

MANAGING FAMILY STRESS During COVID-19

The uncertainty surrounding the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is causing disruptions in our family and work life. The virus has forced us to change our daily routines leading to distress and increased family stress. Many parents may feel the need to develop new or expanded roles, such as getting involved in their child's schoolwork, while managing new demands from the workplace. Many people are faced with financial strain and lack of resources. While all of these changes can add stress and tension to family interactions, family members also can grow closer to each other and become more resilient and resourceful.

HOW CAN YOU MANAGE FAMILY STRESS?

Families are strong. Engage in these three critical areas to help you and your family move through this difficult time.



COMMUNICATE

Keep talking with each other. Family members grow closer if they talk to each other about their personal experiences with the stress of the coronavirus and its impact on their lives. When emotions are intense, conflict is likely to occur. When people feel out of control, they may attempt to control each other. Sharing one's own feelings and views and listening to others promotes problem-solving, the celebration of small successes, and better understanding.

- Set a time each day to talk about your day and about thoughts or feelings related to COVID-19.
- Talk with family at the end of the day about something that was fun or that you learned new that day.
- Come up with a plan together for what you will do tomorrow as a family. You can plan small things, such as meals, or fun activities, with everyone sharing their input and making a family decision together.
- If the health and safety of people are not at stake, then put off major decisions and difficult conversations that are not necessary to manage the current crisis. It is best to avoid or delay conflict right now.
- In the context of parenting, connecting with your kids before correcting them is really important.
- If you get angry, or someone gets upset, find some personal space and take some time to cool down. Put things in perspective and keep in mind that this is a very challenging time for all families.
- People might need some private time to be by themselves. If the kids share a room, you can schedule who gets to be in the room at what time. If there is a balcony or yard, you can send the kids out for some time or spend time there yourself.
- Be the first to offer comfort or to tell someone "it's ok."



GROUND YOURSELF IN COMMON BELIEFS



Create a "common ground" for sharing and support. Families may grow stronger when they feel connected. A shared understanding of "how we live together as a family" is important. This can mean having similar beliefs and values related to your culture, or your faith and spirituality. When you create a common ground of belonging, you or your family feel less alone and more secure during hard times. Remember "we are in this together" and "we can get through this together," by learning to rely on each other as a team.

- Normalize and contextualize the distress you and your family members are feeling. Other families are also feeling similarly.
- Reach out every day to your family members who live in other places by phone or video calls.
- Keep in touch as much as you can.
- Have children read a book to someone over the phone (grandparents or someone isolated).



- Start a journal that you write something in daily about what you are thankful for (consider doing it by yourself and/or as a family).
- Watch a favorite movie or look at photos with your children—and share stories about why these are so meaningful to you
- Hope for a better future. Be optimistic. This time will pass. Believe in your family's strengths and potential.

CREATE NEW ROUTINES AND STRUCTURE



Create new routines for safe connection. The uncertainty of these challenging times makes us anxious, and we share that anxiety within our families. The closure of local businesses and community activities—from sports to libraries to restaurants—bring changes to our family and work routines. These changes could be temporary or last longer than we want. While change can produce anxiety, it can also bring an opportunity for experiencing life in a different, perhaps healthier and more satisfying way.

- Create a new normal and reorganize patterns of interaction to fit the new conditions that we are living in. Be excited about "bouncing forward" into these new routines.
- Connect with nature—take walks and exercise alone or with your family. Exercise helps to manage emotions.
- Take time to do the things you've been waiting to try, for yourself or for your family. That might be cooking a different dinner, reading a book you've saved, or calling a friend you haven't talked to in many months.
- Encourage yourself and your family to try new things.



- Connect safely (from 6 feet) with someone new in your community (your building, your street, around the corner). *To stay six feet apart, imagine there is a full-size couch between you!* 
- Keep some of your family rules in place, especially mealtime and bedtime for children. For you, getting up and going to bed at familiar times is also important.
- Find meaningful small tasks such as organizing groceries or cleaning an area you wanted to change.
- Help your children create a "safe box" of things that comfort them—a toy, a blanket. And have them help you create your own "safe box" of things that make you feel safe.

WHERE TO FIND HELP

For further information about ways you can better help yourself and those around you, visit health.mypgc.us/coronavirus or call (301) 883-6627.

If you or someone you care about is feeling overwhelmed by feelings of sadness, depression, or anxiety, or you have thoughts of wanting to harm yourself or others, call 911 or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's **Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990** or text **TalkWithUs to 66746 (TTY 1-800-846-8517)**. You can also call Maryland's Helpline by dialing 211 or text "MD" to **741741** anytime, about any type of crisis.

"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone." -Fred Rogers