

# Addressing change and uncertainty with children

Keeping up with changing elements is tough enough for adults. For children who have varying levels of maturity and understanding, it can be even more challenging. If you have a child or teen in your life, consider these tips for helping them build understanding and resiliency. They're great for parents, teachers, babysitters and other trusted adults.



## Start by listening

Before you give information or advice, make sure that you aren't making assumptions about what the child already knows or how they're feeling. Listen to your child, give them space to talk and avoid asking too many questions, which can feel overwhelming. Validate their feelings and answer any questions that they have.<sup>1,2</sup>



## Be honest and open

Especially for secondary school-age children, hearing about your own feelings can be helpful. While you don't want to worry them, sharing some thoughts and feelings can help them feel like they're not alone. It can also show them that they don't always have to pretend that everything's OK or hide their feelings. Make sure that you also share the ways that you're coping.



## Teach self-soothing

Just like you may choose a solo run, a hot bath or meditation to clear your mind when you're feeling stressed, children can find ways to self-soothe. For some, a distraction such as drawing or building a blanket fort might work. For others, cuddling with their favourite stuffed animal or spending some time outside may be calming. Encourage them to find ways to relax when uncertainty feels stressful.<sup>3</sup>



## Know when to get help

Depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns are common during “normal” times. If your child is experiencing symptoms or is having trouble when coping with change, seek professional help.<sup>3</sup> Your Emotional Wellbeing Solutions – a modern and flexible employee assistance programme (EAP) – can connect you with an Emotional Wellbeing Specialist.

Resiliency is a skill that can be learnt, and now is a great time to help children discover how to manage stress, anxiety and feelings of uncertainty. But even the most resilient people still experience tough emotions. Be there for your child and try to maintain a positive outlook.<sup>4</sup> Reassure your child that their feelings are valid. Getting some exercise, playing a game or reading together are all great ways to spend time together.

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### Critical support when you need it

Visit [optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter](https://optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter) for additional critical support resources and information.

1. Stanford Children's Health. Talking to children about COVID-19. [med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/elspap/documents/Coping-During-COVID-19\\_final\\_updated-2-.pdf](https://med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/elspap/documents/Coping-During-COVID-19_final_updated-2-.pdf). Accessed on 25 February 2021.
2. World Health Organization. #HealthyAtHome – Healthy Parenting. [who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome/healthyathome---healthy-parenting](https://who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome/healthyathome---healthy-parenting). Accessed on 25 February 2021.
3. Burch, JM. Children feeling stressed? Help them learn self-care skills! Magination Press Family. [evidencebasedmentoring.org/kids-feeling-stressed-help-them-learn-self-care-skills](https://evidencebasedmentoring.org/kids-feeling-stressed-help-them-learn-self-care-skills). Accessed on 25 February 2021.
4. American Psychological Association. Resilience guide for parents and teachers. 26 August 2020. [apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers](https://apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers). Accessed on 25 February 2021.



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