

Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks—Taking Care of Children

Sacramento County Behavioral Health Services supports the wellbeing of our County family, friends, and colleagues. When you hear, read, or watch news about an outbreak of an infectious disease, you may feel anxious and show signs of stress—even when the outbreak affects people far from where you live and you are at low or no risk of getting sick. These signs of stress are normal and may be more likely in people with loved ones in parts of the world affected by the outbreak. During an infectious disease outbreak, it is important to care for your own physical and mental health and reach out in kindness to those affected by the situation.

Tips for managing your own wellbeing

1. Spend time in places that feel safe and comfortable as much as possible.
2. Tell yourself that how you are feeling is a normal reaction and will pass.
3. Reach out to your usual supports – family, friends, and workmates. Sharing how we feel and offering support to others is important.
4. Keep to usual routines – mealtimes, bedtime, exercise and so on.
5. Keep active – going to for a walk, doing usual leisure activities, and seeing friends can improve general wellbeing and help distract from distressing feelings.

Resources:

Mental Health Access Team: To request mental health services, call Mon. - Fri., 8 am - 5 pm (24/7 for Crisis Calls), at (916) 875-1055, (888) 881-4881, or 711.

Call Centers: Feeling anxious, stressed, or need support? Call The Source, 24/7, at (916) 787-7668; or Hope Cooperative, Mon. - Fri., 8 am - 5 pm, at (855) 502-3224.

The most current updates and materials on the coronavirus (COVID-19) are posted at [https://dhs.sacounty.net/PUB/Pages/Communicable-Disease-Control/2019-Novel-Coronavirus-\(2019-nCoV\).aspx](https://dhs.sacounty.net/PUB/Pages/Communicable-Disease-Control/2019-Novel-Coronavirus-(2019-nCoV).aspx).

Questions specific to the coronavirus (COVID-19) may be directed to COVID19@sacounty.net.

TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN

There may be children or young people in your life who experience distress. As a trusted adult, you can help reassure and educate them about COVID-19 – it can be good to talk to them now, so they can understand the illness and be reassured. If you feel the child or young person is getting distressed through this conversation, reassure them and redirect the conversation to another topic or activity.

Children react to stress differently than adults – they may withdraw or behave in a more ‘babyish’ way, seem anxious or clingy, be preoccupied with illness in their play or drawing, have problems sleeping or night-mares, or may get physical symptoms such as stomach-aches or headaches. Here are some tips for supporting children and young people:



1. Reassure them they are safe.
2. Encourage them to talk about how they feel.
3. Tell them they can ask questions and answer these in plain language appropriate to their age and ability to understand.
4. Tell them that feeling upset or afraid is normal, that it’s good to talk about it and that finding creative and healthy ways to express their feelings (drawing, journaling, etc.) may help them feel better.
5. Be understanding – they may have problems sleeping, throw tantrums, or wet the bed – be patient and seek support and care for your child and yourself through this time.
6. Make efforts to create opportunities for quality time and attention with your children.
7. Remember that children look to their parents to feel safe and to know how to respond – reassure them, share how you cope and that you know you will get through this together.
8. Try to keep to normal routines – mealtimes, bedtimes etc. – allow them to get out and play, to go to the park, etc.

However, if a child’s distress is escalating or they are displaying any worrying behaviors (such as extreme withdrawal, terror that you cannot comfort them from, etc.), seek help early. Consider seeking professional help if you or a loved one is having difficulty coping.