



Soothing & Comforting

During tough times and stressful situations, it can feel as if our worlds have been turned upside down. Your children look to you for guidance and comfort—so this is a great chance to show them that, even in times of unease, your family is in this together no matter what. And don't forget self-care: being kind, patient, and understanding to yourself in uncertain times helps create a calmer family environment and builds children's sense of security. We hope these tips remind you that you are strong and that you can help your children and your family through these complicated times.

Take care of yourself and reassure your child.

Try to find ways to reduce your own stress, because children will react and respond to your level of anxiety. It's important to take care of yourself by drinking water, eating well, getting enough sleep, and taking breaks. Exercising together is a great way to boost morale: Take a walk outside, have a daily dance party, or involve the whole family in a game of freeze tag.

Provide Reassurance. You can assure children they are safe and cared for with simple, heartfelt phrases: "I know this is hard, because we have a new routine, but let's be creative—together, we can make up *new* routines filled with fun activities!" "Some things in our lives are different right now, but we'll get through it together." Remind yourself that this situation (and the way you feel right now) will not last forever.

Limit exposure to media. While it's important to stay informed, an endless stream of headlines can increase your stress and anxiety, which children will pick up on. Try to limit the amount of information children hear by finding safe and entertaining activities for them while you get your news.

Model Healthy Ways of Coping. Children look to adults to see how they should feel and react—so, as much as possible, staying calm helps. Let children know that it's okay to have many different feelings and thoughts, and that they can always talk to you about them. Saying things like, "I get scared/worried sometimes too, and I know it can feel icky inside" can help validate their feelings and reassure them that they're not alone.

Belly Breathe. Breathing deeply and slowly is a calming strategy for anyone—anytime, anywhere. Ask children to pretend their bellies are balloons. Encourage them to take long, deep, slow breaths to fill the balloons with air, then breathe out slowly through their mouths to let the air out. Repeat three times—and feel calmer almost instantly.

Stick to Routines. Children always find comfort in the predictable and the familiar. Keep bedtime routines the same if at all possible, maybe choosing one lullaby or story that they can look forward to every night. Remember, it's okay to be flexible and change the order of some activities. What matters most is providing structure to your child's day.

Watch Your Child Play! Observe and listen—children under age seven often voice their thoughts as they play, cluing you in as to what is on their minds and giving you the chance to follow up with them later. It also helps to teach children positive ways to show or handle their "big feelings" by talking about them, drawing pictures, writing stories, dancing and moving, or having some quiet time.

Take shifts if you can. With children home from school and many parents trying to work from home, it's a tricky balance. If possible, take turns spending time with your children, so that you can get the breaks you need to help children navigate these challenging times.

Finally—look for silver linings. One benefit to being at home is having more family time. Children enjoy being with their parents—if we can manage our own anxieties and be present with our children as much as possible, we can form stronger connections than ever.