

Five key ways to support mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak and beyond

The Oregon Department of Education is committed to supporting students, teachers, staff, families and communities during this time of uncertainty. While it is natural to experience fear and anxiety, children and adults may be particularly worried about themselves, friends and family getting ill with the Coronavirus. It is important to support each other in managing our feelings and anxiety in healthy ways to reduce the effects of stress on our health.

We all play an important role in helping each other in the days ahead.

Here are **five ways** adults can support children and each other:

- 1. Remain as calm as possible.** The most important thing that we can do is to remain as calm as possible. Consider small things that you can do each day to calm your mind and body. Even a moment or two of quiet can go a long way. You can model this for your children, or have them practice calming strategies with you.
- 2. Children are looking to us for guidance.** Children will often mirror our emotions, words, and body language. You do not have to be perfect, but do pay close attention to what you say and do, what media you interact with and how it affects your mood and behavior. It is important to stay updated, but also to take breaks from the news when overwhelmed.
- 3. Provide a safe emotional place.** The more we can provide a safe emotional place for ourselves and children, the less fearful and stressed we will become. Children often fear what they do not understand. Make time to listen, and calmly and directly provide them with clear and accurate information that is appropriate to their age. Expect them to ask the same question more than once. If you're not sure of the answer you can find information about COVID-19 and how to talk with children on the [CDC](#) and [OHA](#) websites.
- 4. Take action.** There is a great deal that we cannot control right now, and feeling powerless may increase our anxiety and distress. The more we empower ourselves and children to control the things that we can, the better. Use this as an opportunity to teach children how to reduce the spread of disease. That may mean offering instructions about washing hands for at least 20 seconds, keeping at least six feet away from others and coughing or sneezing into a tissue and discarding it. It is important to remember that exerting too much control of children's lives might lead them to feel

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more anxious. Allow them to make age-appropriate decisions about how to spend their time.

- 5. Find ways to stay connected with others.** Being alone or isolated from friends, family, classmates and other supports can make being out of work or school particularly challenging. Make sure to connect with others at a distance as much as possible. Use the telephone, video conferencing and other forms of messaging and communication to keep in touch, and schedule time with others. Help children to connect with friends and family, and schedule as much quality time with them as possible. Also, make sure to take time and space away from others if needed.

Remember, we are all in this together.