

Staying Strong During Pandemic

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT & PROTECT CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Understand that reactions to the pandemic may vary: Children's responses to stressful events are unique and varied. Some children may be irritable or clingy, and some may regress, demand extra attention, or have difficulty with self-care, sleeping, and eating. New and challenging behaviors are natural responses, and adults can help by showing empathy and patience and by calmly setting limits when needed.

Ensure the presence of a sensitive and responsive caregiver: The primary factor in recovery from a traumatic event is the presence of a supportive, caring adult in a child's life. Even when a parent is not available, children can benefit greatly from care provided by other adults (e.g., foster parents, relatives, friends) who can offer them consistent, sensitive care that helps protect them from a pandemic's harmful effects.



Dragons & Butterflies Creative Preschool

Social distancing should not mean social isolation: Children—especially young children—need quality time with their caregivers and other important people in their lives. Social connectedness improves children's chances of showing resilience to adversity. Creative approaches to staying connected are important (e.g., writing letters, online video chats).

Create a safe physical and emotional environment by practicing the 3 R's: Reassurance, Routines, and Regulation: First, adults

should *reassure* children about their safety and the safety of loved ones, and tell them that it is adults' job to ensure their safety. Second, adults should maintain *routines* to provide children with a sense of safety and predictability (e.g., regular bedtimes and meals, daily schedules for learning and play). And third, adults should support children's development of *regulation*. When children are stressed, their bodies respond by activating their stress response systems. To help them manage these reactions, it is important to both validate their feelings (e.g., "I know that this might feel scary or overwhelming") and encourage them to engage in activities that help them self-regulate (e.g., exercise, deep breathing, mindfulness or meditation activities, regular routines for sleeping and eating). In addition, it is essential to both children's emotional and physical well-being to ensure that families can meet their basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, clothing).

Keep children busy: When children are bored, their levels of worry and disruptive behaviors may increase. Adults can provide options for safe activities (e.g., outside play, blocks, modeling clay, art, music, games) and involve children in brainstorming other creative ideas. Children need ample time to engage in play and other joyful or learning experiences without worrying or talking about the pandemic.



As we get closer to the summer months, the MHGCCA would like to recognize the efforts of all our local directors and early childhood educators over the past few months. While some programs have begun to re-open, others have chosen to wait a little longer. Those are hard decisions to make financially and emotionally. Please always know that we support you at whatever point you are at and we truly believe that...



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Increase children's self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is the sense of having agency or control—an especially important trait during times of fear and uncertainty. Children often feel more in control when they can play an active role in helping themselves, their families, and their communities. For example, children can help by following safety guidelines (e.g., washing their hands), preparing for home confinement (e.g., helping to cook and freeze food),



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or volunteering in the community (e.g., writing letters or creating art for older adults or sick friends, sharing extra supplies with a neighbor).

Create opportunities for caregivers to take care of themselves:

Children's well-being depends on the well-being of their parents and other caregivers. Caregivers must take care of themselves so they have the internal resources to care for others. To this end, adult caregivers can engage in self-care by staying connected to social supports, getting enough rest, and taking time for restorative activities (e.g., exercise, meditation, reading, outdoor activities, prayer). Seeking help from a mental health provider is also important when adults struggle with very high levels of stress and other mental health challenges.

Seek professional help if children show signs of trauma that do not resolve relatively quickly:

Emotional and behavioral changes in children are to be expected during a pandemic, as everyone adjusts to a new sense of normal. If children show an ongoing pattern of emotional or behavioral concerns (e.g., nightmares, excessive focus on anxieties, increased aggression, regressive behaviors, or self-harm) that do not resolve with supports, professional help may be needed.

Emphasize strengths, hope, and positivity: Children need to feel safe, secure, and positive about their present and future. Adults can help by focusing children's attention on stories about how people come together, find creative solutions to difficult problems, and overcome adversity during the epidemic. Talking about these stories can be healing and reassuring to children and adults alike.

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

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