



Are the Kids All Right?

Fear, Isolation and Mental Health

Before 2020, “Pandemic Depression” might have been the name of a high schooler’s garage band. Now, mental illness is a real concern for families living a Coronavirus reality.

Are the kids all right? It’s sometimes hard to tell.

“Children don’t always understand what they’re feeling. For example, fear presents differently at different ages,” said Michelle Roley-Roberts, PhD, licensed clinical child and adolescent psychologist at CHI Health.

A young child might repeat the same question – “What’s for dinner?” – over and over. They’re not looking for an answer. “They’re looking for reassurance,” said Dr. Roley-Roberts. Others may act out more, while some will isolate.

Seek help if you see major differences in how your child behaves. Meanwhile, be kind, consistent and an example to follow.

“Kids look to parents to provide safety. But we can’t say with 100 percent

certainty that we can be safe. A parent can say: ‘I’m feeling frustrated not knowing what’s going to happen. Maybe you feel this way too.’ Part of providing safety is labeling or creating a vocabulary about feelings.”

Signs of Emotional Struggle



- Excessive crying/irritation in younger children
- Excessive worry/sadness
- Unhealthy eating/sleeping habits
- Irritability/“acting out” in teens
- Poor school performance/avoiding school
- Difficulties with attention/concentration
- Avoiding activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches/body pain
- Use of alcohol/tobacco/other drugs

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dos and Don'ts from Dr. Roley-Roberts

Don't lose hope: “The majority of people who experience a traumatic event – such as a pandemic – recover spontaneously.”

Don't overcompensate. “Parents ask if they should do something special since kids are going through this. If we're constantly providing for our kids, they don't learn how to do things themselves.”

Do pay attention: “For kids with anxiety or depression, sometimes new traumatic events can amplify problems. At other times, kids can look more functional in some ways but not in other ways because they've already learned how to deal with chaotic situations.”



Change is Hard: Coping Skills You Can Count On

Whether it's the end to summer break, or a world-altering global pandemic, the skills we use to deal with change remain the same.

"Positive coping skills should be introduced at a young age, improved upon and reinforced as children grow. They're tools children can rely on today and for their entire life. They aren't just something parents or teachers lecture about. If practiced correctly, they can empower and effectively help families deal with any challenge," said Bridget Mostek, LIMHP, CHI Health mental health therapist.

Mostek recommends flexibility when working with adolescents. "A coping skill that works to alleviate stress or anxiety today may not have the same effect tomorrow," she said.

"Don't be afraid to try new things, share ideas and talk about the results as a family."

When in doubt, Mostek encourages getting back to basics.

"To deal, teens rely heavily on electronic devices. That's their go-to, but devices may help them avoid, not necessarily accept, change," she said. "Stepping away from the phones to pay attention to yourself or reconnect as a family is healthier and can be more effective."

**"Change is the only constant in life"-
Heraclitus, 500 B.C.**

Just Breathe

Breathing, and doing it correctly, can be one of the easiest, most accessible and successful coping strategies. Mostek recommends the 4, 7, 8 rule. Take a breath in for 4 seconds, hold it for 7 seconds, release for 8 seconds; then repeat. Slowing down our heart rate allows for better focus, alleviates anxiety and helps us to calm our mind for better, more rational decision-making.

TRUE or FALSE



5G mobile networks DO NOT spread COVID-19.

TRUE. Viruses cannot travel on mobile phone networks or radio waves. COVID-19 is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. People can also be infected by touching a contaminated surface and then their eyes, mouth or nose.

Wearing medical masks DOES NOT cause oxygen deficiency.

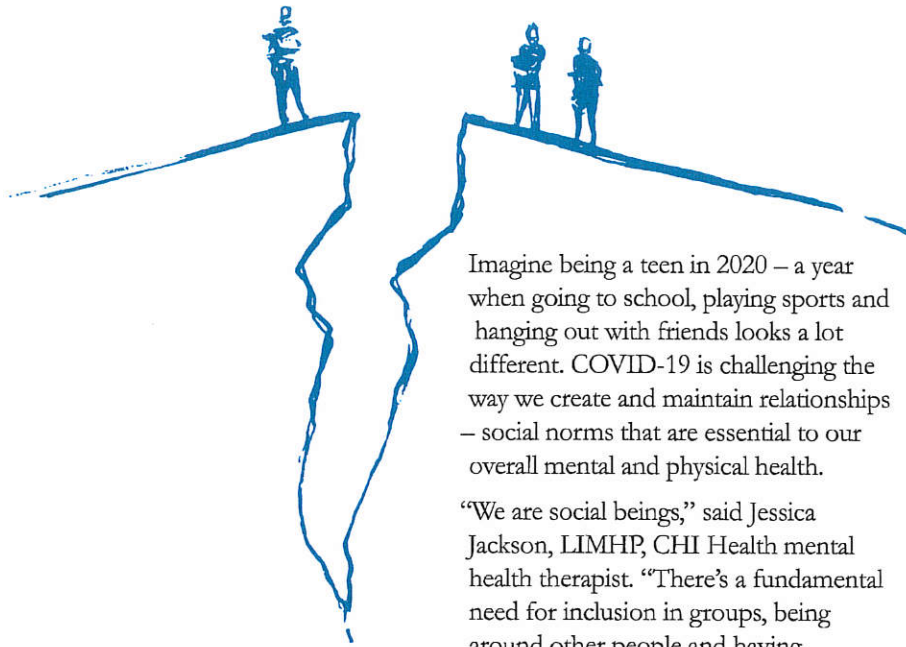
TRUE. Masks can be uncomfortable, but they do not cause CO2 intoxication or oxygen deficiency. Masks aren't recommended for children under the age of two as they could become a choking hazard.

Masks must be disinfected with chemicals to be reused.

FALSE. You can run your cloth mask through the washing machine and dryer after use. You can also hand-wash using soap and dry in the sun. Disposable surgical masks can be placed in a paper bag for seven days and reused.

Products shipped from overseas carry COVID-19.

FALSE. The likelihood of becoming infected with COVID-19 from a commercial package is low since it has likely traveled over several days and been exposed to different temperatures and conditions during transit.



When 6 Feet Feels Miles Apart: Maintaining Meaningful Relationships

Imagine being a teen in 2020 – a year when going to school, playing sports and hanging out with friends looks a lot different. COVID-19 is challenging the way we create and maintain relationships – social norms that are essential to our overall mental and physical health.

“We are social beings,” said Jessica Jackson, LIMHP, CHI Health mental health therapist. “There’s a fundamental need for inclusion in groups, being around other people and having relationships. There’s evidence that there’s mental and physical effects on the brain and body when our need for social interaction is not met.”

Jackson said social isolation can cause learning and memory to become hindered and bring on increased feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.

“Kids and adults can become worried or scared, so they avoid social situations instead of being educated on safe ways to social distance,” Jackson said.

The important thing to know is you can still be with friends and socialize safely – whether it’s an in-person or virtual activity.

“Being open to trying different ways of communicating like talking on the phone or using Zoom can help fulfill a person’s social needs,” Jackson said. “It may feel uncomfortable at first, but it could actually be enjoyable once you try it.”

Social distancing is just part of the puzzle. It can be hard for kids to take it seriously and understand why it’s necessary.

“Anytime there’s uncertainty, there’s going to be anxiety – not only for kids, but also for adults and families,” Jackson said. “Pay attention to that and talk about how kids are feeling, fears they’re having and why we social distance.”

Jackson said setting and enforcing boundaries in the household, leading by example and having open dialogue are the most important steps parents can take.

“Kids look to parents for security and safety, so be aware, stay calm, be a good role model and provide reassurance,” she said.

Meet in the Middle

What if your kids’ friends aren’t taking the same precautions as your family?

- Talk with your children – sometimes their friends may have different beliefs and that’s okay
- Teach your kids not to point blame, but acknowledge differences among others
- Listen to your children’s concerns and validate those feelings
- Make the decision that is right for your family

An illustration at the bottom of the page shows two young people on the left, a girl with brown hair and a boy with dark skin, both wearing white face masks. On the right, two older people, a man with white hair and glasses and a woman with dark hair, are shown in profile, appearing to be in conversation.

Screen Time: Good vs. Bad

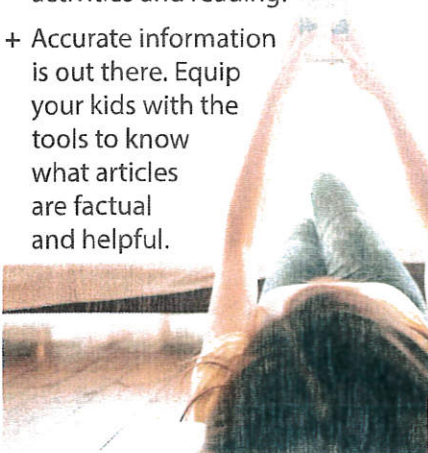
With less social interaction, screen time has increased in many households. The most important thing you can do as a parent is set limits and monitor screen time.

The bad:

- There are a lot of negative articles and conspiracy theories about the virus on the Internet, which can incite fear and anxiety among kids. Teach them what to look for in articles, how to think critically and ask information-seeking questions.
- If social media isn't monitored, it could have negative effects like cyberbullying.
- Too much time spent on devices can cause unhealthy sleep and diet habits. Make sure a routine is in place and do what's best for your family; give time frames for screen time.

The good:

- + Social media and electronic devices allow us to connect, which helps us initiate conversation and form or maintain relationships outside of the in-person realm.
- + Technology can also be used to enhance learning through games, activities and reading.
- + Accurate information is out there. Equip your kids with the tools to know what articles are factual and helpful.



Scared or Scarred? Signs of Trauma



Watching a nation face COVID-19 can be confusing, stressful and sometimes frightening for adults and children.

Every child's situation is different, but could some be traumatized?

"There is definitely multi-directional trauma exposure to kids coming from a number of places," said Monica Arora, MD, CHI Health child and adolescent psychiatrist.

You don't have to go through a traumatic event, such as war, to experience trauma. It can just be an overwhelming or frightening experience that is out of our control.

We are in an unusual and uncertain time. The stress and anxiety children are experiencing could be from a number of different factors.

- » Separation from loved ones who are hospitalized due to COVID-19 and/or fear that they may catch the disease
- » School closures thrust many kids into taking care of younger siblings

- » Loss of the structure school provides, including important daily interaction with teachers and friends

- » Job loss in the family, leaving children worried about basic essentials – food, clothing and housing

Children's reactions from a traumatic event vary depending on age. See "*Signs of Emotional Struggle*" on page 1.

Children may have difficulty sleeping through the night. Some may be filled with worry about family and friends. Teens may say they're fine when in reality they are suffering from anxiety.

How to Support Children

It's important to reiterate safety and validate their feelings. "Reassure children they are okay and safe. Provide age-appropriate, simple and honest answers," said Dr. Arora.

Teenagers often hide their emotions. Be a resource for those who wish to talk. Remember, kids are tuned into grown-up's reactions. To best support your child, you must take care of yourself too.