



From the uncertainty and anxiety to the disconnection and possible loneliness, this will be a very formative time in the lives of today's children. By being there for them as a source of guidance and support—and modeling strong coping behaviors—adults have a powerful opportunity to teach a valuable life skill: resilience.

- Jud Heugel, MD

From Uncertainty to Resiliency: Supporting Kids in the Time of COVID-19

According to UNICEF¹, more than two billion children and teens around the world are currently being restricted in their movement as a result of the pandemic. This disruption to their lives—disconnection from school, activities, peers and routines—is not only massive, it's unprecedented, leaving more questions than answers around the potential impact on kids' mental and emotional health. Here, 98point6 Director of Pediatrics Jud Heugel, MD offers actionable tips for taking control and fostering strength.

Hangin' Tough

"As much as we, as parents, hate to see the daily impact the new normal has on our children, teaching them how to bounce back can be beneficial to them in the long run," says Dr. Heugel.

Research has linked "mental toughness" to higher levels of school engagement.² In other studies, resilience was found to be a potent protective factor against the effects of bullying.³ "It's hard to see a silver lining in this difficult time, but with parental guidance and support, it can be a chance for character-building."

More Than a Minor Concern

Preliminary research out of Italy and Spain⁴, where the impact of COVID-19 has been significant, shows that nearly 86% of parents noted changes in their children's emotional state and behaviors during the quarantine. Children in both countries spent less time engaging in physical activity and more hours sleeping, and families under more stress reported more emotional problems in their children. A study from India found similar results, with both quarantined and non-quarantined children showing high levels of psychological stress—and long-term behavior changes, such as vigilant hand-washing and avoidance of crowds being observed.

Since stress and anxiety in children and teens often manifest through physical symptoms or new habits, Dr. Heugel recommends being on the lookout for signs including:

- Clinginess
- Restlessness
- Excessive worry
- Moodiness/tantrums
- Fidgeting/nail-biting
- Change in eating patterns
- Sleep troubles: insomnia, waking, nightmares
- Recurring headache, stomachache or other pain

Most of these symptoms are normal responses to a stressful situation, but if you feel that they are becoming excessive, please start a visit or consult a primary care provider.

Note: Currently, 98point6 does not treat conditions such as depression and bipolar disorder in pediatric patients; however, some/many behavioral health concerns can be addressed within the scope of primary care.

What You Can Do

- ✔ **Shape discussions about the pandemic and the new normal appropriately.** Children look to caregivers for leadership, so it's important to give them a sense that things will be OK and they will be safe.
- ✔ **Pay attention to the types of media they're being exposed to and give them a chance to voice their worries and ask any questions.** Don't wait for them to approach you, either—do a daily check-in, at least.
- ✔ **Make it a teachable moment.** Discussing prevention measures like hand hygiene and the importance of wearing masks will give kids a sense of control and confidence.
- ✔ **Let them feel their feelings and grieve their losses.** Cancelled sports seasons, graduations, birthday parties—these are important events and the emotions around missing them shouldn't be downplayed. Encourage kids to share and process them.
- ✔ **Build in one-on-one time, if you can.** Try to find chunks of time each day to spend with each child. This focused attention, even if for small periods, can be very strengthening for kids.
- ✔ **Model healthy, positive behaviors.** Not only will prioritizing your own self-care and taking steps to actively manage stress make you happier and more resilient, kids are likely to mimic your example.

Out and About

Another interesting finding in the previously mentioned study? The Italian children, who were permitted to take short walks, fared better than the Spanish ones, perhaps because the activity broke up the monotony of quarantine. There's also evidence from prior research that adolescents living in "greener" areas have lower depressive symptoms.⁵

"My recommendation," says Dr. Heugel, "is take advantage of the summer and fall weather and get out as a family in a way that is comfortable and responsible. The risk of outdoor transmission is lower, but still exists, so unless you are in your backyard or another isolated area, continue to practice and model the right precautions."



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We're Here for You

At home or on-the-go, if you're experiencing any medical concerns or simply feel the need to connect with a primary care physician, 98point6's virtual clinic is available 24/7 from wherever you are.

A SOURCE YOU CAN TRUST: This resource was put together using expert guidance from 98point6's board-certified physicians.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/dont-let-children-be-hidden-victims-covid-19-pandemic> ² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5554528/>
³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4235769/> ⁴ <https://psyarxiv.com/5bpfz/> ⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5963277/>