

summer activity guide

Family Resource:
Recognizing and Managing
Stress in Youth

QUICK
GUIDE



About the Summer Activity Guides

Summers are for fun and engaged learning. In 2020 as the impact of the pandemic is widely felt, summer opportunities will be different for young people, families, and afterschool and summer program staff. The Summer Activity Guides were developed to help engage youth with supportive adults in a range of places.

The activities and resources in the Summer Activity Guides are intentionally designed to support youth-serving summer programs in driving consistent engagement and providing ongoing opportunities for youth skill-building and emotional well-being. In addition to the activities for youth, supplemental materials will be available to support professional development and enhance family engagement.

The Guides include 150 original activities and challenges organized by four different age groups (5-9) (10-12) (13-15) (16-18). The activities are adaptable for in-person and virtual instruction, or a hybrid of both, as well as sent as take-home packets.

All activities should be safely executed and aligned with state and local health guidelines.



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Recognizing and Managing Stress in Youth

Resource for Families

INTRODUCTION

For the last few months youth everywhere have had to adjust to life during COVID-19. With school closures, extracurricular activity cancellations and social isolation, youth and their families have had to figure out how to live, work and play during the pandemic. These constant changes in their lives and isolation from their peers have left many youth feeling stressed. As families and caregivers of youth, you likely have taken on new responsibilities almost overnight and with little preparation, like homeschooling. In addition to your new responsibilities, you may be wondering or worried about your children's emotional well-being. You may be asking yourself questions, like:

- How are they doing? Is their behavior normal? How should they be coping?
- How can I help them manage their emotions?
- How can I support youth in gaining and using positive coping strategies?

Many youth will have the support they need to face the challenges of COVID-19 and their reactions to stress will be temporary. Unfortunately, some youth are at risk of developing significant mental health problems, trauma-related stress, anxiety, and depression. At especially high risk are youth who have already experienced trauma or have pre-existing mental, physical or developmental issues. The good news is that families and communities can work together to protect our youth and improve their chances of responding positively to the stressors associated with the outbreak.

The purpose of this resource is to provide guidance to families and caregivers around recognizing signs and symptoms of significant stress and trauma in youth, and to provide specific actions you can take to support youth's emotional well-being. This guide is a supplement to the [Summer Activity Guide](#), which is a suite of activities and resources intentionally designed to support youth-serving summer programs in delivering programming through multiple approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS AND TRAUMA

Living through an infectious disease outbreak is stressful, and unexpected changes and the unknown can cause many to become overwhelmed with fear and anxiety. Children and teens are particularly vulnerable to these stressful and uncertain situations, particularly when stress in the home is high and the expectations are changing constantly. Right now, youth are feeling a range of emotions, including both positive and negative feelings, and every child processes these feelings differently. Their reactions will vary depending on their age, developmental level, social support, and how they typically cope with other stressful events in their lives. As a first step, families and caregivers should be aware of these reactions and be able to identify them as a sign of stress. Common reactions to COVID-19 could include:

Signs of Stress during COVID-19 among Youth		
Youth (All Ages)	Youth (Ages 5 – 12)	Adolescents (Ages 13 – 18)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Changes in sleep or eating patterns○ Difficulty focusing and problems with attention○ Withdrawal from loved ones○ Crying or angry outbursts○ The emergence of new fears or re-emergence of old fears	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Irritability, whining and aggressive behavior○ Nightmares○ Separation anxiety or fear of being alone○ Tantrums or meltdowns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ignoring health promotion behaviors (e.g., hygiene issues, or unhealthy eating)○ Physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches or rashes○ Agitation or decrease in energy○ Use of alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism

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Beyond normal signs of stress, some young people may experience more intense and long-lasting reactions. **“Traumatic stress”** occurs when a youth experiences a traumatic event and their reactions persist and affect their daily lives after the event has ended. It negatively affects their daily functions as well as their interactions with adults and peers. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, youth may feel or experience: “depressive symptoms or anxiety, behavioral changes, difficulties with self-regulation, problems relating to others or forming attachments, regression or loss of previously acquired skills, attention and academic difficulties, nightmares, difficulty sleeping and eating, and physical symptoms, such as aches and pains. Older children may use drugs or alcohol, behave in risky ways, or engage in unhealthy sexual activity.”

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO REDUCE STRESS

Your role as a parent or caregiver to youth is critical to helping youth address and cope with their feelings during these unprecedented times. Reducing stress levels will improve you and your youth’s mental and physical health. As an adult, you can create a safe and calming environment for our children to cope with the changes. Remember to use the [3 Rs \(reassurance, routines and regulation\)](#).

HELPING YOUR YOUTH COPE

LISTEN TO THEIR FEELINGS AND VALIDATE THEM

- Check-in with youth frequently to understand their feelings. Do it at a time that is consistent with family’s activities and values. This might be mean conversations during walks, art projects or over a family dinner.
- Validate youth and reassure them. Reflect back what you hear them saying (ex. What I hear you saying is...) and ask clarifying questions (ex. How are you feeling about things now?). It may be tempting to solve the problem or downplay negative emotions, but it’s more important that you listen and show you understand.
- If your family has experienced a serious illness or death of a loved one, [find ways to support your youth](#). This may include: 1) talking to your friends and family about your loved one, 2) finding ways to honor the death of your loved one (ex. paint a memorial rock, create a playlist of that person’s favorite songs or songs that remind you of them, plant something, write a poem or story, or make a memory book), and 3) seeking religious guidance or professional counseling by phone.

MAINTAIN AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES AND ROUTINE

- Youth thrive when they have structure and routines. Routines can give youth a sense of predictability when things are unpredictable. As an example, you can work together as a family to set a realistic schedule, and allow youth to participate in creating schedule to help provide them with a sense of control.
- Be careful not to overschedule youth! Youth need free time to unwind, de-stress and do things they like doing. Alternate chores and school work with fun activities and free time.
- Encourage healthy habits – youth will feel better when they get adequate sleep, eat healthy and get exercise. You could build drinking water, eating healthy foods and getting exercise into your schedule. As families and caregivers, you can model the healthy coping behaviors that and share your healthy eating tips and routines.
- [Teach youth how to manage their reactions](#) (self-regulate) through positive coping techniques. Examples include deep breathing, exercise or meditation/yoga.
- Social distancing does not mean social isolation. Youth need quality time to connect with their peers (virtually) and caregivers. Encourage youth to stay connected with their loved ones, even if they can’t be in the same room.

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PROVIDE AGE APPROPRIATE INFORMATION

- Stay updated about what is happening with COVID-19 using reputable sources, such as the [CDC's website](#) or your state or local public health organizations.
- Reduce your and your youth's exposure to news or social media that may cause fear or panic. Be aware of how much media coverage the youth in your home is exposed to.
- [Check-in with youth regularly](#) and encourage them to ask questions. Help to clarify misinformation or misunderstandings. For older youth and teens, direct them to reputable sources of information.
- Reassure youth they are safe, and remind them that it is your job as their caregiver to protect them and keep them healthy. Talk to your youth about everyday actions they can take to protect themselves.

MANAGING YOUR EMOTIONS

Your children will look to you for guidance on how to adapt and respond to ongoing changes. Managing your stress and feelings is equally as important as helping your youth cope. The young person in your home may be picking up on your stress and anxiety without you knowing it. Model positive coping skills and controlling negative thoughts and feelings.

- These are unprecedented times and there's no playbook for what to do right now. Be kind to yourself and remind yourself that you are doing the best you can.
- Try not focus too much on the future or the past because much of this is out of your control. Practice deep breathing or meditation, and make time to clear your mind.
- Set achievable goals for you and your family, and give up on unrealistic expectations for home life during COVID-19. Each day set aside time to acknowledge your achievements for the day.
- Model calm for your youth. Try to avoid sharing your worries with youth. When you are feeling anxious, find healthy ways to ground yourself, like going for a walk or seeking out connection with friends and family members.

SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED

Sometimes what youth are going through is too big or too much for you to handle on their own. Asking for help is a sign of strength and resourcefulness. Seek professional help if your youth show signs of stress or trauma that do not resolve relatively quickly (e.g., increased aggression, nightmares, excessive anxiety, or self-harm.)

Crisis Hotlines

- Connect with a trained counselor at SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or by texting TalkWithUS 66746.
- The Crisis Text Line serves anyone in any type of crisis 24/7. Text HOME to 741741.
- The National Suicide Prevention Line provides free and confidential support to people in emotional distress 24/7. Call them at 1-800-273-8255.

Service Locators

- If you are worried about meeting the basic needs of your youth, such as food, shelter, clothing or healthcare, call, text or chat with your [local 211](#) to connect with a community resource specialist. Simply call 211.
- Find local mental health treatment by calling 1-800-662-HELP or visit <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>.

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RESOURCES

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Website on Coping with Stress:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration(SAMHSA):

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with

COVID-19: [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/parent_caregiver_guide_to_helping_families_cope_with_the_coronavirus_disease_2019_covid-19.pdf)

[sheet/parent_caregiver_guide_to_helping_families_cope_with_the_coronavirus_disease_2019_covid-19.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/parent_caregiver_guide_to_helping_families_cope_with_the_coronavirus_disease_2019_covid-19.pdf)

The American Institute of Stress's Website on Signs of Childhood Stress from COVID-19 and What to Do:

<https://www.stress.org/signs-of-childhood-stress-from-covid-19-and-what-to-do>

Child Mind Institute's Resource on Helping Parents through COVID-19

<https://27c2s3mdcxk2qzutg1z8oa91-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/WTI-ParentResource.pdf>

The 50 State Afterschool Network



The Summer Activity Guide has been developed for the 50 State Afterschool Network with leadership from the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network to engage and support children and youth nationwide.

In each state, the afterschool network is broadening opportunities for youth. Seeking equitable outcomes for underserved children to succeed in school and future jobs, a statewide afterschool network brings together cross-sector leaders with a common vision and coordinated strategy to advance quality afterschool and summer learning programs

Alabama Afterschool Community Network
Alaska Afterschool Network
Arizona Center for Afterschool Excellence
Arkansas Out of School Network
California AfterSchool Network
Colorado Afterschool Partnership
Connecticut After School Network
Delaware Afterschool Network
Florida Afterschool Network
Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network
Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance
Idaho Afterschool Network
Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now) Coalition (IL)
Indiana Afterschool Network
Iowa Afterschool Alliance
Kansas Enrichment Network
Kentucky Out-of-School Alliance
Louisiana Center for Afterschool Learning
Maine Afterschool Network
Maryland Out of School Time Network
Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership
Michigan After-School Partnership
Ignite Afterschool (MN)
Missouri AfterSchool Network
Mississippi Statewide Afterschool Network
Montana Afterschool Alliance
Beyond School Bells (NE)

Nevada Afterschool Network
New Hampshire Afterschool Network
New Jersey School- Age Care Coalition
NMOST (New Mexico Out of School Time) Network
New York State Network for Youth Success
North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs
North Dakota Afterschool Network
Ohio Afterschool Network
Oklahoma Partnership for Expanded Learning Opportunities
OregonASK
Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network
Rhode Island Afterschool Network
South Carolina Afterschool Alliance
South Dakota Afterschool Network
Tennessee Afterschool Network
Texas Partnership for Out of School Time
Utah Afterschool Network
Vermont Afterschool, Inc.
Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time
Washington Expanded Learning Opportunities Network
West Virginia Statewide Afterschool Network
Wisconsin Afterschool Network
Wyoming Afterschool Alliance