



Covid-19 Psychological Care – Kids Edition

With school closures, both kids and parents' lives have been disrupted. The subliminal message that children hear is something very significant is taking place, which if not careful, can translate into "bad things" will happen. Kids are most susceptible to change in routines and yet they are most adaptable, depending on how the change is communicated and carried out. In addition, with more unstructured time in their hands, they at times can fall into unhealthy patterns. By now, we know what to do to help minimize and protect our kids from physical exposure. Here are some helpful hints to protect them psychologically as well:

1. Give them accurate information in a calm way. Be honest about the temporary changes, what it means, and what you need from them. Enlist them to partner in making this a good time for your family. Kids will take their cue from us and if we are calm, they will likely be calm as well.
2. Turn off the News! A constant diet of the news impacts their wellness in negative ways. Teach them to get accurate information from trusted sources and then to turn to other activities.
3. Create a new normal and a new routine. Kids thrive in a routine they can expect and count on.
4. Given that most kids will be doing school online for a time, create a "school schedule" and "free time" schedule with expected wake up times, bedtimes, chores, and free time. Think of inviting your college kids that have been sent home to contribute a small portion of their time tutoring younger siblings.
5. For kid's free time, help them focus on activities that are still possible – face timing family and friends, making cards for kids and others who are sick or in the hospital, baking bread or a cake, or taking up a new hobby.
6. Create an exercise routine – riding bikes, walking, running, swimming (if you have a pool), and taking on challenges as a family (ie. 1-minute planks, 30-day sit-up challenge that increases slowly every day, etc.). Kids love a challenge to focus on!
7. Enlist them in giving back to their community – down 'purple gloves' (if you can find them - kids love novelties) and clean up a lake, pond, or stretch of beach. This gives them a sense of control and purpose/meaning, which are wonderful antidotes to feeling anxious and out of control.

8. If you are working from home, help them understand that being together on weekdays now is not the same as when you are home together on weekends or vacation. Designate a work area for you and establish rules about interruptions. It is helpful to schedule check in times throughout the day (i.e. mealtimes, break times, etc.). If you have children younger than five, plan ahead of time for activities and availability of a variety of toys that can be introduced staggeringly. Enlist the help of older siblings.

9. Last, but not least, when there is free time, do something 'wild!' Kids are surprised and comforted by watching parents do something out of the ordinary; for some reason they think they are the only ones that are expected to be 'wild.' So surprise them, like putting on a YouTube dance video and dancing in the living room; or creating a karaoke night with prizes for different entries (you can even have grandparents online be the judges), or creating costumes for a mystery dinner.

Yes, we will get through this. And if we are creative, despite the suffering and pain, we might even create some great memories that we will remember and laugh about in the future!

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