

Supporting Children and Families During Uncertain Times

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Children from birth through age eight are impacted by the coronavirus epidemic. They pick up on the concerned messages of adults, hear snippets of disturbing news on media outlets, and may develop fears or anxiety related to the disruption of normal school and child care schedules. While families strive to balance financial stress and uncertainty about the future, concern for children's wellbeing needs to be a priority.

Like other chronic stressors, the death of a family member, and natural disasters, it is important for families to answer questions in age-appropriate terms that match the understanding of children who are very young and in early the early school years. You'll want to reassure, without providing complex information that can add to their confusion. When families respond in reassuring ways, children internalize those positive cues.

Letting children know that schools are closed to protect people from an illness and assuring everyone's safety at home is okay. Telling children there is a worldwide illness that is killing millions of people is not okay. Children in the early childhood years birth through age eight do not have the life experience or emotional development to process these broad and undefined – and scary – messages.

Families need to exercise caution about exposing children to repeated news broadcasts. When the World Trade Center fell and the footage was broadcast over and over, children, with their limited perspective of time, thought the catastrophe was happening over and over. It is important to place boundaries around incoming information. Children want to know, "Will I be okay? Will you get sick? Are you staying home with me? When can I see my friends?" [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [Harvard Medical School](#), [Child Trends](#), and [Nemours Health](#) offer some excellent suggestions for communicating with young children that will support their emotional well-being during this time.

Program leaders can share these practical resources with families through e-mail or social media. In addition, teachers and staff will need to understand and use this information with children and families when programs are reopened.

This unprecedented time of uncertainty has some benefits. One parent said, "While I am struggling with social isolation, my children are thriving. They love having the extended time at home with me." Another family reported, "I feel stuck at home, but the children are having a ball. To them, this is a holiday – a special time to enjoy projects and play."

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Families can make the most of the situation by having dinner by candlelight, enjoying a backyard or balcony picnic, putting together a jigsaw puzzle, taking a walk, and spending extra time together. It's easy to lose perspective, but families may well look back on this time with their children as a bonus. It is a good time to support families who are looking for [activities to do at home](#) and to provide guidance about the use of appropriate educational [media for children](#).

All around the country, educators are working together to ensure the highest quality experiences for children in the months ahead. Families can find expanded online learning opportunities, [safe learning sites](#), and [pop-up resources](#) for young children. While this is a difficult time for grown-ups, it's the perfect time to enrich the lives of children and get them excited about learning.

Be sure to follow the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership on social media, as we are sharing additional educational and enrichment activities for leaders, families, and children:

Facebook: facebook.com/mccormick.center/

Twitter: twitter.com/MCECL

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/mcecl/

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