

COVID-19 Mental Health First Aid

Tips and Strategies to help Families Coping with Pandemic Stress and Anxiety

During these challenging times, many of our children and students are making an adjustment to distance learning from home. For some, this adjustment can be a difficult change and presents emotional challenges. West Bergen Mental Healthcare is committed to providing families and caregivers with essential support strategies to help navigate the “new normal”. Below are guiding principles for all families, including those with children who have been diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum or with ADHD:

- Most importantly, continue to follow the CDC guidelines for protecting yourself and your family: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Talk with your child about COVID-19 and any changes to the family routine. Encourage questions, clarify any misinformation, ask them to talk about their feelings and be sure and validate their feelings
- Create a structured schedule for each day. Keep meals, snacks, academic work, playtime and bedtime consistent. Post this schedule in an area for the family.
- Have family meetings each morning to discuss the schedule for the day.
- Reward positive behaviors through a predetermined behavior plan (e.g sticker chart, allowance, earned tablet or game time). Keep this consistent for all positive and negative behaviors.
- Lack of social opportunities can present concerns. This is the time to be creative with having your child practice their coping skills. Encourage them to express their feelings through art, and social connection through technology, phones, computer games and video conferencing apps to connect with others.
- Plan a game night, in-person if that is safe and possible, or through video conferencing. Examples can be games like “I Spy”, 20 Questions, Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit or have your family create an original game.
- Plan time to go outside for fresh air and family activities.
- Connect with spirituality and religion, if appropriate, through technology. Many religious institutions are becoming creative with video conferencing worship services and other youth activities.
- Work on promoting independence and teaching functional living skills by assigning daily living tasks such as cleaning, laundry, basic cooking skills etc.
- Be kind to yourself as a parent or family member. Take breaks throughout the day. Create a self care routine.

Additional Resources

West Bergen's team of clinicians has compiled a listing of additional resources that can be helpful to parents and caregivers.

<https://sumairaz.com/mindset-shift-during-a-pandemic/>

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b0edb3f266c07458c681630/t/5e74b91500619b55d3e0fbfe/1584707863356/Brain+Breaks+at+Home.pdf>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/coronavirus-anxiety.htm>

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/helping-children-cope-with-changes-resulting-from-covid-19>

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

<https://childmind.org/article/supporting-teenagers-and-young-adults-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-children-about-the-coronavirus-2020030719111>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-how-talk-child.html>