

Common Reactions and How to Respond

Age Group	Reactions	How to Respond
Infants to 2 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in crying • Clinging behaviors • Change in appetite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase positive interactions throughout the day • Respond to emotions in a caring and supportive manner
Age 3 to 6 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regression (e.g., toileting accidents, bed-wetting, difficulties with speech, etc.) • Fear of being separated from parents • Increase in tantrums • Difficulties with sleeping, nightmares 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient and tolerant • Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) • Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling • Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements • Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime • Maintain routines • Avoid media exposure
Ages 7 to 10 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in mood (sadness, anger, anxiety, etc.) • Increase in demands for attention • Trouble with concentration or memory • Obsession with details of crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient and tolerant • Arrange to stay in touch with friends through telephone and internet (virtual playdates) • Regular exercise and stretching • Engage in educational activities • 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 to assist. • Encourage expression through play and conversation. • Help family create ideas for routines • Limit media exposure • Clarify misinformation
Preteens and Teenagers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability or agitation • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches, etc.) • Sleep or appetite changes • Apathy or decrease in energy • Isolation or withdrawal • Risk-taking behaviors (e.g., use of drugs or alcohol) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage routine and structure, participation in family routines • Encourage discussions of feelings and experience • Find creative ways to help them stay connected with peers • Limit media exposure • Engage in service or volunteering and practice gratitude

Other Key Considerations for Parents/Caregivers:

1. Understand that behavior is a form of communication and reactions to the pandemic may vary - be patient and tolerant and use positive discipline.
2. Practice the 3 R's: reassurance, routines, and regulation. Listen and validate their feelings.
3. Encourage regular exercise and participation in educational activities -- keep children busy. Balance educational activities with play time.
4. Emphasize strengths, hope, and positivity.
5. Be compassionate with yourself.
6. Seek professional help if children show severe signs of distress or if these symptoms do not resolve over time.

References:

Center for Disease Control, [Caring for Children](#)

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics: [The Emotional Impact of Disaster on Children and Families](#)