

# Franklin County Public Schools Resource for Parents



## Helping Your Child Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking the necessary actions that reduce the risk of illness. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety. This is also a tremendous opportunity for adults to model for children problem-solving, flexibility, and compassion as we all work through adjusting daily schedules, balancing work and other activities, getting creative about how we spend time, processing new information from authorities, and connecting and supporting friends and family members in new ways. The following tips can help.

### ● **Stay Calm, Listen, and Offer Reassurance**

- Be a role model for your child and be aware of how you discuss COVID-19 as children take cues from the adults in their lives. Carefully listen to their concerns and reassure them that you are taking necessary steps to keep your family safe.
- Explain social distancing to your child and how these practices will help keep the virus from spreading.
- Limit overexposure to television and social media as many stories on the internet may include inaccurate information. Also, watching information designed for adults on television news stations may increase anxiety and fear in children as they are not yet developmentally ready to process this information.
- Focus on the positive.

### ● **Establish and Maintain a Daily Routine when Possible**

Keeping a regular schedule provides a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being. It also helps children and other family members respect others' need for quiet or uninterrupted time and when they can connect with friends virtually.

### ● **Stay Connected to School**

Although the location and mode of instruction may change at different points during the school year, it is important for children and adolescents to stay connected to teachers and other students at their school. Depending on the school and teacher, different opportunities will be available for students to connect with each other. It is important that parents are aware of these opportunities and take advantage of them.

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## ● Be Aware of your Child's Mental Health

- Most children will manage well with the support of parents and other family members, even if showing signs of some anxiety or concerns, such as difficulty sleeping or concentrating. Some children, however, may have risk factors for more intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors. Risk factors can include a pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or the loss of a loved one. Parents and caregivers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks.
- Preschoolers—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal.
- Elementary school children—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.
- Adolescents—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

## ● If you notice these behaviors in your child, please contact your school's student support team by following these steps:

- Call the school and request help.
- A teacher or staff member will notify a member of the school's support team who will follow up with you to determine the most appropriate intervention for your child. Members of this team include administrators, school counselor, school social worker, school psychologist and/or family liaison.
- **School inboxes and voicemails are not checked 24 hours per day, please allow 24-48 hours for follow up.**

- **\*IMPORTANT:** Call local agencies if these symptoms are persistent over the course of two weeks. If suicidal or homicidal thoughts or ideations are present, report directly to the emergency room or Piedmont Community Services if during their office hours.
- Piedmont Community Services: (540) 483-0582
- National Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>)

If you have an immediate mental health concern, you may call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.