with one another so that they can come to know how their child or teen is doing in the world around them. In addition to communicating with other parents, being in contact with teachers, school administrators, and leaders of extracurricular activities can help parents tap into their child's or teen's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and be aware of any sources of concern.



Listen and translate

Because children are often not familiar with the word stress and its meaning, they may express feelings of distress through other words such as "worried", "confused", "annoyed", or "angry". Children and teens may also express feelings of stress by saying negative things about themselves, others, or the world around them (e.g. "No one likes me", "I'm stupid", "Nothing is fun"). It is important for parents to listen for these words and statements and try to figure out why your child or teen is saying them, and whether they seem to indicate a source or sources of stress.

What to Do if You're Seeing Signs of Stress

Plan for you and your child to have uninterrupted time and initiate a conversation. Explain that the conversation is important, and you want to hear their thoughts. Don't make assumptions about what is causing the stress. Ask open ended questions, allowing them to speak while you listen until they are finished. It might be difficult to get your child to open up initially, but if they're completely resistant, don't force it. Let them know how much you care and that you are always there to listen and support in any way you can. Don't give up, try to have the discussion at another time, sooner than later. Always be encouraging and offer a positive outlook. Seek solutions rather than giving the problem more power.

Seek support

Parents, children, and teens do not need to tackle overwhelming stress on their own. If a parent is concerned that his or her child or teen is experiencing significant symptoms of stress on a regular basis, including, but not limited to those described above, it can be helpful to work with a licensed mental health professional, such as a psychologist. Psychologists have special training to help people identify problems and develop effective strategies to resolve overwhelming feelings of stress.





Creating Calm DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Anxiety is a basic human instinct that exists to alert us to potential danger. Unfortunately the number one mental health issue for children in the United States is having such an excess of anxiety it's classified as a disorder. Periods of transition, stress, and upheaval of routine can negatively influence a child's wellbeing if he or she is unable to effectively cope.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a bundle of transition, stress, and routine disruption, and everyone is feeling the effects in different ways. Children are isolated from their friends and from the routine of school and extracurriculars, and some fear for the health and safety of themselves or their loved ones. Here are some things to watch for and ways to help your child through big feelings.



Recognizing Signs of Anxiety

Not all brains are created the same, and neither are the worries inside them. Different children have different anxiety triggers and there are countless ways children display panic.

Because there are so many ways to respond to feelings of anxiety, warnings often slip by under the mask of "bad" behavior. Common responses such as impulsivity, refusal to participate, inability to focus, anger and tantrums, trouble sleeping or eating, or general opposition can appear as willful defiance. However, major changes in behavioral patterns usually indicate severe stress.

These changes often result when children don't realize that what they're feeling is anxiety. Many may not have the language skills or ability to express what's going on inside of them, or they may not be able to tell the difference between anxiety and other feelings. Behaviors can result as a way to cope with this internal strain.

How You Can Help

- ✔ Model how to identify and manage feelings and practice healthy coping skills to remain calm yourself. Your child senses emotions and your stress will heighten theirs.
- ✔ Never assume the worst. Give your child your open ears and mind and listen without judgement.
- ✔ Remember it's hard to manage our own feelings and actions when we're stressed, imagine what it's like for a child who hasn't mastered coping yet. This can help you respond in a more nurturing and understanding way.
- ✔ Seek to learn what triggers worry or stress. Understanding your child's anxiety traps can better prepare everyone to avoid them.
- ✔ Anxiety is not always rational, validate and accept the feeling anyway. Allowing your child to express their emotions without telling them how they should or shouldn't feel will create a safe space to let the emotion out.
- ✔ Help your child be self-compassionate. Express that everyone feels this way from time to time, and it takes practice for us to learn how to manage this kind of emotion.
- ✔ Proactively teaching your child to be mindful of feelings is paramount in handling anxiety. Once a child is aware of feelings they may have, they are better equipped to manage them.
- ✔ Help them learn they are not stuck with feelings. Instead encourage flexible thinking; teach them emotions can be noticed, evaluated, and changed.
- ✔ Mindfulness techniques are among the most beneficial to reducing feelings of stress. Breathing exercises, naming 5 things they can sense, and muscle tensing and release exercises are all excellent practices for children of all ages.
- ✔ The goal is self-management, not protecting your child from feeling any strain. Life is filled with difficult experiences and helping kids manage feelings of anxiety also means helping them learn how to be comfortable with some discomfort.
- ✔ Finally, give them all your love. Extra long hugs are especially helpful and calming!



Home Alone: Is Your Child Ready?

When is my child old enough to stay home alone? How young is too young? What is an appropriate age to let my child babysit siblings or neighbor children? Because kids mature at different ages, knowing when your child is old enough to stay home alone can be difficult. If you are thinking about leaving your child home alone for the first time, there are several things to consider. The following supervision guidelines provide a starting point in making this decision.

Infant/Children ages 0-4

North Dakota Supervision Guidelines state all children under the age of four, be in view of their caregiver at all times while outside of the home. Inside the home, the caregiver should be available and able to respond to the children to provide immediate care and protection from harm. In addition, children of this age should not be left in vehicles unless they are in proper restraints (unable to put the vehicle in gear) and in direct view of the caregiver at all times.

Children 8 years and younger

- ✔ Should be supervised at all times with a caregiver available.
- ✔ An 8-year-old should not be left in charge of other children.

Children who are 9 years old

A child of this age should NOT be:

- ✔ Left unsupervised for periods greater than two hours during the daytime
- ✔ Unsupervised during sleeping hours
- ✔ Responsible for younger children

Children who are 10-11 years old

A child at this age may be left alone for longer periods of time. However, caution is advised in leaving a child unsupervised during sleeping hours. Children this age should not be responsible for younger children.

Children 12 years and older

- ✔ May be permitted to act as baby-sitters but it is recommended they successfully complete an approved childcare training course.
- ✔ Caution is advised on the number of children left in care, length of time for caregiving responsibility, factors regarding special needs of children left in care and resources available to the child providing care.

Teens

Children under the age of 15 should be attended overnight. Caution should be taken in leaving 15-17 year olds alone overnight. Extended absences of caregivers (such as over a weekend) are not recommended.

Children staying home alone can...

- ✔ Get home from school safely
- ✔ Use the keys to get in the door & lock it once safely inside
- ✔ Say their full name, phone number & address in case of emergency
- ✔ Use the phone
- ✔ Know how & when to call 911
- ✔ Call a neighbor to ask for help if needed
- ✔ Get a snack or safely make a cold snack
- ✔ Do some homework on their own
- ✔ Follow simple rules
- ✔ Know how to do simple first-aid (e.g., put on a Band-Aid or run cold water on a burn)
- ✔ Understand enough about time to know when you will be home

Behavioral Health Services and Support

Project Renew

projectrenew.nd.gov | 701.223.1510

Free, confidential crisis counseling, support, and assistance is available to anyone in the state of North Dakota who has been impacted in any way by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recovery Talk

1-844-44TALK2

Talk with a trained peer support specialist in North Dakota with lived experience in addiction to chat and receive support.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Disaster Distress Helpline

1-800-985-5990

Provides crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters.

FirstLink 211

Confidential service available to anyone for listening and support, referrals to resources/help and crisis intervention.

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Search for providers by address, city or ZIP code.

PARENTS LEAD.ORG

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Initiative