

School Age Children & Parenting

Day 2 of quarantine: my youngest discovered that I hid the last Pop-Tart to save for myself. He had been saving the last Reese's cup for me but has consumed both in an act of defiance.

No one trusts anyone. Tension mounts. Sweets are diminishing.

Topics Covered

- Impact of COVID-19 on school-age children (ages 6-12)
- Strategies for parents
- Strategies for school-age children
- Final Thoughts

Mindful Mondays

04/06/2020



I like to bring this meme out during the crazy times, it speaks to the simple way many of us respond to chaos and uncertainty. We accept it, we smile, and we say, "this is fine".

It's normal to respond to chaos this way, others may respond by putting out all the fires, and some may run from the fires. We all respond differently to these uncertain times, and we have all found success in different ways when it comes to managing and coping with the chaos.

My hope for today is to help you lessen some of the flames of chaos associated with having your school-age children at home. It can be messy, time-consuming, energy depleting, erratic, and can often leave you feeling unrecognized and unappreciated for everything that you do.

Trust me when I say this, you are appreciated, your children just may not quite know how to express that feeling yet.

It is easy to take our children's behavior personally, behaviors and emotions are often directed at us because we're their safe place, their trusted ally in life that can remain strong in the face of any danger.

During times of uncertainty it is likely that you will see an increase in your child's behavior and/or emotions. It is often a response to anxiety, abrupt changes, and the need to adjust to these changes.

Below you'll find information regarding the impact COVID-19 has had on school-age children, strategies parents can use to help combat the impact of COVID-related anxiety, and strategies for your kids to cope with the uncomfortable feelings that often come around during times of uncertainty.

Contact Me

Greater Lakes Child
Advocacy Center

95 Water Street
Laconia, NH

603-499-7504

Awolff@cac-nh.org



Impact on School-Age Children

- **Similar to teenagers, school-age children are also dealing with adjustment and loss.**
 - School-age children have lost out on sports & extracurriculars, play dates, birthday parties, etc.
 - Now may also be the first time where children are experiencing deaths of a loved one as a result of COVID-19
- **School-age children will often respond to uncertain times with increased anxiety and worries as life becomes less predictable, confusing, and uncomfortable**
 - Worries may be related to:
 - Health or the health of others
 - Parent finances
 - Safety of grandparents, teachers, coaches, friends
 - Impact of school changes, grades, etc.
- **Disruptions in daily routines and structure as a result of the pandemic may lead to:**
 - Increased tantrum behaviors
 - Attention-seeking behaviors (silliness, arguing, etc)
 - Limit testing
- **Your child may develop new fears or old fears may come creeping back into their minds**
 - Fear of the dark, getting sick, being alone & fear of people who are sick are typical, but other fears may also arise
- **Somatic complaints (complaints that have no known physical origin) also increase as a result of anxiety and uncertainty. You may hear that your child is experiencing:**
 - Headaches
 - Stomach aches
 - Sore throats
 - Coughs
 - Feeling hot/cold
- **Anxiety can also lead to children becoming quiet and reserved as they internalize their thoughts and feelings**
 - Children may hide, shy away from conversation with adults, and deny discomfort or concern for fear that their worries are irrational, stupid, invalid, etc.

Memes for Distraction

**Homeschool Day 2:
Wondering how I can
get a kid transferred
out of my class.**

Day two of
quarantined homeschool
and I am already
wondering when Teacher
Appreciation Day is...

*3 hours into home
schooling and I is
suspended for
skipping class and
the other one has
already been
expelled 🙄*



Strategies for Parents

- **Be a role model!**
 - Model healthy habits
 - Handwashing, social distancing, etc.
 - Healthy emotional responses & expression
 - Coping skills, talking about your fears/worries in developmentally appropriate ways
 - Goal is to encourage your child's expression, not to encourage further worry
- **Maintain/Re-develop a consistent daily routine or schedule**
 - Knowing what will happen during their days and how things will happen will help lessen your child's anxiety related uncertainty
 - Observe what your child enjoys or what they turn to when needing to cope, incorporate those activities/coping skills into their daily schedule
- **Have discussions with your children about what is happening**
 - It is normal to feel hesitant or uncomfortable about having these conversations, but don't let those feelings stop you!
 - Now is a time to show your children strength and courage even amidst uncertainty
 - Discussions will help your children feel informed, which can help keep them grounded and more able to manage/cope with their anxiety
- **Talking Tips:**
 - The younger the child the more direct and parent-led the conversation should be
 - The older the child the more collaborative and question-and-answer the conversation should be
 - Do your own research to be prepared for general questions. Know your facts and stick to them!
 - Be mindful of your opinions and how they differ from facts. Only present the facts.
 - Ask what your child knows or has heard and respond accordingly:
 - If what they know or have learned is accurate:
 - Validate and praise them for having an accurate understanding
 - If what they know or have learned is inaccurate:
 - Correct them and praise them for sharing what they've learned or know
 - Provide reassurance
 - "We are a strong healthy family"
 - "We've been practicing social distancing very well, and that will keep us healthy"
 - If you are asked a question you don't know, it is okay to say you don't know and that you will do your research to find the answer
 - Always end conversations expressing willingness for ongoing questions and conversations
 - The more your child knows that it is okay to ask questions or have new thoughts about these uncertain times, the more comfortable they will be in approaching you about their thoughts, questions, and concerns
- **Make sure you are managing your own anxiety during these times**
 - Anxiety has a way of passing through parents to their children while going unnoticed. Its like static electricity, we can't necessarily see it or feel it until we get shocked
 - Block off time in your own daily schedule to engage in some form of coping (exercise, deep breathing, yoga, etc)

Me: It will probably be strange and boring to be out of school for a while and not see your friends, but we will try to make this fun for you.

6: Are you kidding me, mommy? We get to hang out with you and daddy. This is going to be fun!

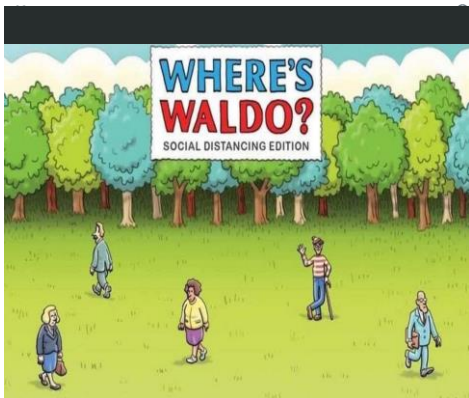
I'm not crying, you're crying 😭.

[video call with my boss while working from home]

Boss: I need you to-

[4 kids run by: one on fire, one naked, 2 in ski masks and capes]

Boss: Never mind



Feeling guilty about your kid watching too much tv? Just mute it and put the captions on. Boom. Now they're reading.

If you see me talking to myself this week, mind your business. I'm having a parent-teacher conference.

• Use your attention strategically

- Your children will be looking for your attention more
- Increased parental presence is exciting for your children and you should use it to your advantage!
- Attention can be used as a reinforcement for positive behaviors, independent play, coping skill use, etc.
- Praise them by letting them hear:
 - What their positive behavior was
 - Why it was good/beneficial to them or others
 - What they earned for their positive behavior (1 on 1 time, snack/candy, extra TV, etc.)

Strategies for Children (with parental assistance)

• Encourage your children to take control over their health by engaging in health habits

- Consistent handwashing
- Keeping hands away from mouth, eyes, noses
- Social distancing

• Get them up and get them to move, hop, skip, jump, or dance

- Anxiety's impact goes beyond our thoughts and often presents itself through our bodies
- Exercise and movement can help release anxiety and also provide our bodies and mind with "feel good" chemicals that aid us in relaxation

• Keep their minds engaged

- Encourage reading, puzzles, sudokus, legos
- Incorporate sensory activities into their day
 - Playdoh, moon/kinetic sand, slime
- Encourage creativity
- The more occupied their minds are on books, creating, solving, and feeling, the less they will wander to the anxious spaces in their minds

• Use your coping skills

- Deep breathing
 - Filling your belly balloon
 - Blowing out imaginary candles
- Journaling (older children)
 - Provide prompts to help children that may struggle with journaling
- Drawing & coloring (younger children)
 - Let them guide and dictate what they draw and what colors they use so they can express their feelings fully
- Highlight or notice the positives of the day
 - Sometimes it is easy to miss the silver-linings but they're important to find and recognize during times like these
- Listen to music/play an instrument

Final thoughts:

Last week I encouraged you all to look for the bright moments and think about the times where you found happiness or success. How did you all do with this? Were you able to replicate any of those happy or successful moments?

The simplest solution often is right in front of us, we may just be looking for it in the wrong places. I want to encourage you all to continue looking for these moments of success and happiness in your daily lives. Seek to repeat them as often as you can, become an expert in them if you so desire. Observe the trials and errors that your children engage in while learning and playing; do they continue doing something that gives them happiness, comfort, and joy? Or, do they stop and attempt to rationalize why they can't do it anymore?

See you Wednesday!

Andrew Wolff, M.S., LMFT
Mental Health Clinician
