



# Kids Mental Health During COVID-19

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# Statistics

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- 99% of children are living with some type of restrictions at the present time
- 60% live in countries under full or partial restrictions
- 1.5 billion children are out of school

# What This Means?

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- Children's every day world's have been turned upside down
- There is no normal way to respond to what is going on
- Children are relying on adults to help them navigate their way through the unknown
- Children may want to know more about death as a result of the pandemic- be honest with children, while maintaining a developmentally appropriate response
- The most important thing as a parent is to keep a calm, loving and supportive environment at the house

# Children's Mental Health

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- Most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members, even if showing signs of some anxiety or concerns, such as difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Some children, however, may have risk factors for more intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors. Risk factors can include a pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one.

# When to Ask for Help?

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- Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks.
- **Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.
- **Elementary school children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

# Group Questions...

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How do you think kids may act during these times?

Will there be long term damage to children's mental health as a result? If so what will they be? If not, how come?

Please type answers in chat box....

# Social Isolation

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- There are both positives and negatives to social distancing.
- As a parent, the use of technology to keep children involved with other children is important.
- Isolation can lead to many other mental disorders
- Children, especially younger ones, learn how to be social beings in school, day care, or other places.
- Be creative when playing with children. Allow them to lead the play like they would with their friends. **DON'T TELL THEM HOW TO PLAY**
- Give them a certain amount of time each day to encourage free play

# Depression Symptoms

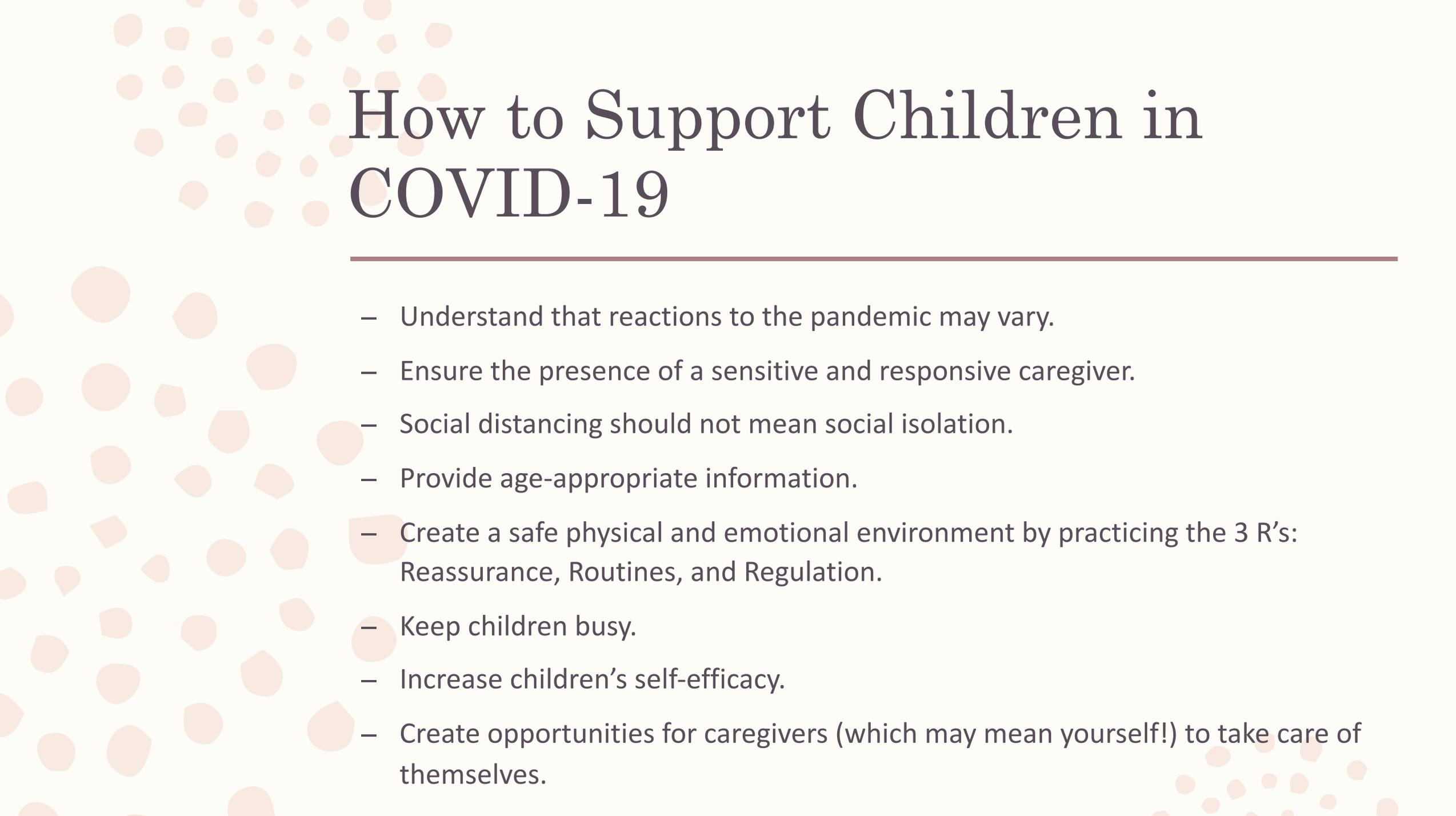
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- Irritability or anger
- Continuous feelings of sadness and hopelessness
- Social withdrawal
- Increased sensitivity to rejection
- Changes in appetite -- either increased or decreased
- Changes in [sleep](#) -- sleeplessness or excessive [sleep](#)
- Vocal outbursts or crying
- Difficulty concentrating
- [Fatigue](#) and low energy
- Physical complaints (such as stomachaches, [headaches](#)) that don't respond to treatment
- Reduced ability to function during events and activities at home or with friends, in school, extracurricular activities, and in other hobbies or interests
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt

# Anxiety Symptoms

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- Depending on the age, children will become more clingy, cry more, have more rapid mood swings, refusal to do things or engage in once liked activities
- Their bodies may shake, feel jittery, short of breath, or feel constant butterflies in their stomachs.
- This is a result of bodies fight or flight response- a normal response when the body feels it is in danger however their bodies response is overactive and doesn't know how to shut off



# How to Support Children in COVID-19

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- Understand that reactions to the pandemic may vary.
- Ensure the presence of a sensitive and responsive caregiver.
- Social distancing should not mean social isolation.
- Provide age-appropriate information.
- Create a safe physical and emotional environment by practicing the 3 R's: Reassurance, Routines, and Regulation.
- Keep children busy.
- Increase children's self-efficacy.
- Create opportunities for caregivers (which may mean yourself!) to take care of themselves.

# What You Can Do

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- Stay calm, listen and offer reassurance
  - Be a role model- children will follow your reactions
  - Be aware of how you talk about COVID 19- these discussions can increase or decrease children's fear levels
  - Explain social distancing
  - Demonstrate deep breathing- this helps calm the nervous system
  - Focus on the positive- celebrate more family time- make it fun
  - Establish and maintain

# Monitor Television and Social Media

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- Monitor for your children and selves. Too much viewing of COVID-19 may increase fear or anxiety
- Developmentally inappropriate material can cause confusion which can add to fear and anxiety
- Dispel rumors that may be spread on social media avenues- use facts and statistics when talking with children
- Provide alternatives to TV and social media- games, outside etc.

# Talking to Children

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- Be honest
- Let your child's questions guide you
- Correct misinformation
- Explain safety steps in simple manner
- Stay up to date on facts

# Keep Explanations Age Appropriate

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- **Early elementary school children.** Provide brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Use language such as "adults are working hard to keep you safe."
- **Upper elementary and early middle school children.** This age group often is more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads in their area. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy.
- **Upper middle and high school students.** Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Engage them in decision-making about family plans, scheduling, and helping with chores at home.
- Encourage all kids at any age to be open and honest with feelings- Be a good listener!!

# Activities to do with Children

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- Activities specific to COVID-19
  - Time capsule
  - Books about COVID-19
  - Bucket list

# Mental health as a second pandemic

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- There is a huge potential that as a result, the pandemic will harm mental health in different communities
- Mental disorders like depression, anxiety, PTSD, and self-harm, could become a ‘second pandemic.’ We need to be anticipating needs, preparing resources, and developing adaptive care delivery models now
- This should start with front line responders and those essential workers that have been away from their families. Family work will be essential for both sides.

# References

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- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>
- <https://childmind.org/article/supporting-kids-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>
- <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/watch-live-child-psychiatrist-takes-your-questions-on-challenges-facing-kids-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>