

Helping Children Cope

Your children may respond differently to an outbreak depending on their age. Below are some reactions according to age group and the best ways you can respond:

AGE GROUP	REACTIONS	HOW YOU CAN HELP
PRESCHOOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of being alone, bad dreams • Speech difficulties • Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting • Change in appetite • Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience and tolerance • Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) • Encourage expression through play, reenactment, storytelling • Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime • Maintain regular family routines • Avoid media exposure
SCHOOL AGE (AGES 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior • Clinging, nightmares Sleep/appetite disturbance • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches) • Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest • Competition for parents' attention • Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet • Regular exercise and stretching • Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games) • Participate in structured household chores • Set gentle but firm limits • Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community • Encourage expression through play and conversation • Help family create ideas for enhancing healthy behaviors and maintaining family routines • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school • Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation
ADOLESCENT (AGES 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.) • Sleep/appetite disturbance • Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy • Ignoring health promotion behaviors • Isolating from peers and loved ones • Concerns about stigma and injustices • Avoiding/cutting school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Encourage continuation of routines • Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force) • Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games • Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance healthy behaviors • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school • Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak

As caregivers and parents, it is also within our power and ability to model healthy coping behaviors for our children. One way to demonstrate healthy coping skills in the midst of our anxiety is to seek the Lord. You can read scripture and sing praise songs to your children throughout their time at home. Here are a few short verses to encourage your children during this time.

“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7

“Cast all your anxieties on Him, because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:7

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” Psalm 56:3