

FS1958 (April 2020)

The Coronavirus Pandemic and Adolescents Ages 9 to 13 Years Old



Common Reactions of Adolescents

- Fears and anxiety, concern about being alone and what might happen next
- Anger or aggression toward siblings, peers or parents who may be preoccupied by their own stressors
- Sadness about missed events, friends, loss, isolation; may withdraw
- Sleep or physical problems related to stress
- Repetitive thoughts, questions about COVID-19, discussions and concerns
- Exaggerated attempts to protect or help parents and other adults



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What to Say and Do

- ✓ Encourage adolescents to talk about their feelings while you listen carefully. Ask open-ended questions so they can direct the conversation and you can assess their thoughts and feelings.
- ✓ Acknowledge your children's concerns for themselves and others.
- ✓ Reassure your adolescents about their safety. Explain what you, as a parent, and other adults will do to provide wellness measures.
- ✓ Talk about the adolescent's responsibility to follow all rules for hand washing, surface sanitizing, sneezing and coughing hygiene, keeping a distance in public and staying away from group activities. Also, discuss following all rules for sheltering at home if that is put in place.
- ✓ Encourage helping with tasks. Discuss and divide family work. Do chores new to the child together the first time to provide assistance, tools and expectations. Entertaining younger siblings while parents are home gives the adolescent practice caring for children without all of the responsibility. Thank children for their help.
- ✓ Reduce exposure to extensive media coverage. Answer questions directly as they arise.
- ✓ Ask your children what they know about the pandemic and how they know it. They are likely seeing a lot of information and misinformation on social media. Spend time as needed to compare what each person has heard or read and use an internet fact-finder to verify facts about the virus and safe practices.
- ✓ Together read books or watch movies that involve people dealing with challenges. Ask children what they think about the characters and their actions.
- ✓ Contact grandparents or older friends or relatives who have lived through pandemics or other world events in history. Ask them to share their stories of resilience with your children. How did they survive? What was different after the event?
- ✓ Allow children to participate in opportunities such as researching needs, making donations, providing services or other appropriate activities that are done from home.

Show adolescents an example of self-control and positive coping in the face of change. An example of a positive attitude, maturity and caring will help children as they choose their responses to the pandemic.

For the complete publication, go to:

www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/kids-family/talking-to-children-about-pandemics

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