

# COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN

## During Stressful Times

**Many families are seeking resources about how to help their family thrive. During stressful times, how do you help your child understand what is happening and the impact on their daily life?**

**It takes time to help children understand current events and the impact they have on our nation, community, and world. Continued conversations are necessary, but how do we do this without stressing everyone out?**



### **Don't be an ostrich.**

Children can be incredibly astute and aware. Oftentimes, parents and adult caregivers believe they are protecting children from undue stress and worry when they shield them from the knowledge of current events. As children are likely already aware, adults need to be open in communicating with children about what is occurring.



### **Have the conversation.**

Talk with your child about what they see in the news. Ask what they think we can all do about it. Ask them how they believe this affects them, their friends, and your family. Use this opportunity to talk with them about how your family may be affected and changes in their daily life that may occur. Making yourself available for conversation sends the message that you are ready to support their needs.



### **Acknowledge and share your feelings.**

By sharing your feelings of fear, anger, or frustration with your child, you send the message that they are not the only ones upset by the events. Be sure to also share how you deal with those feelings.



### **Help your child express ALL their emotions.**

While providing reassurance, encourage your child to express their full range of emotions. Encourage your child to think about how current events affect others, fostering the development of caring and empathy.



### **Get creative when helping your child express their emotions.**

Drawing, painting, reading books, using puppets or stuffed animals are all great ways to help your child open up about their emotions.



### **Check in with them.**

Choose a short period of time after your initial conversation to check back in with your child whether it be a few days or a week.



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## When times get tough, having a conversation about the current crisis can buffer the stress experienced by adults and children alike.

**Connecting and communicating as a family builds a strong foundation that can carry you through the difficult times.**

**Spare them the worry.** Although parents are encouraged to share information with their children about current events be sure not to overwhelm them with grim details. **Children need a sense of security and stability.** Continue with family rituals and routines to maintain and restore a sense of comfort.

**Provide realistic reassurance.** Parents and adult caregivers often resort to telling a child “it won’t happen here” or “it’s not going to happen to you” to provide reassurance. It is important that you are as realistic as possible as you reassure your child. While adults can support and protect children, it is not possible to keep all bad things from happening to them. **Oftentimes, all children need to hear is that you love them and that you will be with them no matter what happens.** These simple statements send a realistic message while helping your child feel comforted and secured.

**Make it fun whenever possible.** Elicit your children’s ideas and support about things your family can do to pass the time during social distancing. Take turns creating fun family activities using what you have on hand and available in your home. Make everyday chores and family times interesting by adding a fun twist. Try ending difficult conversations with having everyone identify one positive thing from the situation or one thing they are grateful for.

**Be a good role model.** Children learn how to cope with stressful situations through the examples parents and adult caregivers provide. By talking about current events in an open, realistic manner while providing comfort and reassurance, helps children to effectively cope with the stress they experience. **It’s also important to be mindful of the unspoken messages you send during the stressful experience.**

Reference: Adapted from “Getting Through Tough Financial Times.” How Do We Communicate with Our Children about These Economically Stressful Times? - Getting Through Tough Financial Times - University of Illinois Extension, [https://web.extension.illinois.edu/toughtimes/communicating\\_with\\_children.cfm](https://web.extension.illinois.edu/toughtimes/communicating_with_children.cfm)