



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

The County of Santa Clara Behavioral Health Services Department 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, 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 – it is nothing to be afraid of.
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 work, doing usual leisure activities and seeing friends can improve general wellbeing and help distract from distressing feelings.

Resources:

**24/7 Behavioral Health Services Department
 Call Center: (800) 704-0900**

Crisis Text Line: Text RENEW to 741741

Suicide and Crisis Hotline 24/7: (855) 278-4204

Check and subscribe to Public Health’s website and social media pages:

Website: <http://sccphd.org/coronavirus>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sccpublichealth/>

Instagram: @scc_publichealth

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 end it.

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 nightmares, 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 – be honest, but avoid details which may distress or cause anxiety.
4. Tell them that feeling upset or afraid is normal, that it’s good to talk about it and that they’ll feel better soon.
5. Be understanding – they may have problems sleeping, throw tantrums or wet the bed – be patient and reassuring if this happens. With support and care, it will pass.
6. Give your children extra love and attention.
7. Remember that children look to their parents to feel safe and to know how to respond – reassure them, share that you are upset too but that you know you will all be fine 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.

Information adapted from Los Angeles County DMH and New Zealand Ministry of Health