Stresses on children in the time of COVID-19

Anilla Del Fabbro, M.D.
Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Medical Director
Center for Development and Disability
Disclosures

• none
Objectives

Participants will be able to:
- identify ways to cope with stress and uncertainty
- discuss how children may respond to a pandemic
- provide parents with tools to take care of themselves and their very young children
CIRCLE OF SECURITY
PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD’S NEEDS

I need you to:
- Watch over me
- Delight in me
- Help me
- Enjoy with me

Support My Exploration

Welcome My Coming To You

Always: be BIGGER, STRONGER, WISER, and KIND.
Whenever possible: follow my child’s need.
Whenever necessary: take charge.

Secure Base

Safe Haven

- Protect me
- Comfort me
- Delight in me
- Organize my feelings
Take care of yourself first

- acknowledge that taking care of others may be stressful

- know the symptoms of physical, mental and compassion fatigue
  
  Have you become cynical or critical at work?
  
  Do you drag yourself to work and have trouble getting started?
  
  Have you become irritable or impatient with co-workers, clients or your family?
  
  Do you lack the energy to be consistently productive?
  
  Do you find it hard to concentrate?
  
  Do you lack satisfaction from your achievements?
  
  Do you feel disillusioned about your job?
  
  Are you using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel?
  
  Have your sleep habits changed?
  
  Are you troubled by unexplained headaches, stomach or bowel problems, or other physical complaints?

- ask for help if you are feeling overwhelmed
Microjoys

• allow transition time from work to home
• use the 20 seconds to wash your hands to quickly meditate and breathe
• de-stress with deep breaths
• schedule enjoyable activities
• make a list of self care activities
• practice grounding to reconnect with the physical environment
• use all of your senses
• find a buddy to work on self-care and be accountable
• remember your “why” (you love your job-write it on your mirror!)
• take a break from media coverage of COVID-19
How children respond

How a child potentially responds to an influenza pandemic may depend on:
• the extent of the outbreak
• the child's age
• the child's developmental level
• how adults in the child's life respond to the stress
• whether the child's school or childcare center is closed
• whether family members/friends become ill
• the media coverage
• pre-existing behavioral health issues
• pre-existing medical illnesses
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Basic Conflict</th>
<th>Important Events</th>
<th>Key Questions to be answered</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy (0 to 18 months)</td>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>Feeding/Comfort</td>
<td>Is my world safe?</td>
<td>Children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood (2 to 3)</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt</td>
<td>Toilet Training/Dressing</td>
<td>Can I do things by myself or need I always rely on others?</td>
<td>Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success leads to feeling of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool (3 to 5)</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>Exploration/Play</td>
<td>Am I good or bad?</td>
<td>Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this state leads to a sense of purpose. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age (6 to 11)</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>School/Activities</td>
<td>How can I be good?</td>
<td>Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, while failure results in feeling of inferiority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (12 to 18)</td>
<td>Identity vs. Role Confusion</td>
<td>Social Relationships/Identity</td>
<td>Who am I and where am I going?</td>
<td>Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adult (19 to 40)</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
<td>Intimate Relationships</td>
<td>Am I loved and wanted?</td>
<td>Young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Adulthood (40 to 65)</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation</td>
<td>Work and Parenthood</td>
<td>Will I provide something of real value?</td>
<td>Adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity (65 to death)</td>
<td>Ego Identity vs. Despair</td>
<td>Reflection on life</td>
<td>Have I lived a full life?</td>
<td>Older adults need to look back on life and feel a sense of fulfillment. Success at this state leads to a feeling of wisdom, while failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What to do

- children need to be well informed
- ask them what they know and think first
- make sure children understand what it is, how it is spread
- address specific questions to lessen fears/minimize misconceptions
- involve them in gathering supplies, “helper”
- teach them about handwashing and hygiene
- how to cough/sneeze
- distancing and no sharing food or drinks
- be matter of fact, only enough info., don’t scare them/exacerbate anxiety
How to help parents

- children react to what they see and feel from their parent/primary caregiver
- infants especially rely on their parent for security during stressful events
- a change in routine/loss of a parent due to illness can cause regression/detachment
- how babies respond to a traumatic life event (pandemic) depends on the impact of the illness/stress on their primary caregiver
- the availability of these caregivers to meet the psychosocial needs of the infants
- toddlers also rely on the availability of parents for their well-being and feeling of safety
- changes in their routine and independence will cause increased stress
- preschoolers are more cognitively “savvy”, don’t understand cause and effect, and may feel somehow responsible and develop feelings of guilt
How to help parents

• provide parent education
• provide anticipatory guidance
• watch for behavior changes
• maintain routine
• allow access to friends
• don’t stress about changes in sleep/appetite
• be a role model by taking good care of yourself
• reassure child, answer their questions and tell them they are safe
• limit exposure to news coverage, social media
• encourage caregivers, parents to access support and/or behavioral health services for themselves and their loved ones
Resources

- https://zerotothrive.org/covid-19/covid-19-kids/
- https://www.allianceaimh.org/new-gallery/z8thudu3t0wo86o0mwqriqtmny8la
- https://zerotothrive.org/covid-19/covid-19-parents/
- https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp
- NM Connect-call, text and access mental health resources https://vimeo.com/403526554/303b8436ac
- https://www.nmcrisisline.com/