

FS1957 (April 2020)

The Coronavirus Pandemic and Young Children Ages 4 to 8 Years Old

Common Reactions of Young Children

- Fear of being separated from parents and other loved ones
- Tantrums or irritability, anger, aggression or sadness
- Withdrawal or restlessness due to changes in normal routines
- Repeated questions about the illness, safety, where loved ones are located
- Regressive behaviors may include thumb sucking, clinging to adults, bedwetting
- Sleep or physical problems such as nightmares and stomach problems



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What to Say and Do

- ✓ Ask children to share their thoughts and feelings with you. Let them know this is a topic they can ask questions about. Ask them about their feelings and let them know such feelings are normal. Reassure the child that talking about feelings helps people. Allow repetitive questions and a search for understanding. Acknowledge their feelings and concerns. They need to know they are being listened to and heard.
- ✓ Calm yourself, then give honest answers at the child's level of understanding. Monitor adult conversations around children. Be cautious when talking about your own fears and the pandemic.
- ✓ Give children physical comfort and verbal reassurance of safety. Young children need to hear and feel messages of support and security. Develop a routine that provides time to do school work, family work (chores), sleep and rest, and share table time together with healthful meals and snacks. Children these ages need an hour or more of physical activity each day.



- ✓ Provide materials for children to express feelings through play, puppets, drawing or telling a story. Read children's books about a character who is dealing with an illness. Limit your child's exposure, as well as your own, to prolonged or intense media coverage.
- ✓ Tell children what adults will do to keep the family healthy and what they can do to keep their hands clean and away from their nose, mouth and eyes. Also talk to your children about staying at home and how to sneeze properly and cough into a tissue or the crook of their arm.

Children have different temperaments and experiences, even within the same family, so their reactions to the pandemic may vary greatly. Give each child the help that child needs to find inner calm and build resilience. Those gifts last a lifetime.

For the complete publication, go to:

www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/kids-family/talking-to-children-about-pandemics

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