



CARING FOR CHILDREN DURING A CRISIS

Toolkit for Parents & Caregivers

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**Child Protection Accountability
Commission (CPAC)**

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Adapted from:



PARENTING DURING A CRISIS

In addition to keeping children physically safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also important to care for their emotional health. Children have adjusted to changes in their daily routine, reduced contact with friends, and noticeable stress in the adults around them. Some of the risk factors for child abuse, neglect, and emotional trauma have also increased due to the pandemic, such as isolation, stress, illness, job loss, and financial hardship. For children in families with a history of domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental illness, these risk factors have increased even more.

This guide will provide parents and caregivers in Delaware with community resources, information on helping children cope with crisis, tips for keeping children safe, healthy ways to cope with stress and practice self-care, and national resources on parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic.



FOR IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE:

Report Child Abuse or Neglect in Delaware

800-292-9582 or www.iseethesigns.org

Delaware COVID-19 Support

Hotline: 2-1-1 or www.coronavirus.delaware.gov

Child Mental Health Crisis Hotline & Support

1-800-969-4357 (HELP) or Text DE to 741741

CARING FOR CHILDREN DURING COVID-19



Regardless of age, children may feel upset or have other strong emotions during the pandemic. Children react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with a crisis calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children.

Infants & Young Children

Parenting a New Baby

Safe Sleep Reminder

Babies should sleep:

- alone
- on their backs
- in an empty crib
- in a smoke-free environment
- under the care of a safe, sober person

Be gentle with your children as they learn, but also with yourself as the parent. For more tips on parenting a new baby, click [here](#).

Toilet Training Tips

Potty training is already tough. Many kids who have been using the potty have some trouble during times of stress. Remember to be patient and that accidents will happen.

Remember to maintain a positive attitude and reward or praise your child's success. For more tips on toilet training, click [here](#).

Safe Space to Play

With children spending more time at home than ever, it is important to remember to keep a safe space to play. Some ideas include mounting flat TVs to the wall, watching children around balconies and windows, and using safety gates at the tops and bottoms of stairs.

For more tips on maintaining a safe space for play, click [here](#).

Children with Special Needs

Parents and caregivers supporting individuals with disabilities during this time face extra challenges. These strategies are designed to help you adapt to parenting in these uncertain times and can be used for all children.

Support Understanding-

describe the virus and current situation in concrete language and terms; use a social narrative such as a story, photos, or use of technology (click [here](#) for examples); provide visual supports to offer guidance on specific actions/behaviors

Maintain Routines-

sleep/wake routines, household chores, daily living skills, etc as well as visual schedules are all recommended strategies to support children and young adults coping with the stress related to COVID-19

Be Aware of Changing Behaviors- be alert for signs of anxiety and depression, including changes in sleeping or eating patterns, increases in repetitive behaviors, excessive worry, increased agitation or irritability, or decreases in self-care

Build New Routines - use of consistent routine to transition off screen; offer choices to increase a sense of autonomy and motivation

Foster Connections from a Distance- build in opportunities for daily contact with family, friends, neighbors, teachers, or others via FaceTime, Zoom, Google Hangout, text, or other apps

Prioritize Coping with Calming Skills - if coping or calming strategies are not already part of the child's routine, parents and caregivers can prioritize the teaching of these skills during this time of uncertainty

Offer Opportunities for Expression- consider family and individual discussions, writing activities, movie making, or play; feelings and needs may also be communicated through augmentative and alternative communications (e.g. iPad, pictures), listening or playing music, dance, yoga, or various visual art forms



HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH A CRISIS

WHAT TO EXPECT & HOW TO RESPOND

Children react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. How a child reacts and the common signs of distress can vary according to the child's age, previous experiences, and how the child typically copes with stress. Parents and caregivers can be more assuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

AGE	REACTIONS	HELPFUL RESPONSES
PRESCHOOL (3-5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fear of being alone, bad dreams - Speech difficulties - Loss of bladder/bowel control; constipation, bed-wetting - Change in appetite - Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patience and tolerance - Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) - Encourage expression through play, reenactment, storytelling - Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements - Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime - Maintain regular family routines - Avoid media exposure
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior - Clinging, nightmares - Sleep/appetite disturbance - Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches) - Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest - Competition for parents' attention - Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patience, tolerance, and reassurance - Play sessions and staying in touch with friends - Regular exercise and stretching - Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games) - Participate in structured household chores - Set gentle but firm limits - Discuss the current outbreak; encourage questions, and include what is being done in the family/community - Encourage expression through play and conversation - Help generate ideas for promoting health and maintain family routines - Limit media exposure, talking about what they have heard/seen in school - Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation
TEENS (13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.) - Sleep/appetite disturbance - Agitation or decrease in energy; apathy - Ignoring health promoting behaviors - Isolating from peers and loved ones - Concerns about stigmas and injustices - Avoiding or cutting school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patience, tolerance, and reassurance - Encourage continuation of routines - Encourage discussion of outbreak with peers, family (but do not force) - Stay in touch with family and friends through phone, internet, or video games - Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings and enhancing healthy behaviors - Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak



HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH A CRISIS

TALKING THROUGH COVID-19

Communication is key during the outbreak. While it may seem safer to shelter children from potentially scary information, you can actually help them feel more at ease by calmly talking through the situation together. Focus on supporting children by encouraging questions and helping them understand the current situation.

REMAIN CALM AND REASSURING

- Remember children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.
- Provide comfort and a bit of extra patience.
- Clarify misunderstandings or misinformation about how the virus is spread- not every cough or sneeze means they or others have COVID-19.



EMPHASIZE YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

- Check in with your family to ensure they and all household members remain well. If you have a reason to think anyone in the home is not well, direct them to a hospital, health care professional, or telehealth resource.
- Check back in with your children on a regular basis or when the situation changes.

BE MINDFUL OF YOUR LANGUAGE

- Remember viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.
- Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for their age and development level.
- Consider having a separate discussion with young children in order to understand and address specific fears or misconceptions they may have.

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE TO LISTEN AND TALK

- Make time to talk. Be sure children know they can come to you with questions.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and be sure to validate them.
- Help them express their feelings through drawing or other activities.

INCREASED RISK OF MALTREATMENT

Around the world, COVID-19 has increased risk factors for child maltreatment, such as stress, illness, job loss, financial stress, and isolation. It is important to recognize and minimize risks for maltreatment while strengthening factors that can protect children and families.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is generally defined as any non-accidental physical injury to the child and can include hitting a child with a hand or object and leaving an injury; hitting a child with a closed fist; throwing, kicking, burning, biting or cutting a child; and interfering with the child's breathing. It is best to use healthy discipline strategies that teach children to manage their behavior and promote healthy development. For more help responding when children misbehave, click [here](#).

Abusive Head Trauma (AHT) is the most frequent cause of non-accidental deaths in children under two and shaking or impact injuries are the most frequent forms of this trauma. Crying can be the most difficult part of caring for a baby, especially when infants are difficult to soothe. Remember to take care of yourself and take breaks: place the baby on his/her back in the crib and step away, take a breath, and relax. For more help soothing babies, click [here](#).

For videos on comforting a newborn (and yourself), click [here](#) and enter code "DELAWARE".

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway

SEXUAL ABUSE

1 in 10 children under 18 is affected by sexual abuse. Now is a great time to talk with your child about body boundaries, privacy, and sexual predators. It's easy if you start early and talk often. For more guidance on approaching the subject, click [here](#).

It is also important to be aware of child grooming and red flag behaviors, such as gift giving, special attention, and gaining access to children via the internet. For more information on grooming, click [here](#).


Realistically, it is impossible to have "eyes" on your child at all times. This is why it is essential to minimize opportunity for sexual abuse. About 90% of child sexual abuse victims know their abuser, and only 10% of sexually abused children are abused by a stranger. Most often this occurs during one-on-one interactions between adult/child or older child with younger children. Establish online safety rules, keep lines of communication open, and revisit rules about having closed doors in the house. For more tips, click [here](#).

Even before the pandemic, child sexual abuse on the Internet has been increasing significantly. Keep the children you care for safe online by monitoring which sites and applications they are using. Have age-appropriate conversations with them about online safety. For more resources, click [here](#).

NEGLECT

Neglect is frequently defined as the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm. With everyone spending more time at home, it may seem like children are always being supervised. However, plenty of dangerous situations can arise while parents and caregivers are working from home and not paying attention.

Here are some reminders to prevent common accidents from happening:

 Drowning Risk: Watch children when they are near water. It is a good idea to identify a "Water Watcher," or an adult who is responsible for watching children in or near the water. For more tips on reducing risk of drowning, click [here](#).



Hot Cars: Never leave your child alone in a car, not even during a quick trip to the store. Keep car doors and trunks locked and keep key fobs out of reach. For more tips, click [here](#).



Gun Safety: Keep guns out of reach and out of sight of children by storing them securely. Use child-proof locks, and store guns separate from ammunition. For more tips, click [here](#).



Drug Ingestion: Keep all medications, including vitamins, prescriptions and illicit drugs, out of reach and out of sight from children. Place bags and briefcases on high shelves or hang them on hooks, out of children's reach and sight. For more information, click [here](#).

As children return to school with new schedules, parents and caregivers may feel tempted to leave children home alone while they have to work. It is important to consider a child's level of functioning, maturity, physical/mental health, length of time alone, and time of day when deciding whether it is appropriate to leave a child home alone. If possible, leaving children with a safe adult is always best.



SUPPORT FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

PARENTING

It's hard to feel positive when you're stressed and kids or teenagers are driving you crazy. It's easy to get frustrated and say "stop doing that!" but children are much more likely to do what we ask if we give them positive instructions and lots of praise for what they do right.

Teens especially need to be able to communicate with their friends. Help your teens stay connected with friends and family through video calls or the internet.

Routines can be used to ensure that children continue to learn and grow, and they help to reduce boredom. In addition to completing their schoolwork, encourage children to read, try a new hobby, or learn a new activity.

Provide outlets, such as creative play and outdoor time, to allow children to express themselves and blow off steam.

Maintain limits and rules, such as time limits on screen time and daily chores.

Connect with your family. Turn off electronics and spend time together outside, playing board games, trying a new recipe, making crafts, reading, listening to music, or exercising together.

Teach children life skills such as how to plant a garden, vacuum, set a digital clock, build something, or sew. Teach older kids how to do laundry, wash a car, and cook a meal.

This break is an opportunity for all of us to get back to the basics and get out of our digital lives.

SELF CARE & COPING WITH STRESS

Being a parent and caregiver can have its challenges on a good day. Adding the stress and anxiety of what's happening in today's world can test all of us. The following are some suggestions to help:

- Stay active and engaged
- Stay connected
- Manage stress and anxiety
- Be flexible and go easy on yourself (and your kids)
- Focus on gratitude
- Reach out for help

For more information, click [here](#).



NAVIGATING THE RETURN TO SCHOOLS

Although the return to school looks different for everyone, there are some basic tips that are useful for all parents and caregivers as they navigate these changes. Create order, with some flexibility, in your days; focus on school work in reasonable increments; limit your child's anxiety by managing your own; build time to let off steam; be flexible with your expectations; try to get outside; and find a way to create fun and special memories for your family.

Reach out to your friends, laugh when you can, and remember that this will pass. And let's help each other out whenever possible.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES



Click on the links below to explore resources in Delaware.

- [DE COVID-19 Information](#) or call 2-1-1
- [DE Child Care Resources and Guidance](#)
 - [Food Bank of Delaware](#)
 - [DE Resiliency Resources](#)
- DFS Child Abuse and Neglect Report Line:
1-800-292-9582 or online at iseethesigns.org
- Delaware's Child Mental Health Crisis Hotline & Support: 1-800-969-HELP(4357)
- Crisis Text Line (for youth): Text DE to the number 741-741
- [DE Domestic Violence Hotline Numbers](#) (varies by county)
- Mobile Crisis Intervention Services (Adult Psychiatric or Substance Abuse) 1-800-652-2929 (New Castle) or 1-800-345-6785 (Kent/Sussex)



GENERAL RESOURCES

- Prevent Child Abuse Delaware's [Coronavirus Resources](#)
- Prevent Child Abuse Delaware's [Parent Resources](#)
- [Resources for Supporting Children's Emotional Well-being During the Pandemic](#)
- [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Pandemic](#)

