

## Helping children during times of stress



Although dealing with COVID-19 has increased stress and anxiety for all of us, young children are even more vulnerable to the emotional impact of traumatic events that disrupt their daily lives. During times of stress, children may express strong feelings of fear, disappointment, worry, or sadness by acting out through temper tantrums or similar behaviors. This resource offers suggestions for how to support and protect children's emotional well-being during this difficult time.

### Try these strategies to support children during COVID-19.

#### Use Feeling Words with Children

Anthony is told that it's time to clean up before dinner. He yells, **"I DON'T WANT TO!"** and kicks his toys.

#### TRY THIS!

*"Anthony, you are so **disappointed** because you were having fun playing and now it's time to clean up."*

#### AND/OR

*"Anthony, I can tell that you are really **upset** right now. It's hard to stop sometimes, isn't it? We can play again tomorrow."*

**WHY?** Understand that "big behaviors" (hitting, kicking, yelling, tantrums, etc.) may be signs your child feels scared, worried, disappointed, or out of control. Children may feel more in control if they feel understood.

#### Help Children Know What to Expect

Amari wakes up feeling grumpy. She fights with her sister all morning. At lunch she says, **"Everything is too different. I want to go back to normal."**

#### TRY THIS!

*"Amari, after we clean up lunch it's reading time. Which books will you choose to read today?"*

#### AND/OR

*(In the morning) "Amari, this morning we have 3 things to do. First, we need to clean the house. Next we have to make lunch, and then we can read together."*

**WHY?** Children feel safe when they know what to expect. Take a few minutes to talk with your child about any plans for the day. When possible, ask your child to make their own plans ("What's the first thing you'll look for on our walk?").

## Ask Children What, Why, How Questions

Ayden has been cooped up inside all day. Now he runs around the apartment, pretending to be a dog. He knocks over his little brother who starts to cry.

### TRY THIS!

“Ayden, **what** are some other things dogs do inside?”

AND/OR

“Ayden, **why** is it important to walk instead of run when we’re inside?”

AND/OR

“Ayden, **how** can you help your brother feel better?”

**WHY?** Asking what, why, how questions helps children understand how their actions affect others and how they can make better choices in the future.

## Encourage Responsibility

Anita’s teachers say she always follows directions at school. Now at home, Anita says “NO!” if her mom tells her to clean up or to stop teasing her brother.

### TRY THIS!

“Anita, *it’s time to clean up. I wonder how many toys you could pick up in one minute?*”

AND/OR

“*It’s time to get ready for bed. Will you read a book by yourself or with your brother tonight?*”

AND/OR

“*I bet you could help me make a game for your brother today. I could really use your help!*”

**WHY?** Children want to help when they feel important and in control. Try giving children jobs or challenges. When possible, give children small choices.



For more information and resources, visit [highscope.org/active-learning-at-home](https://highscope.org/active-learning-at-home).