

WASHINGTON STATE RESOURCE GUIDE  
FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS:

# Caring for Your Family During COVID-19



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**



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## Dear Washington State Parents and Caregivers,

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our world dramatically — and rapidly.

This is a difficult and unprecedented time for parents and caregivers across the state. We see you — see you doing the mental and physical gymnastics to navigate a new and unknown time for you and your family. Your valiant efforts may feel like they are unseen or unappreciated, but we know your actions, big and small, to support yourself and your children are invaluable. Days may seem long and arduous or fresh and joyous — either way, we are in this together.

This guide was developed to help you and your family navigate this pandemic and the days to follow.

## Five Protective Factors to Support Strong Families:

The protective factors can show up in many ways in our lives, often very visible and sometimes a little hidden. Protective factors can grow and change over time and can help you and your child's wellbeing. As you page through this guide, you may find some areas that hit home or feel far away. Attending to each protective factor will help support the overall wellbeing of you and your family.

- **Parental Resilience:**  
Problem-solving and finding ways to alleviate stress (deep breathing, taking a break, going for a walk).
- **Knowledge of Parenting and of Child/Youth Development:**  
Finding an online parenting class or workshop.
- **Social Connections:**  
Check out your local library for a virtual story hour or connect with someone who inspires you over text or phone.
- **Concrete Supports:**  
Call 2-1-1 to find organizations in your area that support families.
- **Social and Emotional Development:**  
Establish a daily routine so your child knows what to expect.

The Center for Study of Social Policy has more information on the five protective factors at this link:  
<https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/About-Strengthening-Families.pdf>.

This resource guide is rooted in each of these areas.



# Concrete Supports

## For Immediate Assistance:

- 24/7 Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 1-866-END HARM
- Perinatal Support Washington: 1-888-404-7763
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233
- Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence: [wscadv.org](http://wscadv.org)
- Washington COVID-19 response: 1-800-525-0127 or <https://coronavirus.wa.gov>
- 2-1-1: You can call 2-1-1 from any phone to be connected to a list of statewide resources for everything from food and diapers to rental assistance and bus fare. Or visit <https://wa211.org>
- Disaster Distress Helpline: For mental health support. These are anxious times. Reach out if you need to, 24/7/365 at 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- Crisis Connections (24/7 mental health support): 1-866-427-4747
- Parent Trust Family Help Line 1-800-932-4673
- Help Me Grow Washington 1-800-322-2588 <https://helpmegrowwa.org>

## Coping with the Stress of an Infectious Disease Outbreak Like COVID-19

*From the National Child Traumatic Stress Network*

Even if your family is prepared, an outbreak can be very stressful. To help your family cope with this stress, following these recommendations can help:

### Stay Informed and Connected

Keep informed about the situation from credible sources – the Washington State Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), local health authorities and credible media outlets.

Keep connected – stay in touch by talking on the phone, texting, emailing, social media and meeting platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, WhatsApp, etc.

Stay informed – but don't let the media information overwhelm you. Be aware and limit exposure about the outbreak to children.

Support children by encouraging questions and helping them understand the current situation:

- Talk about their feelings and validate these feelings.
- Help them express their feelings through drawing or other activities.
- Clarify misinformation or misunderstandings about how the virus is spread and that not every respiratory disease is COVID-19.
- Provide comfort and a bit of extra patience.
- Check back in with your children regularly or when the situation changes.

### **Stick to a Schedule**

- Even if your family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.
- Keep your family's schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals and exercise.
- Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising or engaging in religious activities (prayer, participating in services on the Internet).
- Have children participate in distance learning opportunities that may be offered by their schools or other institutions/organizations.
- Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting the disease, anxiety, stress and panic are typical reactions to a stressful situation such as a disease outbreak and you are not alone.

### **Take Care of Yourself and Your Family**

- Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of the situation and focus on what you can accomplish. Shift priorities and focus if you need to.
- Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation.
- Attempt to control self-defeating statements and replace them with positive thoughts.
- Your children look to you for how to manage their worries. Do your best to handle the stress and let go of what you can to minimize everyone's stress.





## Have a Plan

### Do you know what to do?

If you or someone in your family becomes sick with COVID-19, do you have a plan? It's not fun to think about, but it's best to prepare in case of a serious illness or hospitalization.

### Here are some things to think about and plan for:

If you get sick, can someone care for your child? Remembering that COVID-19 is more likely to affect those over 65, is there an aunt/uncle/family friend that could be a caregiver while you focus on getting better? Place emergency contact/care information in a prominent place so that emergency responders can find it. If you have no one to ask, a hospital can usually advise you on community resources for families in crisis.

Other resources include:

- 211: <https://wa211.org>
- Child Care Aware:  
<https://childcareawarewa.org>
- Parent Help Line:  
<https://www.parenthelp123.org>
- Help Me Grow:  
<https://helpmegrowwa.org>
- Your local primary care clinic

It's important to remember that in most cases it's best to isolate at home. In most cases, the same precautions as for the seasonal flu are recommended. As long as no one in your house has a higher risk factor – like undergoing chemo, or asthma, etc., then you can stay home, with some extra doses of hand-washing, keeping your dishes separate, and if possible, using a separate bathroom and bedroom. Try to maintain these boundaries until a medical professional clears you, usually about 14 days later.

While you are isolating for the 14 days, it's best to also have a plan for food and groceries. Many restaurants and delivery apps offer delivery right now, often times for free and many will do no contact. Depending on where you live, grocery delivery may be available. Food banks are also working with those in need for pick up. You can find your local foodbank online at <https://www.foodbanks.net/state/wa.html>. If you are unable to travel, try contacting a friend or family who might be able to pick something up and leave it on your doorstep. You can find more information on food assistance online at <https://www.parenthelp123.org/resources/food-assistance-resources>.

# Knowledge of Parenting and of Child/Youth Development

## What to Expect and How to Respond

*From the National Child Traumatic Stress Network*

Children can have a variety of reactions to a stressful situation. These reactions can change with age, with the situation or just with the day:

AGE GROUP	REACTIONS	HOW TO HELP
PRESCHOOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fear of being alone, bad dreams</li><li>Speech difficulties</li><li>Loss of bladder/bowel control,</li><li>Constipation, bed-wetting</li><li>Change in appetite</li><li>Increased temper tantrums, whining or clinging behaviors</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Patience and tolerance</li><li>Provide reassurance (verbal and physical)</li><li>Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling</li><li>Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements</li><li>Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime</li><li>Maintain regular family routines</li><li>Avoid media exposure</li></ul>
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (ages 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior</li><li>Clinging, nightmares</li><li>Sleep/appetite disturbance</li><li>Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)</li><li>Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest</li><li>Competition for parents' attention</li><li>Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Patience, tolerance and reassurance</li><li>Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet</li><li>Regular exercise and stretching</li><li>Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)</li><li>Participate in structured household chores</li><li>Set gentle but firm limits</li><li>Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions include what is being done in the family and community</li><li>Encourage expression through play and conversation</li><li>Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and main-training family routines</li><li>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</li><li>Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation</li></ul>
TEENS (ages 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)</li><li>Sleep/appetite disturbance</li><li>Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy</li><li>Ignoring health promotion behaviors</li><li>Isolating from peers and loved ones</li><li>Concerns about stigma and injustices</li><li>Avoiding/cutting school</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Patience, tolerance and reassurance</li><li>Encourage continuation of routines</li><li>Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)</li><li>Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games</li><li>Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors</li><li>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</li><li>Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during the outbreak</li></ul>

## **Seven Strategies to Support Individuals with Special Needs Through Uncertain Times**

*From UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute*

Everyone is feeling varying degrees of stress right now. There are a lot of unknowns from school closures, changes in routines, loss of connections and general fear around COVID-19. Children with autism may have a particularly difficult time adjusting and processing. UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute has created seven strategies for those with autism to better understand COVID-19 and the changes we are experiencing.



### **SUPPORT UNDERSTANDING**

Describe the virus and current situation (e.g. closures, social distancing) in concrete language and terms and avoid flowery or abstract phrasing. Use a social narrative, a story that clarifies a situation and possible responses through modified text, photos or the use of technology. Provide visual supports to offer guidance on coronavirus specific actions and behaviors.



### **OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPRESSION**

Consider providing multiple opportunities for family members to express their feelings as they are able-through family and individual discussions, writing activities, movie-making or play.

Feelings and needs may be communicated through alternate forms of expression such as the use of augmentative and alternative communication (e.g. iPad, pictures), listening or playing music, dance, yoga and various visual art forms.

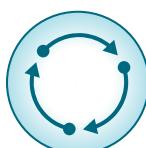


### **PRIORITIZE COPING AND CALMING SKILLS**

Ideally, individuals with autism have some coping and calming strategies in their repertoire of skills to access with support during their most anxious times.

These may include rocking in a rocking chair, listening to music on headphones, deep breathing, watching a preferred video clip, brief periods of vigorous exercise or accessing a favorite activity or material.

If coping or calming strategies are not yet part of the routine, caregivers can prioritize the teaching of these skills during this time of uncertainty.



### **MAINTAIN ROUTINES**

**Sleep/wake routines:** Maintaining physical health is key for all family members and ensuring proper sleep is an important contributor. Sleep disturbances are more common in individuals with autism, thus extra attention may be required to support good sleep hygiene and maintain bedtime and waking routines.

**Household chores/daily living skills:** Taking part in structured household chores and routines is a recommended strategy to support children and young adults coping with stress related to COVID-19.

Expanding the use of a visual schedule, and using one more regularly throughout the day, may help facilitate participation in activities at home and reduce anxiety.



### BUILD NEW ROUTINES

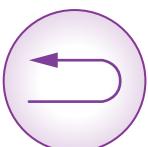
Transition off screens. Establishing a clear, consistent and concrete routine for this transition can better prepare the individual for the coming transition and offer support throughout.

Offer choices. In a time of crisis, when most people feel like so much is out of their control, providing choices can increase a sense of autonomy and motivation. Creating regular opportunities across the day where family members have a voice about what happens and when it happens can serve as an effective anxiety-reducing strategy and a communication tool.



### FOSTER CONNECTIONS FROM A DISTANCE

Caregivers may need to check in to ensure social contact is continuing via text or direct messaging, and/or build in opportunities for daily social contact with family, friends, neighbors, teachers or others via Face Time, What's App, Google Hangout, Marco Polo or other apps. Scheduling time to connect with others via online platforms to attend religious services, play chess, participate in socially engaged gaming, complete online schoolwork or virtually volunteer are ways to safely promote social interaction and stave off isolation.



### BE AWARE OF CHANGING BEHAVIORS

Individuals with autism may not be able to verbally express their fear, frustration and anxiety about the many changes and/or their health, so these expressions may be demonstrated through other means. Caregivers should be aware of the behavior of individuals with autism during these uncertain times and be alert for signs of anxiety and depression. These may include a change in sleeping or eating patterns, increases in repetitive behaviors, excessive worry or rumination, increased agitation or irritability or decreases in self-care.



## Parental Resilience

### Mental Health Resources

*From Peak Resilience*

### Common Reactions During this Time

Humans generally love certainty and control. When things feel out of our control it can increase feelings of fear. This reaction is normal because it is our body's natural, biological response. What matters is how we respond to our reactions.

### Here are Some Common Reactions You or People You Know May be Experiencing:

- Worry, anxiety, fear of the unknown in general
- Financial concerns and fears
- Fears around your health or the health of your loved ones
- Feeling of being “on edge” - irritable, cranky, short with people
- Feelings of being low - hopeless, sad, apathetic (just don’t care)
- Feelings of being detached or things feel surreal
- Wrestling with conflicting values - “do I visit my grandma?”
- Existential stress - thoughts and feelings related to “what is the point of my life”

Key ways to maintain your mental health and promote the mental health of those around you:

- Recognize that fear and uncertainty are normal and these feelings make sense - sometimes people can be anxious about being anxious- you can imagine this doesn't decrease anxiety
- Focus on taking small, concrete steps every day to prepare and educate yourself. For example: looking through your cabinets to take inventory of your home supplies and food will allow you to go out to get anything you're missing the next day. Calling an elderly relative will help you focus on helping others who might be struggling more than yourself
- Recognize what is in your control (hand-washing) and what is out of your control (quarantine measures) and try to focus on what you have control over
- Set boundaries with friends or family by telling them what you can currently take on
- Look out for each other and keep connected! Talk with your neighbors, friends and family to share your needs and what you have the capacity for when supporting others



## Healthy Ways for Parents to Cope

*From the National Child Traumatic Stress Network*

### Normal Reactions to a Crisis

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations such as an infectious disease outbreak that requires social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. It's important to recognize these reactions and realize they are typical. You may feel:

#### Anxiety, Fear

- Over your health status or the health of others.
- Due to time taken off from work, loss of income, job security.
- Because of the obstacles to securing essential items.
- Concern over the responsibility of effectively caring for your children and others in your care.

#### Anger, Frustration

- Because of the uncertainty of how long you will be in this situation.
- Over the challenges of being stuck at home, with no time to yourself, potentially while trying to work remotely.
- Due to boredom or inability to participate in work or regular activities.
- If you think you were exposed to the disease because of others' negligence.
- Over insufficient healthcare resources to handle the crisis.

#### Helpless

- Due to a lack of control over the situation.

#### Loneliness

- Due to feeling cut off from the world, your community, and loved ones.

#### Depressed

- Symptoms of depression include feelings of hopelessness, changes in appetite, sleeping too little or too much.

#### Temptation

- A desire to use alcohol or drugs to cope.
- The urge to take your anger, frustration, anxiety, or sadness out on others.

## Check Out These Ways to Manage Your Response to the Outbreak:

### **Set Yourself up for Success**

Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of your situation. Focus on what you CAN accomplish, not what you are unable to do. Celebrate the small victories, especially when it comes to your children.

### **Show Yourself Compassion**

Try building more compassion, not only toward others but also toward yourself. Try to recognize self-defeating statements and replace them with more encouraging thoughts. Self-compassion is known to enhance life-satisfaction, overall psychological and emotional well-being and mood.

### **Exercise**

Study shows that people who exercised adequately may be less likely to feel as stressed out, depressed, and lonely as compared to others. Even light exercise like a short walk can make a difference.

### **Interact with Family and Friends**

Make it a point to have some meaningful conversations with loved ones/friends as often as possible. If you do not have family members around and are having difficulty initiating or maintaining friendships, seek professional help from a therapist. Therapy can help you develop a better relationship with yourself which itself can reduce loneliness and in turn, can enhance other relationships. Even one good relationship can make a marked difference.

### **Make Time for Yourself**

Time alone is important! Don't feel guilty for taking a walk by yourself, enjoying a warm bubble bath, or whatever makes you feel at ease. Source: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



# Social and Emotional Development

## Advice on Talking with Young Children About COVID-19

### *From Zero to Three*

Even if you've kept your toddler away from news about COVID-19 in the media or overhearing adult conversations, they are bound to have questions. Here are some age-appropriate responses to the common questions a toddler might have. Most importantly, remember to keep your answers simple and age-appropriate.

- Why can't I play with that little boy over there? "We have to take a break from playing with others so we can all stay healthy."
- Why are we wiping down everything with wipes? "We wipe things down to keep them clean." You don't need to explain more than this — young children don't understand germs or infection transmission yet.
- Why is that person wearing a mask? "Right now, in order to help everyone stay healthy, we are all encouraged to wear masks. It helps keep any germs from spreading."
- Is the mask a costume? "No, sometimes people wear masks when they are sick. The mask just means they are helping to protect you and everyone else."
- Why can't I give Grandpa (or other loved one) hugs or kisses? Reassure your child that their loved one still loves and cares about them very much. Then you can explain: "When a grown-up has a cold, they can keep others from getting sick by not hugging or kissing for a while. When they feel better and are healthy again, the first thing they'll do is give you a big kiss!"
- Why can't I go to child care/school? "Your child care is closed right now. Your teacher and your friends are home too, just like you. When child care is open again, you can go back and see your friends. I'll tell you when." Avoid going into details about illness so toddlers don't develop fears about attending child care.
- Will I get sick? "Everybody gets sick sometimes. If you get sick, Mama/Dada will take care of you until you are all better. The doctors will help you, too."
- Why can't we leave the house? Why can't my friend come over to play? "Right now, there is a rule that families need to stay home for a little while and be together. That helps us and our friends stay healthy. I know it can be sad when we can't see and play with friends. But there are lots of fun things we can do together at home! Would you like to play chase or do a puzzle?"

Even if your child is too young to ask these questions, you might notice that they still appear curious about all the changes happening around them. You can validate that something different is happening without going into detail. Explain that a change in routine is happening and what your child can expect instead: "You're going to be staying home with Daddy for a little while, instead of going to child care. This morning we'll go on a walk and then we'll have a snack."

# Social Connections

*From the National Child Traumatic Stress Network*

Social distancing is really only physical distancing; it does not mean that we have to lose touch with loved ones, colleagues and community. Here are some tips for enhancing existing connections and creating new ones.

■ **Reach out to existing friends, family (supports)**

STAY CONNECTED to the people you love (and be innovative about it!).

■ **Know who lives in your neighborhood and check in on those who may need your help through notes, phone calls or texts.**

Offer a kind word, share your toilet paper stash or have your kids draw pictures or make art projects for neighbors.

■ **Create groups on social media or through FaceTime, Zoom, Skype or WhatsApp for your neighborhood, your schools and your kids' friends.**

■ **If you belong to faith-based or social support organizations such as a church or regularly attend 12-step programs, find those programs online.**

Many are offering streaming services or online resources for when people are unable to actually get out.

■ **Send a card or a note to brighten someone's day.**

■ **Get involved in a group or organization that provides advocacy for issues facing children and families.**

Bolstering our safety nets and necessary services, like affordable and adequate child care; health care for vulnerable populations; and protections for front-line and essential workers will make our whole state stronger in the event of a future crisis – and make children safer on a daily basis.

■ **Social and emotional competencies of children**

Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotion and establish and maintain relationships.

■ **There are new stressors and uncertainties right now.**

Help your child(ren) navigate this new world by working with them to understand and regulate their emotions. Listen to their concerns, provide them with assurance and be age-appropriately honest with them about how you're feeling.

■ **This is an opportunity to help them strengthen problem-solving skills.**

Seek their input on how to organize their days, managing school work and chores – and let them weigh in on what is and isn't working well.



#### ■ Encourage and support healthy peer relationships.

Kids (especially teens) miss their friends. Accommodate creative ways to make connections, such as watching a movie together on Netflix Party.

#### ■ See the world through your children's eyes.

Do you remember what it was like to be a kid? Do you remember how boring it was to watch the news? Do you remember how cool it was when your parents did spontaneous things with you?

- Go “camping” in the living room
- Make a pillow fort
- Create a nature scavenger hunt

#### ■ Learning can be fun.

With uncertainty about the return to school, many parents are fretting about the potential loss of academics for their children. Fortunately, daily activities carry immense opportunity for learning:

- Cooking teaches science and math
- Yard work teaches about nature and can inspire creative art projects
- Reading together enriches vocabulary and listening skills

#### ■ Connect with family.

Right now is a great time to connect with family members near and far.

- Call/Skype/FaceTime/Zoom/WhatsApp with family members
- Look at photo albums and discuss family heritage
- Create a family tree
- Write letters to/create cards for relatives (Perhaps an overdue thank you note for that really nifty gift you received?)

#### ■ Connect with friends and neighbors.

Our social circles often serve as our greatest system of support, and there's plenty to do in lieu of play dates, shared meals and group gatherings.

- Go outside and greet and talk to neighbors and passersby from a safe distance
- Host a virtual meal
- Attend a virtual concert (“cloud clubbing”), church service, or exercise or yoga class
- Play an online game together

## Resources:

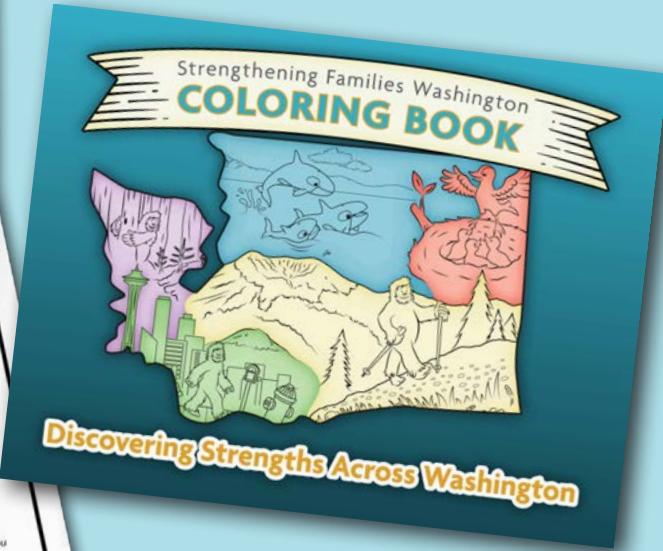
- Sesame Street:  
<https://www.sesamestreet.org/caring>
- Talking is Teaching  
<https://talkingisteaching.org/assets/public-files/HHS-SED-Tips-for-Families.pdf>
- Child Mind Institute  
<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents>
- Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children  
<https://www.dec-sped.org/ei-ecse-resources-covid-19>
- First Aid for Feelings  
<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents>



# Need an Activity to do with Kids?



Download our coloring book and follow sasquatch as he learns about the Protective Factors. There are activities for kids and adults! Available in English and Spanish. See our website for more information: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-development-supports/sfwa](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-development-supports/sfwa).



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