



Reducing Anxiety in the Midst of COVID-19

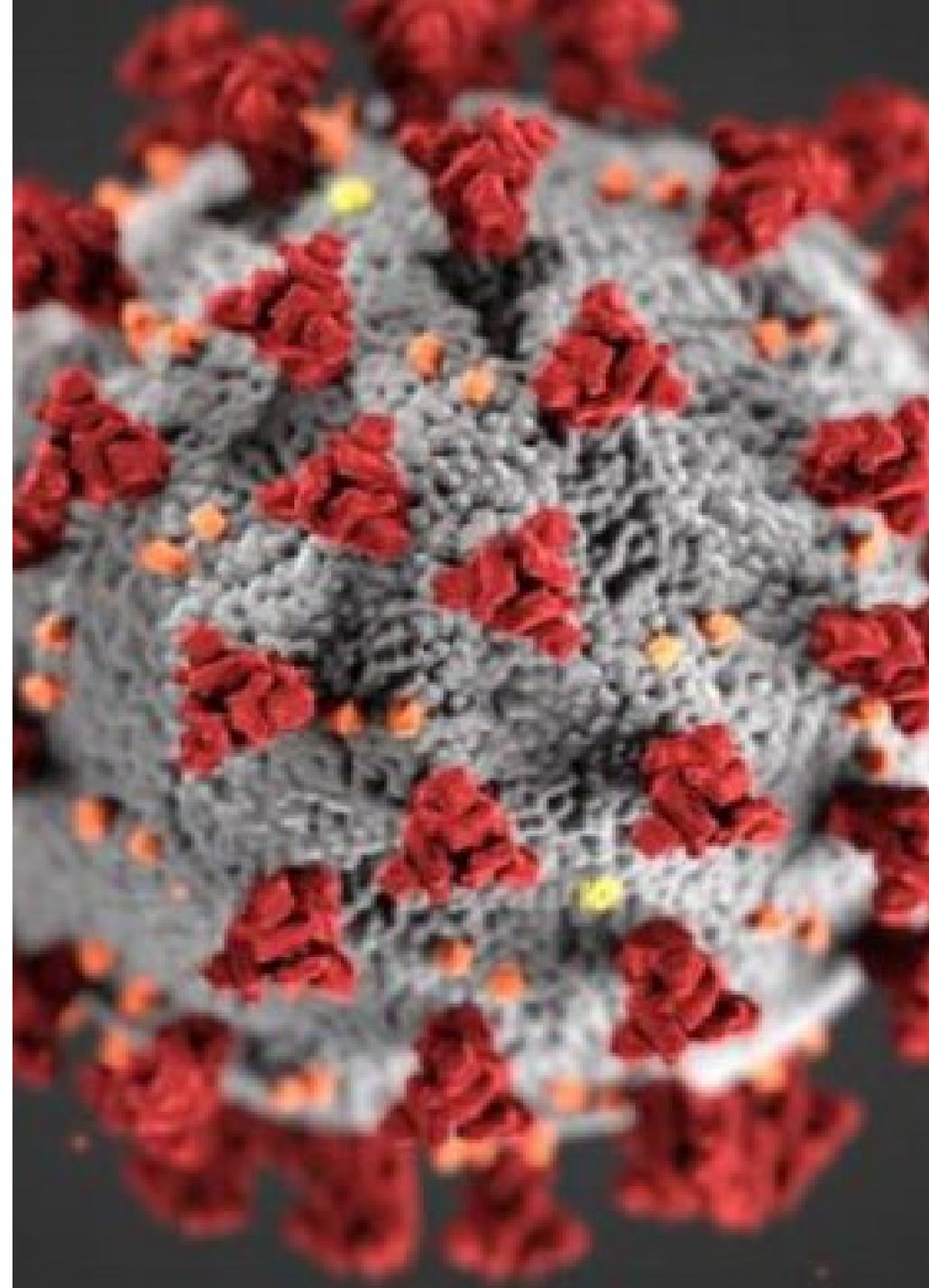
by: Donna Rininger, LMHC, MCAP

Coronavirus

Understanding the Impact on Our Mental Health

- Fear and anxiety about an illness can cause strong emotions in adults and children
- Social distancing is trying to slow the spread of the illness, but it is also curtailing activities that impact the mental health of the whole community
- The constant stream of COVID-19 news on our TVs, social media, and Internet can cause deeper worries and lead to anxiety

Your mindset during this crisis is the one thing within your control in a situation that is beyond your control.



Life Stressors

The following can occur during an infectious disease outbreak

- Worry about your health or the health of loved ones
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in eating habits
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of substances
- Irritability
- Problems concentrating
- Poor performance in daily work or life tasks
- Fears about the uncertainty of things



People Who May Respond with Stronger Emotions During COVID-19 Crisis

Elderly

Children

Medical
and
Healthcare
Workers

People with
Chronic
Health
Conditions

People with
Compromised
Immune
Systems

People with
Substance
Use
Conditions

People with
Mental
Health
Conditions

People
Lacking
Support
System

In the face of events that are scary and largely out of our control, it's important to be proactive about what you CAN control.





WAYS TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND REDUCE ANXIETY

Stay positive. Focus on your safety measures.

Avoid catastrophic thinking. Set boundaries with others; it's easy to absorb fears/anxiety.

Be informed, but limit media consumption and stick to trustworthy sources like CDC.

Eat healthy, well-balanced meals.

Take time to exercise.

Engage in mindfulness activities such as deep breathing or meditation daily.

Self-care and Anxiety Reduction Continued



Get plenty of sleep.



Find time to relax during the day. Try to take in some sunshine when possible.



Connect with others by phone, social media or Zoom/Google Hangouts.



Stick to a regular routine. Develop a schedule with the input of everyone in the family and post where all can see it throughout the day.





WAYS TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND REDUCE ANXIETY

Incorporate new family activities into your routine such as game night.

Keep your worries in check to help your family navigate this uncertain time as easily as possible.

Ask for help and accept help as needed. Everyone who can pitch in, should do so.

Get back in touch with hobbies and activities you enjoy or learn a new skill.

If you are unable to cope with your anxiety on your own, **you're not alone.**

Even the most well-adjusted individuals are struggling right now. **Seek professional help.**

Peace River Center's Crisis Line has been expanded to include emotional support related to COVID-19.

Free help is available 24-hours a day, (863) 519-3744.

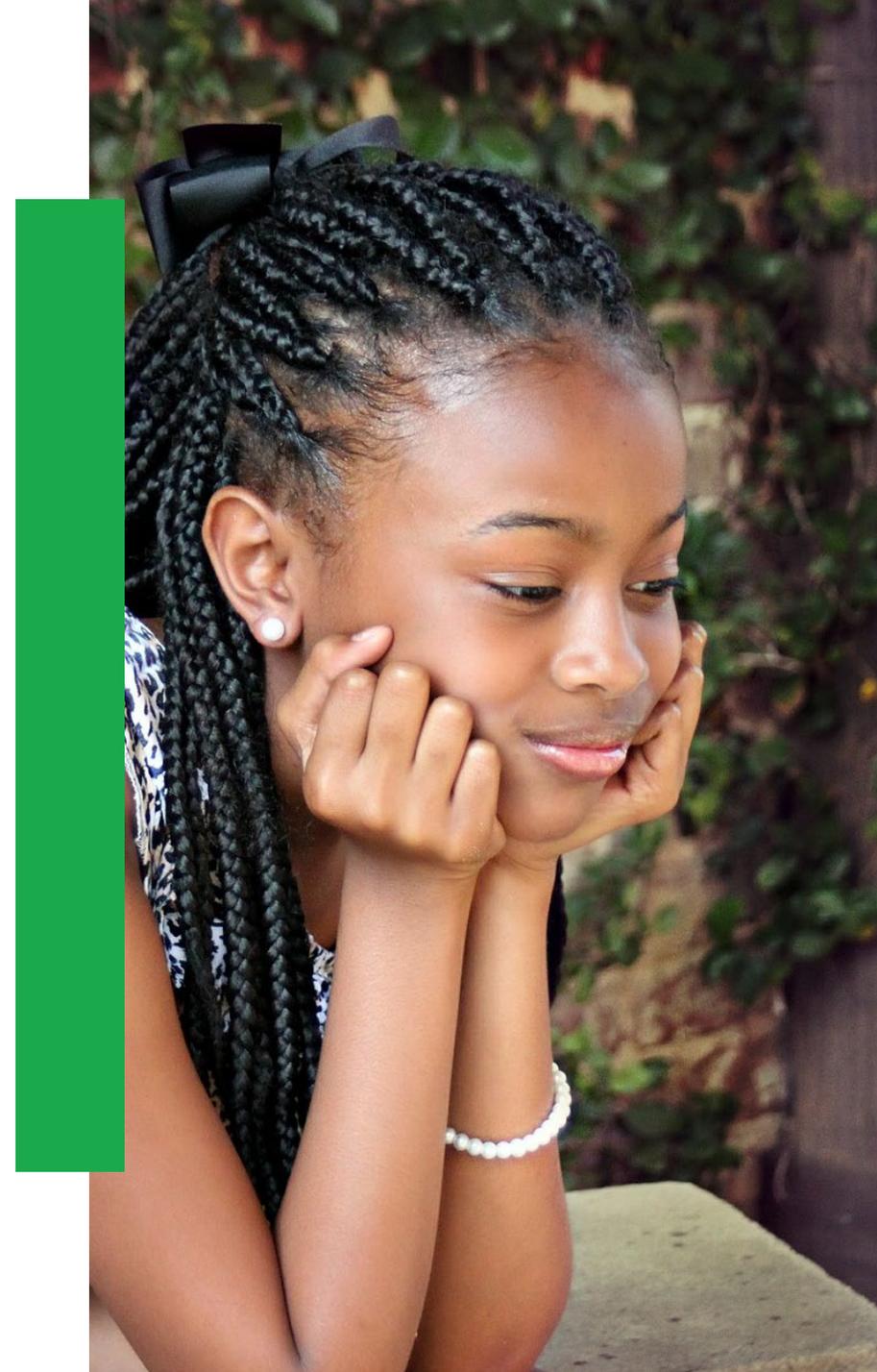
Kids and Stress

Not all children react to stress in the same way.

How they react is based in part on what they observe from the adults around them.

Some children may react right away while others display a delayed reaction.

Signs of distress can vary according to the child's age, previous life experiences, and the child's learned coping mechanisms.



Challenges to Watch for with Children



- Excessive crying
- Irritability
- Returning to outgrown behaviors
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Changes in eating patterns
- Changes in sleeping patterns



- Increased fighting with siblings
- Poor school work performance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoidance of activities usually enjoyed
- Unexplained head or body aches
- Use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs

Developing a Family Schedule

Getting Started

- Get everyone's input for a written schedule
- Post it in a readily visible spot

Consistency is Key

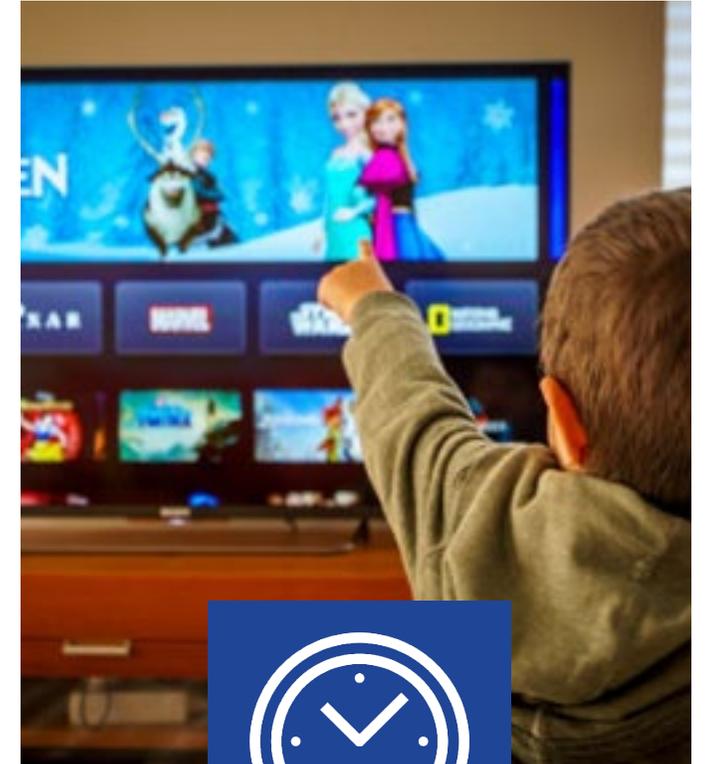
- Consistency and structure help calm
- Kids cope better when they know what is going to happen and when
- Consider using a timer to transition from one scheduled activity to another

Setting Up for Success

- Build in physical activities
- Lets kids choose some activities (helps with buy-in); this is especially helpful in virtual education system
- Include more breaks for younger children

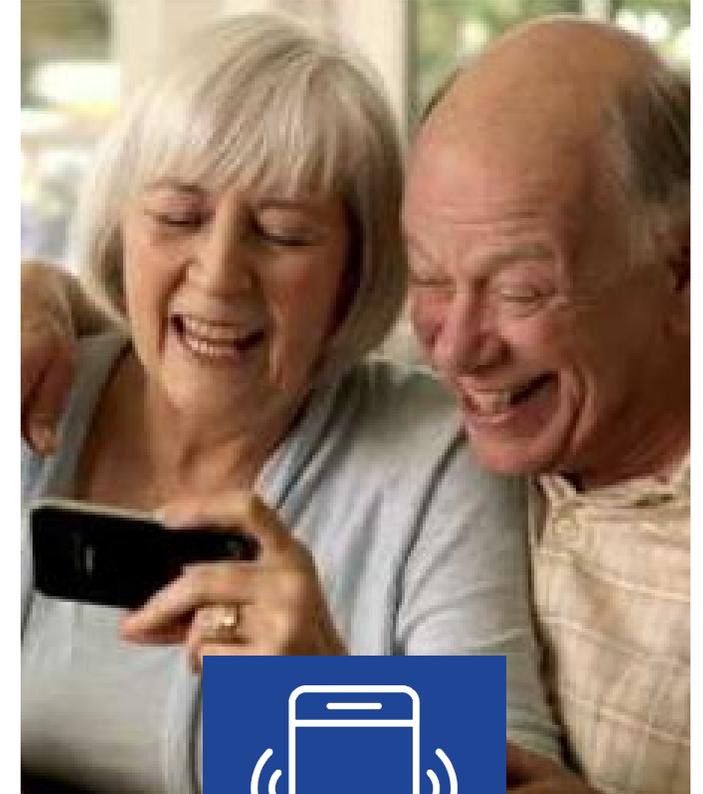
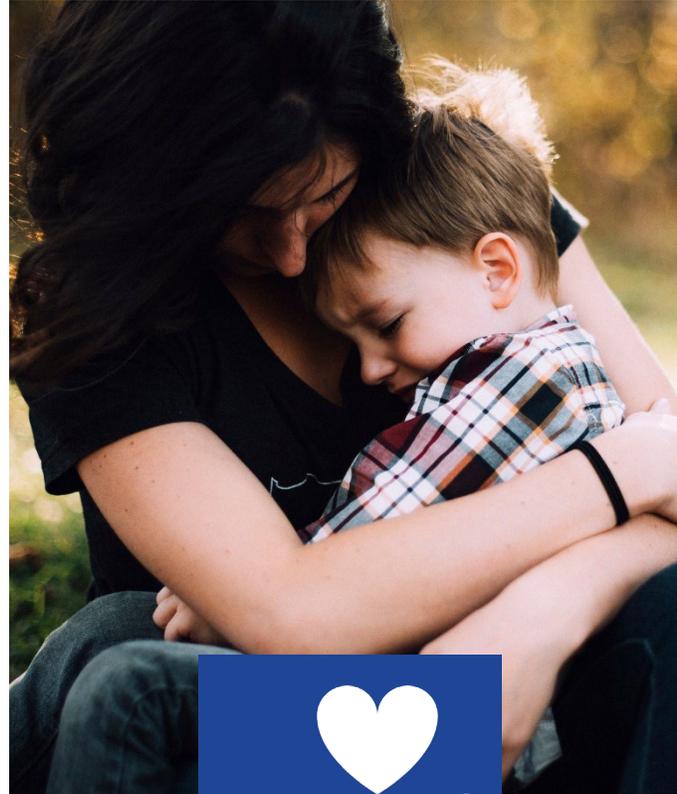
Helping Younger Children Cope

- Answer questions and share facts about the COVID-19 outbreak in a manner appropriate for your child's developmental stage, reassuring them you are prepared to keep them safe.
- Limit media coverage of the pandemic and avoid discussing it with other adults in your children's presence.
- Respond to a child's fear that they or a loved one may become ill from COVID-19 and die.



Helping Younger Children Cope

- If your child is overly fearful, tell the child a story about a time in your childhood when you were frightened and how you overcame that fear or dealt with it.
- Practice self-care (healthy eating and sleeping habits, meditation, journaling, yoga) and ensure your children are doing the same.
- If your children are used to interacting with other family members outside the home, such as grandparents, arrange for a FaceTime call.



HELPING YOUR TEEN COPE



Emphasize social distancing and how their choices could impact more at risk people.

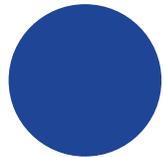
Voice an understanding of their frustrations with not being able to see their friends. Listen to their feelings and validate them.



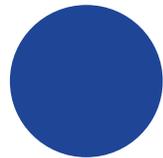
Come up with technology-based solutions for them to see their friends.

Ensure teens are getting enough sleep; they may be on social media later to compensate for not seeing their friends at school.

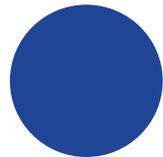
Helping Your Teen Cope



Keep a balance between giving a teen freedom and providing a structured schedule.



Engage in mindfulness activities with your teen to promote relaxation and learn self-calming.



Validate their disappointments. This is an especially trying time for an individual in the teen years.





Infant/Toddlers

- Babies may feel unsettled by changes in routine and sense when people around them are worried or upset. They may become cranky and want to be held and comforted more often.
- You may see increased tantrum behavior in toddlers.



3-6 Year Olds

- This age group may revert back to behaviors they have outgrown such as bedwetting or sucking their thumbs.
- They may experience separation anxiety.
- They may have a hard time sleeping or experience nightmares.
- Be sure to explore and calm any fears noted.



7-12 Year Olds

- Children in this age group may fear becoming ill or a pandemic happening again.
- Correct any misinformation your child may have been given by other children or the media.

Special Considerations

Special Considerations



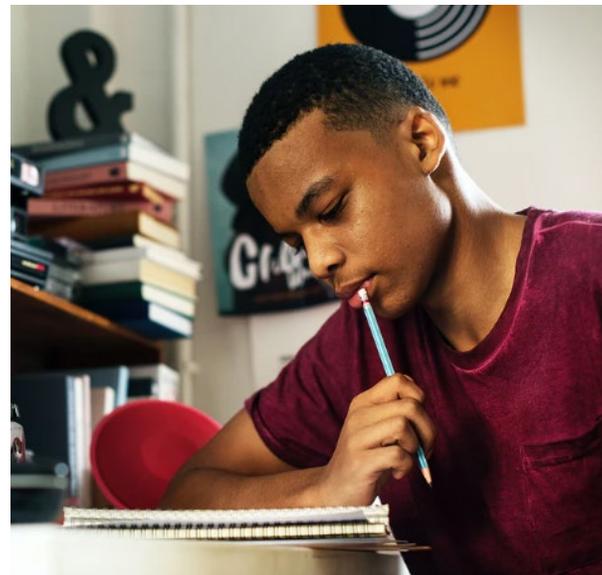
Children with special medical needs that require medical equipment may have **stronger reactions and experience a higher level of distress** due to their dependence on others and their lowered level of control over their daily care.



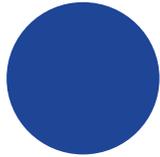
The same is true for children with other physical, emotional, and intellectual challenges. They may **need more reassurance and explanations** about the event.

Special Considerations

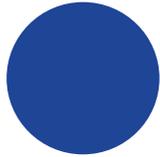
- Teens feel painful loss of important high school experiences such as prom, sports events, productions, recitals, and graduation ceremonies.
- Some worry about missing activities to help with college applications and scholarships.
- Help your teen find ways to celebrate these events, even if it means at a later date when it is safe to re-engage in the community.
- This is a bonding opportunity as you engage together in a common cause.
- Also helps develop your teen's leadership skills.



Make a Family Project



Have kids journal about their experiences during this time (it helps process emotions).



Consider creating a family project such as developing a time capsule of this event.



Brainstorm daily with all family members regarding other positive projects you can do as a family.



Create new traditions and keep a positive atmosphere in your home.



Getting Back to Normal



If your children have continued reactions that affect their schoolwork or relationships, **seek professional help** with someone who specializes in children's emotional needs.

Appointment Line: (863) 248-3311

Talk

Provide children with the opportunity to talk about what they went through, how they feel about things, and what they think about the event.

Encourage Questions

Encourage them to ask any questions or voice their concerns about the future.

Be Aware of Triggers

Children may fear a pandemic may happen again. Behavior related to the stress caused by the event may return if a child sees or hears something that is a reminder of the event.

Free Emotional Support and Help is One Call Away



Peace River Center's Crisis Line has been expanded to include emotional support related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

(863) 519-3744

- 24-hours a day
- Free service

Any Questions?

Your mindset during this crisis is the one thing within your control in a situation that is beyond your control.



Donna Rininger, LMHC, MCAP

Email: drininger@peacrivercenter.org

Office: 863.519.0575 Ext. 7298

Mobile: 863.512.4223