

How parents can help their kids manage stress and anxiety

Volume 90%

Author: New Day Northwest, Andrew Hinkelman

Published: 10:30 AM PDT September 29, 2020 Updated: 12:55 PM PDT September 29, 2020

SEATTLE — Overwhelmed: It can be a crippling feeling and one that is easy to feel during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the months of isolation and sacrifice, life has yet to return to normal, and mental health experts say families are suffering the effects in ways big and small.

Kids have had to experience a number of interruptions in their daily life over the past few months. Things like being unable to return to in-person learning, the stress of the pandemic, social unrest, and political upheaval are just a few circumstances that have kids and adults on edge. Dr. Auerbach says parents should learn to spot problem signs:

- Changes in eating
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Headaches, stomach aches, body pains
- Unusual outbursts of anger or crying
- Teens turning to drugs, alcohol, or vaping

If you do notice behavioral or physical manifestations of stress, there are ways to help your kids get through it. First and foremost is communication. Talk to your children on their level. Share information about what's going on and listen to their concerns.

Second, try to limit the amount of news consumption.

“There's a lot of news out there, good and bad,” Dr. Auerbach said. “It can be overwhelming. So, you may consider limiting news, define some boundaries including social media, and make sure you have an answer to any questions from any information on the news that they may see on social media or on television.”

Third, as much as you can, try creating regular routines like setting times for meals, separate times for learning, and fun activities. Parents also need to set a good example as kids mirror your activities.

Staying socially connected – while maintaining social distance – is a key part of feeling you're a part of something and that better days may lie ahead.

“It's so important to continue connecting and communicating with your family and friends for you and your children,” Dr. Auerbach said. “Whether it's a phone call, a text, the Zoom internet connection – our social mental health (needs) to continue those social connections.”

Parents need to care for themselves, too. Maintaining your good mental health is just as important as doing it for your kids. The same symptoms that can be signs of problems with children apply to adults, and recognizing them will allow you to formulate a plan to combat them.

“The first thing would be, be kind to your body,” Dr. Auerbach said. “So, whatever you did pre-COVID to relieve your stress do that again. Make sure you're getting enough sleep and rest and avoid things like alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and chocolate as they can increase anxiety and actually interfere with your sleep.

“The second thing would be to engage your mind, plan your days. So sometimes too much time or too little time can actually make you anxious. And then if you're really anxious and you're struggling, write those feelings down, keep a diary.”

Know that there are resources within the community to help you manage the stress:

- Employers often have employee assistance programs (EAP) to deal with mental health; check with your human resources department
- If you have insurance, check your insurance card for assistance information
- If you don't have insurance, you seek out counseling through public health departments