

INTERVENTION 3:

Messages & activities for helping children deal with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak

Encourage active listening and an understanding attitude with the children. Children may respond to a difficult/unsettling situation in different ways: clinging to caregivers, feeling anxious, withdrawing, feeling angry or agitated, having nightmares, bedwetting, frequent mood-changes, etc.

- Children usually feel relieved if they are able to express and communicate their disturbing feelings in a safe and supportive environment. Every child has his/her own way to express emotions. Sometimes engaging in a creative activity, such as playing and drawing can facilitate this process. Help children find positive ways to express disturbing feelings such as anger, fear and sadness.
- Encourage an increased sensitive and caring environment around the child. Children need adults' love and often more dedicated attention during difficult times.
- Remember that children often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how adults respond to the crisis is very important. It's important that adults manage their own emotions well and remain calm, listen to children's' concerns and speak kindly to them and reassure them. If appropriate and depending on the age, encourage parents/caregivers to hug their children and repeat that they love them and are proud of them. This will make them feel better and safer.
- If possible, make opportunities for children to play and relax.
- Keep children close to their parents and family, if considered safe for the child, and avoid separating children and their caregivers as much as possible. If a child needs to be separated from his/her primary caregiver, ensure that appropriate alternative care is provided and that a social worker, or equivalent, will regularly follow up on the child.
- If children are separated from their caregivers, ensure regular and frequent contact (e.g. via phone, video calls) and re-assurance. Ensure all child protection and safeguarding measures are addressed.
- Keep regular routines and schedules as much as possible or help create new ones in a new environment, including learning, playing and relaxing. If possible, maintain schoolwork, study or other routine activities that do not endanger children or go against health authorities. Children should continue to attend school if it is not a risk to their health.
- Provide facts about what is going on and give clear child-friendly information about how to reduce risk of infection and stay safe in words they can understand. Demonstrate to children how they can keep themselves safe (e.g., show them effective handwashing)
- Avoid speculating about rumours or unverified information in front of children.
- Provide information about what has happened or could happen in a reassuring, honest and age-appropriate way.
- Support adults/caregivers with activities for children during home isolation/quarantine. Activities should explain the virus but also keep children active when they are not at school, for example:
 - hand washing games with rhymes
 - imaginary stories about the virus exploring the body
 - make cleaning and disinfecting the house into a fun game
 - draw pictures of virus/microbes' that to be coloured by children
 - explain person protective equipment (PPE) to children so that they are not scared

Source: WHO. *Helping children cope with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak (Handout)*. WHO: Geneva, 2020.