



Helping Your Young Family Members Cope with Acute Stress & Sudden Change

There are times when life and the world as we know it changes and we experience a sense of uncertainty of what to do or how-to best cope. When in this state of mind and being a number of things can unfold, one being we can notice changes in our children.

As we all know all children are different, therefore, the way a situation impacts them will be different and the way the communicate (communication is a broad sense) will vary. This is the reason we as parents and as the individuals who offer them a sense of safety, security and support need to be flexible in how we navigate these challenging times.

Below are some suggestions you are invited to try:

A) Start with you. Make sure you explore ways that you can best cope with the emotions you are feeling so that you will be able to respond in the way that you want to when talking to children and young people.

Everything is [energy](#), so we sincerely have to be open to the possibility that even if we do not say anything or think we are “hiding” how we feel that the people around us absorb and feel the vibration energy of the emotions and thoughts we are experiencing.



B) Be mindful of your timing- It is great that you may want to talk to them about their feelings and or answer their questions, but it may not be the best time to engage in this type of conversation prior to bed or when you or they are already highly stressed. Instead defer to the following day and actually follow through with it. Consider doing a breathing exercise or [tapping](#) and then dive into the question and answer process.

C) Curve your expectations- Become familiar with how symptoms of anxiety and being in a state of “Fight-Flight-Freeze” can impact how your child processes information, follows direction and remembers tasks. This does not mean flush all rules and expectations down the toilet, but it does mean to check-in on how you ask or remind your child to do things they once use to do automatically. For example, try asking for



only 1 thing to be done (i.e. ask them to do the dishes then once that is complete suggest the next expectation) and avoid listing a number of expectations at once. This could prevent information overload. When in an acute stressful situation or exposed to chronic stress in an unmanageable way we are easily saturated, thus it takes very little to send us into a sense of overwhelm resulting in impaired functioning.

D) Consider establishing a routine instead of a schedule as it feels less restrictive and more flexible. However, some form of familiarity is essential for those experiencing symptoms of a mental health problem such as acute stress, depression or anxiety.

E) My ice-cream approach works well with my daughter. Depending on your child’s age you may want to leave out the analogy of building an ice-cream cone, but the same ingredients apply regardless.

Select Your Cone- is the investigation -> Ask open-ended questions, “What are your worries about this?”, “How does it make your body feel when you think about this?” “What makes you feel that way?”. These will help guide you and your child to learn more about how emotions show up in their body and gain an understanding about their triggers.

Now we add the ice-cream- Validate-> Offer loads of validation to normalize their emotions. Share the reasons you can relate to what they are currently feeling. For example, if they identify feeling worried about someone in the family you can share your own anxiety about a family member so they do not feel they are the only person feeling this way. Explain to them that it is normal to feel what ever emotion they feel (i.e. anxious, scared, sad)

Don't forget the sprinkles- This is where we offer them hope -> It is important to make sure that you remove any myths or inaccurate assumptions your child might be mentally holding onto. Help them to realize there are components in most situations which they can control and then there are aspects that other people will need to be responsible for. If you are supporting an adolescent it is essential to help them set boundaries regarding what their responsibilities are regarding the situation and what aspects are not their responsibility (i.e. they are responsible for another person's happiness or changes regarding a global crisis). Teaching them age appropriate ways to cope with higher levels of anxiety and/or stress will empower them and if done together will strengthen that sense of security, safety, love & belonging which we all need, not only in a time of crisis, but always.



Remember Self-Care is the Best Care