



The Pandemic and Kids' Mental Health

Tips and Strategies for Supporting a Preschooler's Resilience

Be truthful. Children pick up on changes in routine and mood through your words, tone of voice, and body language. By speaking honestly with children, you help to ensure they aren't left alone with feelings of confusion or worry.

Check in to see what they've overheard. Consider what kids may have overheard in your day-to-day conversations. Then, ask questions with the goal of correcting misconceptions. You can say, "I was talking to Zach's mom. What did you hear us talking about?" It's best to not make assumptions. Let kids bring up worries rather than assume what they're upset about. A child's worry might be, Is Daddy going to get Coronavirus? Or, simply, Why can't I stay up later?

Watch for signs of distress. Some children manifest worry by withdrawing. Others act out. They may or may not know what's upsetting them. When your child is having a bad day, you can show love and support by asking, "Do you want an extra hug today?" Or "You're upset. Do you know what's upsetting you?"

Engage in play. You can help children express what's on their mind by joining in play with their toys and making space for fantasy play. Listen so you can follow up on any misconceptions later, without interrupting their play.

Maintain routines. Structure and consistency provides children with a sense of normalcy and security. Developing a regular daily routine of getting dressed in the morning, regular mealtimes, a balance of activity and quiet time, and bedtime rituals often help children feel more settled, and their behavior reflects this. Reviewing the plan for the day – in the morning or the night before – conveys that home is a safe place.

Practice self-care. Juggling so many responsibilities often feels overwhelming. Carving out small moments to relax can help. For example: Take a few deep breaths, pause and slowly exhale. This relaxes your nervous system and helps reduce stress. A problem shared is a problem halved. Identify the trusted people with whom you can share worries.

Cut yourself some slack. Identify daily tasks that *really* need to get done and consciously let go of those that can wait. No child has ever said, "I wish we had fewer dirty dishes in the sink."

Ask for help. Open communication is vital to maintaining healthy relationships. You can share, "I'm not able to sustain this level of household tasks/childcare, plus work. I can hear how irritable I sound. Can we find a way to divide the tasks? It's important that we get through these times appreciating each other." Having these conversations is better than letting resentment build up.

Actively appreciate those around you. In times of stress, everyone feels they're doing more and being appreciated less. An extra "thank you" can go long way. "I know how much you're doing. Thanks so much for running that errand." Showing appreciation is often helpful to the receiver and to you. Practicing gratitude builds resilience.

Check out [*Words Can Work*](#) products to support conversations with young people. Produced by [Jeanne Blake](#) with our advisor Dr. Paula K. Rauch and other experts from McLean Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital.