

Making Connections

Newsletter Fall 2020

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How can the parent partner assist you ?

Provide families with:

- Helpful resources
- Support while receiving Birth to Three services and after the transition process at age 3
- Information needed to make referrals to other agencies
- Information on child development

Returning to “Normal” After COVID-19

We have all struggled with the everyday life changes and everybody has different feelings about going back to ‘normal’. Children may struggle with significant adjustments to their routines (e.g., schools and child care closures, social distancing, home confinement), which may interfere with their sense of structure, predictability, and security. Even infants and toddlers are keen observers of people and environments, and they notice and react to stress in their parents and other caregivers, peers, and community members.

Why is going back to normal challenging? There are many reasons why going back to ‘normal’ might be anxiety-provoking for you or your child. These might include:

- Yet another change in lifestyle and routines
- “Normal” won’t be the same as it was before the pandemic
- Return to pre-COVID-19 stresses
- Feeling safe at home and out-of-control in public
- Life was better in isolation – you were able to spend more time as a family
- Fear of second wave of COVID-19

To support your family, remember varied reactions from each family member is normal and may be different from day to day as different stressors come to mind. As a family you can,

Get back into a routine as similar to what you had in place prior to having to stay at home - Routines are safe and familiar which can help reduce anxiety.

Focus on what you can control - It’s hard getting caught up in the unknown and ‘what-if’s’? As a family, identify what you can control and practical things you can do so everyone can be more in the present moment and reduce anxiety.

Revisit social distancing rules and good hygiene practices - Reviewing these can help everyone feel more at ease about their safety when in public spaces.

Provide reassurance - Sometimes there doesn’t seem to be a solution to all the problems we and our children have, but they don’t always need one – just to feel understood and supported is sometimes enough.

Explore the positive and be curious - Talk about the things they may be looking forward to (returning to school, childcare, trips to the playground, playdates). Even if they are worried it can be helpful to chat through these together if they seem open to this. Ask open questions and actively listen to understand more about your child’s thoughts and feelings.

- **Validate their feelings** - This means letting them know that what they are feeling is normal, other people feel the same way and that there is nothing wrong with their feelings. Use simple words to name those feelings, such as scared, worried, afraid, cautious, etc.
- **Help them limit exposure to media** - If they are younger, this might include reducing their exposure to the news. If they are older, it might be helping them to critically think about media messages they are exposed to or ensuring they are accessing reputable sources.
- **Create a plan around transitioning** - Planning can help alleviate some anxiety, especially fear of the unknown. Having a plan for the first day returning to old routines can help.

Take small steps to re-integrate into society - Some fears can be alleviated with small, controlled exposures. For instance, a great first step might be a quick trip to the supermarket or organizing for your child to meet and hangout with one friend in a park.

If you are interested in more ideas on helping to prepare your family to return to ‘normal’, please reach out to the Parent Partner at your WV Birth to Three RAU!

Child Trends. Resources for Supporting Children’s Emotional Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Returning to normal after COVID-19. KidsHelpLine. <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/returning-normal-after-covid-19>

How to Talk to Your Child About the News

Children Hear about what's going on in the world through social media, friends, or adults' conversations. Sometimes the news is uplifting, other times, children may worry about current events and need an adult to help make sense of what's happening.

Help your child understand the news and feel more at ease by taking these steps:

Find Out What Your Child Already Knows

- **Ask your kids questions to see if they know about a current event.** For school-aged kids and teens, you can ask what they have heard at school or on social media.
- **Consider your child's age and development.** Younger kids may not grasp the difference between fact and fantasy. Most kids realize the news is real by the time they are 7 or 8 years old.
- **Follow your child's lead.** If your child doesn't seem interested in an event or doesn't want to talk about it at the moment, don't push.

Answer Questions Honestly and Briefly

- **Tell the truth, but share only as much as your child needs to know.** Try to calm any fears and help kids feel safe. Don't offer more details than your child is interested in.
- **Listen carefully.** For some kids hearing about an upsetting event or natural disaster might make them worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Older kids may have lots of questions. Focus on what your kids ask so you can help them cope with their fears. An adult's willingness to listen sends a powerful message.
- **It's OK to say you don't know the answer.** If your child asks a question that stumps you, say you'll find out. Or use age-appropriate websites to spend time together looking for an answer.

Help Kids Feel in Control

- **Encourage your child to talk.** If your child is afraid about what is going on, ask about it. Even when kids can't control an event-like a natural disaster-it can help them to share their fears with you.
- **Urge teens to look beyond a news story.** Ask why they think an outlet featured a frightening or disturbing news story. Was it to boost ratings and clicks or because the story was truly newsworthy? In this way, a scary story can be turned into a discussion about the role and mission of the news.
- **Teach you children to be prepared, not panicked.** For example, if the news is about a natural disaster, make a family plan for what you might do. If an illness is spreading, talk about ways to protect yourself and others.
- **Talk about what you can do to help.** After a tragic event, finding ways to help can give kids a sense of control. Look for news stories that highlight what other people are doing.
- **Put news stories in context.** Broaden the discussion from a specific news item about a difficult event to a larger conversation. Use it as a way to talk about helping, cooperation, and the ways that people cope with hardship.

Limit Exposure to the News

- **Decide what and how much news is appropriate for your child.** Think about how old your kids are and how mature they are. Encourage them to take breaks from following the news, especially when the topics are difficult.
- **Keep tabs on the amount of different news you child hears.** Notice how often you discuss the news in front of your kids. Turn off the TV so the news is not playing in the background all day.
- **Set limits.** It's OK to tell you kids that you don't want them to have constant exposure and to set ground rules on device and social media use.
- **Watch the news with your child and talk about it.** Turn off a story if you think it's not appropriate for your child.

Keep the Conversation Going

- **Talk about current events with your child often.** Help kids think through stories they hear-good and bad. Ask questions like: "What do you think about these events?" or "How do you think these things happen?" With these types of questions, you can encourage conversations about non-news topics.
- **Watch for stress.** If your child shows changes in behavior (such as not sleeping or eating, not wanting to be around people, or worrying all the time), call your child's doctor or a behavioral health care provider. They can help your child manage anxiety and feel better able to cope.

Find this article and more information at <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/news.html>

Somewhere for West Virginians to Turn with Covid Related Stress

Operators of several 24-hour help lines in West Virginia have now created a specific line to help West Virginians who are dealing with increased anxiety brought on by all of the factors involving Covid 19. First Choice Services has unveiled what it calls “Help 304, West Virginia’s Emotional Strength Line.”

“A lot of people who frankly don’t need a referral, they need to talk to someone and sit down, process their emotions, and get some stress management strategies in place,” said Sheila Moran with First Choice Services.

According to a recent poll conducted by the American Psychiatric Association, 36 percent of Americans say COVID-19 is having a serious impact on their mental health and 59 percent says it is having a serious impact on their day-to-day lives.

“There’s a real big need for this in West Virginia. Studies have shown anxiety has gone up tremendously in the United States and West Virginia already was ranked as one of the least mentally healthy states where people were suffering from a lot of anxiety and depression. This pandemic has certainly worsened that,” she said.

First Choice Services already operates the Help4WV addiction and mental health line, the Problem Gamblers Help Network of WV, the Suicide Lifeline, the Tobacco Quitline, the Jobs and Hope program which helps those in recovery find employment, the ACA Navigator program which assists with enrollment in free and reduced-cost health insurance, and 211, which helps locate resources such as food banks and housing assistance.

According to Moran their impact on West Virginians suffering anxiety will be two-fold. They can obviously be a sympathetic ear but moreover also offer professional counseling services on the phone. The conversation alone can help people work through whatever their stressful situation might be. She added because of the other services First Choice provides, they could also direct people to additional resources to get added help.

“If somebody calls and says, ‘I think my husband is an alcoholic.’ We can direct them to resources. If they call and have lost their job and have no money for food or rent, we have a partnership with the United Way to operate the 2-1-1 line to get them to feeding centers and food pantries in their area,” Moran said.

Those suffering added stress and anxiety brought on by the pandemic or any other reason can call the helpline at 1-877-HELP-304 or go to help304.com to chat with somebody online.

Reprinted from MetroNews Staff (August 11, 2020). Somewhere for West Virginians to turn with covid related stress. Retrieved from: <https://wvmetronews.com/2020/08/11/somewhere-for-west-virginians-to-turn-with-covid-related-stress/>

What information are you DRIVING around?



Fall Sensory Play



Grab a bin and throw in leaves, grass clippings, acorns, pinecones, and rocks. You can go on a nature walk and let your child collect anything that gets their attention.



FALL LEAF ART A SIMPLE TODDLER CRAFT

Draw a bare tree on construction paper then let your child glue on leaves they have collected from outside.

Pumpkin Sensory Bag

with I-spy printable



Put the insides of a pumpkin in a gallon size zip lock bag. Then, add small shapes, toys, or erasers. You can make your own I-spy chart or go to pre-kpages.com/pumpkin-sensory-bag/ to print one.

