

## Helping Infants and Young Children Cope with Stress

Children may react to a variety of changes in their routines and transitions in their lives, such as changes in the household, overwhelming stimulation in their environments, and big world events. They can also be sensitive to the stress experienced by their caregivers, including when caregivers are less emotionally present or physically less available. The COVID-19 public health emergency is a challenging time for everyone, including infants, young children, and their caregivers.

**Infants and young children communicate that they are stressed through their behaviors and emotions. Knowing what to look for can help you figure out when children need a little extra support.**

### *INFANTS*

- Changes in regular sleep routine
- Changes in eating patterns
- Changes in bowel movements
- Increased crying or agitation

### *TODDLERS*

- Changes in sleeping or eating
- Increased tantrums or increased irritability
- Regression of skills (such as less independence in eating or toileting)
- Frequent reliance on self-soothing behaviors like thumb-sucking or ear-tugging
- Increased separation anxiety

### *PRESCHOOLERS*

- Changes in sleeping or eating
- Increased tantrums or increased irritability
- Frequent complaints of physical ailments, like stomachaches or headaches
- Significant change in emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, withdrawal)

**Infants and young children need YOU, the important adults in their lives, to help them feel better when they have big feelings. The ideas described on the next page may help young children calm their minds and settle their bodies.**

- These skills may look different depending on the child's age and developmental abilities.
- Links to additional resources have been provided, so that you can learn more, and have information appropriate for family and school caregivers.
- The following link provides an overview of many of the strategies:  
[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/positive\\_solutions\\_for\\_families.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/positive_solutions_for_families.pdf)

**YOU KNOW THIS CHILD BEST - READ THEIR CUES AND OFFER COMFORT WHEN NEEDED.**

**FOCUS ON CONSISTENT SLEEP AND EATING ROUTINES; PROVIDE COMFORT AND HELP CHILDREN RETURN TO FOLLOWING A REGULAR SCHEDULE AND HEALTHY ROUTINES.**

**BE AVAILABLE AND PRESENT. GET INVOLVED IN CHILDREN'S PLAY!**

**FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES THROUGHOUT THE DAY, AND CATCH YOUR CHILDREN BEING GOOD!**

<https://medicine.tulane.edu/sites/g/files/rdw761/f/promoting%20positive%20behavior%20pyramid.pdf>

<https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-web/lab-wpcontent/sites/96/2020/02/31204724/Positive-Attention.pdf>

**TELL CHILDREN WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO AND PROVIDE PLENTY OF WARNINGS BEFORE TRANSITIONS BETWEEN ACTIVITIES.**

<https://illinoisearlylearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GR-PGplan.pdf>

<https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-web/lab-wpcontent/sites/96/2020/02/20211555/Transition-Warnings.pdf>

**TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT STRESSFUL SITUATIONS, ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS, AND PROVIDE AGE APPROPRIATE INFORMATION.**

The accompanying "Talking to Children about the Coronavirus Tip Sheet" offers suggestions.

**PREPARE CHILDREN FOR CHANGES IN WHAT THEY MAY BE EXPECTING (E.G., SPECIAL EVENTS CANCELLED, LIMITED CONTACT WITH LOVED ONES AND FRIENDS).**

**ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO USE THEIR WORDS TO COMMUNICATE THEIR NEEDS.**

<https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-web/lab-wpcontent/sites/96/2020/02/31204726/Verbal-Reminder.pdf>

**HELP CHILDREN LABEL THEIR BIG EMOTIONS. USE EMOTION WORDS AND EMPHASIZE THAT ALL FEELINGS ARE OKAY.**

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/backpack/BackpackConnection\\_emotions\\_label.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/backpack/BackpackConnection_emotions_label.pdf)

[http://teacher.scholastic.com/education/pdfs/FirstAidForFeelings\\_Eng.pdf](http://teacher.scholastic.com/education/pdfs/FirstAidForFeelings_Eng.pdf) (available in English and Spanish)

**TEACH CALM DOWN SKILLS LIKE BREATHING AND TAKING SPACE. VERBALLY PROMPT CHILDREN TO USE THE SKILLS WHEN THEY HAVE BIG FEELINGS.**

<https://illinoisearlylearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GR-PGcalm.pdf>

<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/count-breathe-relax/>

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Smell-Blow.pdf>

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Relaxation-Thermometer.pdf>

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/TurtleTechnique\\_steps.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/TurtleTechnique_steps.pdf)

[https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/TuckerTurtle\\_Story\\_Home.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/TuckerTurtle_Story_Home.pdf)

**If the effects of stress on a young child are frequent and occurring for a long duration of time, seek support from a doctor or other trusted members of your community.**