

Fast Facts for Parents: Coping with Unanticipated Change



Problematic behaviors can increase when children experience unexpected stress or unhelpful emotions, such as boredom or disappointment related to disruption in their routines. Additionally, seeing and hearing the news, particularly about catastrophic events, may cause children to experience stress, anxiety and fear.

Being mindful and focusing on the things you can control will assist in developing more positive emotions and decreasing these unhelpful emotions.

Here are some tips to help manage change and disruption during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic:

Tip #1: Improve the moment

- **Find activities.**
Find ways to occupy your family's time indoors and at home, including increasing your self-care practices.
 - o **Schedule any "pleasant event:"** Do something that increases positive emotions.
 - o **Schedule something that builds a sense of accomplishment:** Look for a challenge, but a reasonable challenge, such as a puzzle, a board game, a new recipe or an art project.
 - o **Contribute to someone else:** Do something thoughtful. Making and sending a card in the mail can help your family feel connected, while boosting those positive emotions.
- **Access different emotions.**
 - o How can you create a different emotion through music, games or your TV routine?
 - o What makes your family laugh?
 - o During a time of high anxiety, avoid watching or listening to things that evoke those unhelpful emotions, such as scary movies.

continued

Tip #2: Encourage positive choices

- **Use specific praise.**

- o Show your approval and excitement about your child's positive choices.

"Hey, thank you for..." "I'm impressed," "You're right on target," or "Terrific," for example.

- o Describe the behavior your child did well.

"I'm glad you washed your hands after using the bathroom."

- o Give your child a reason why their behavior is beneficial.

"I don't think I would have had time to play video games with you if you hadn't helped with the dishes."

- o Add a reward if you want to see it again!

- Picking the family's breakfast cereal, dinner meal, movie, game, radio station, activity or TV channel are all ideas of reinforcers that are free or inexpensive.

- Offer coupons for having extended time on technology, staying up late, sleeping in or staying outside.

- **Practice coping ahead for the inevitable stress.**

- o Rehearse a plan ahead of time so your child is prepared to act skillfully.

- o Try deep breathing, movement, and activities that distract to start.

- o Set a timer for preferred activities and be clear about expectations BEFORE the break/time away, so you aren't rewarding problem behaviors.



Tip #3: Be mindful of vulnerabilities that can create unhelpful emotions and responses.

- Is your child tired? Could your family eat something more balanced? How was physical exercise or movement today? Has everyone taken their prescribed medications?
- Minimize the negative effects of hearing the news, such as monitoring the amount of time your child watches news shows and watching the news with them. Make time to discuss feelings.