

SUPPORTING CHILDREN DURING COVID-19

How to Ask What Kids Are Feeling

Ways to get insight into how your kids are handling stressful times

by Donna Freydkin

No school. No playdates. No camps. No pool outings. The world as kids know it has been thoroughly upended and they are justifiably anxious, whether they show it or not. It's up to the adults in the room to get them to open up about those feelings so that they can be addressed. Doing so takes finesse, curiosity, and a very light touch.

"Our job as parents isn't to provide certainty in a time of uncertainty. Our job is to help kids tolerate the uncertainty," explains Jerry Bubrick, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute.

Kids aren't stupid. Nor are they obtuse. They hear you discussing the increasingly dire COVID-19 news, they see headlines on your social media feed, and they understand that to a large extent, the stuff they once enjoyed doing is no longer in play. Playing epidemiologist isn't going to work. Kids don't need specific answers, they need broader certitude that they are loved and will be taken care of — certitude that makes the ambiguity of the moment manageable.

How to validate their feelings

"We want to teach them how to tolerate not knowing. You should let them explain how they're feeling and why, and you can help them validate those feeling by saying things like, 'I have similar worries. Let's brainstorm ideas on how we can make things better.' Instead of just giving answers, you want to have a conversation and compare notes," says Dr. Bubrick.

Getting kids, regardless of age, involved in problem-solving makes them feel empowered and like they're part of the solution. But as Dr. Bubrick points out, if you ask vague questions, you'll get vague answers, including the dreaded "I'm fine" (the quintessential conversational dead end). Dr. Bubrick's advice is to lead with curiosity and ask open-ended yet specific questions:

- What did you learn about today?
- What is something interesting or funny you heard about today?
- What was the most fun thing you did today?
- What are you most looking forward to tomorrow?
- What was the toughest part of your day today?

If you believe a child is in danger or experiencing abuse or neglect, please call the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline at 1-855-503-SAFE (7233) which operates 24/7.





Together, we celebrate.

“Being a CASA means always being there for the child, so when the call came amid the COVID-19 pandemic that a child I had been appointed to before was once again in foster care, I knew I could not say “no” to being on the case again. Before COVID-19 restrictions, my CASA kiddo moved into a fourth foster home, where she knew no one. She was not able to see any of her family during the initial months of COVID.

Being an advocate during the pandemic called for creative thinking. Social isolation meant no face-to-face visits were allowed. Suddenly, during this time of virtual advocacy, texting, phone calls and Skype calls became the norm. With school closures, foster parents needed help to develop a daily schedule and homework routines. Later, a “drive by” visit provided a chance to wave and smile. When our first “distancing” visit was allowed it was a joyous outdoor reunion complete with chickens at her foster home! Being a CASA during the pandemic has been challenging, but no less rewarding than it always is. “

~ CASA Cathy



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