



# California Surgeon General's Playbook: Stress Relief for Caregivers and Kids during COVID-19

## NAVIGATING STRESS MANAGEMENT WITH KIDS

Many of us are feeling a lot of stress right now. Even for adults, it can be tough to recognize that what we feel as irritability, difficulty focusing, insomnia or changes in appetite can actually be signs that our bodies are feeling the effects of stress. For kids, no matter the age, their brains and bodies are even more vulnerable to the harmful effects of stress than adults, and most often, they aren't able to recognize or verbalize it. Stress in kids may show up differently than our stress as adults does. This Stress-Busting Playbook can help you understand what to look out for and what you can do to protect your family's health.

Some of the changes happening as a result of the COVID-19 such as frequent worrisome news reports, school closures, not being able to see friends and loved ones can be disruptive and even downright scary for kids. They may have worries about their own health or the health of those they love, such as a grandparent. Or they may feel upset about missing a special event such as a birthday party, music recital,

## KEEPING AN EYE OUT FOR STRESS IN KIDS

Many of us are feeling a lot of stress right now. As adults we may be able to recognize and say "wow, I'm stressed out." For kids, no matter the age, they may not necessarily recognize it, verbalize it and it may not show up in the same way that our stress as adults does.

During challenging times, our bodies may make more stress hormones than usual. This can show up differently for different people. Babies may have differences in the sleeping and eating patterns. Toddlers and preschoolers may go back on a developmental milestones they had already achieved (like sleeping through the night or bedwetting).

One of the most common ways stress shows itself in school-aged kids is changes in their behavior. They may be a bit more irritable, bouncing off the walls, expressing boredom, or having a hard time managing their impulses, paying attention or focusing, or new behaviors may arise. Teenagers and

- You can empower them with a sense of purpose by letting them know that, even though it's kind of a pain (or especially because it is kind of a pain), their actions are protecting the most vulnerable that could get sick. E

## Six Stress-Busting Strategies For Kids

Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments in which children feel safe emotionally and physically can protect children's brains and bodies from the harmful effects of stress. You can help your child be healthier by managing your own stress response and helping your child do the same. Healthy nutrition, regular exercise, restful sleep, practicing mindfulness, building social supports, and getting

e. Limit food and beverages containing caffeine, like soda and chocolate.

4. NUTRITION:

a. This is not about losing weight. This is about ensuring you are getting proper nutrition to help combat stress. Keep regular mealtimes, includes snacks for kids. Minimize refined

- Adjusting our expectations – We recognize this is temporary and that during this time we may not be as productive as we had hoped every day. That is OK. Caregivers are balancing household responsibilities, ensuring your kids are doing their distance learning and work stress and more. All of these things can be incredibly intense. Give yourself permission to let go of judgement that you aren't doing it "right" or doing enough. Do the best you can to work the program you develop to minimize stress for you and your kids right now.
- Asking for help or take a moment – open up the communication in your house about times when we need help. Whether you have a special code word or just the reminder to yourself. If





Remember, the