



Mental Health

If you need to get outside help for either yourself or your children, some suggestions are listed below. For help, reach out to your Military and Family Support Center, a military and family life counselor or chaplain, or other professionals who can offer support.

Reframing for Mental Health:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/reframing-defined-2610419>

Military OneSource:

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/family-relationships/family-life/preparing-your-family-for-emergencies/online-learning-resources-while-schools-are-closed> or contact Military OneSource 800-342-9647

Sleep Foundation:

<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/excessive-sleepiness/support/how-much-sleep-do-babies-and-kids-need>

Fostering Resilience Website and info on Dr. Ken Ginsburg's book, "Raising Kids to Thrive":

http://www.fosteringresilience.com/index_parents.php

Books and Resources

Here is a list of additional books that might be helpful:

"Community Crisis and Disasters A Parent's Guide to Talking with Children of All Ages"
by Paula K. Rauch, M.D. and Cynthia W. Moore, Ph.D.

"Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children" by Linda Goldman

"Making Hope Happen: Create the Future You Want for Yourself and Others"
by Shane J. Lopez, Ph.D.

"The Scaffold Effect: Raising Resilient, Self-Reliant, and Secure Kids"
by Harold Koplewicz, MD

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Parenting Through Crisis: A Quick Guide

(Adapted from Community Crisis and Disasters)

<https://www.mghpact.org/assets/media/documents/Quick%20Guide.pdf>

Key points you may want to keep in mind as you support your child during a crisis and through its aftermath:

- When talking with children, be descriptive, but objective. Words like “catastrophe,” “tragedy,” or “disaster” may unintentionally raise children’s anxiety. Focus instead on the first “four Ws”: what happened, where and when the event occurred, who was affected, and importantly, who was *not* affected. The fifth “W”—why this happened—is usually better addressed in later conversations. Remember that your emotional tone is as important as the words you use. It can be extremely difficult to help your child feel calm when you, yourself, are not feeling calm. As best you can, be aware of your tone of voice when talking to children, and to others around your children.
- Be aware of ways in which your child may be learning about events. There are so many channels that troubling news can come through: television, radio, the Internet, texts from friends, other social media, overheard conversations at home or out in the world. The more you know about how your child is learning about news, the better you can address inconsistent or incorrect information.
- Welcome all of your child’s questions. Though you may be anxious about sharing too much information with your child, encourage her to ask you anything, so you are aware of how she understands the situation, and what might be confusing. Telling a child that she asked a good question, and that you need some time to come up with a good answer and will get back to her, *and then doing so*, is preferable to discouraging or avoiding conversation.
- On the other hand, don’t wait for questions to arise before talking with children. Older children frequently learn of world events at the same time as parents, if not before! Even if your child understands the “four Ws” and rolls her eyes when you ask if she has questions, you have an important role in helping her make sense of the events and the world’s response to them.
- Don’t let your child worry alone. Encourage your child to share his worries with you. Choose check-in times that correspond with when your child is most likely to be willing to talk. Car rides, bedtime, and side-by-side activities, like washing dishes, seem to be ‘talking times’ for many children.

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- Convey confidence without promising that nothing bad can ever happen. You may very much want to reassure your child of his safety, now and in the future. On the other hand, it is important not to make promises that can't be kept. If your child asks if something bad could happen again, consider talking about the fact that it is not impossible, but is unlikely. Giving concrete examples of extremely unlikely events can make this idea more easily understood by your child.
- As much as possible, maintain your child's usual schedule. Regular routines provide a sense of security and normalcy. When this is impossible, provide as much predictability for your child, day by day, as you can. Emphasize what will be the same about her routine, and describe what will be different. An example might be: "Even though we're staying at the Red Cross shelter tonight, I'll still tell you a story when it's time for bed, and you'll have your favorite blanket."
- Keep the channels of communication open with key caregivers, such as grandparents, teachers, babysitters, coaches and the parents of close friends. Talk with these people about what your child understands about the events and any concerns about your child's response, and ask that they let you know about any changes in your child's mood or behavior.
- Respect a child's wish not to talk very much. Some children talk about all kinds of things, and others tend to think things over more on their own. All children need basic information about important events, especially about details that will affect them. But it's OK if your quieter child doesn't want to have a big discussion, even though you may feel worried that he is hiding distress. Rather than pushing him to talk, watch for changes in behavior at home or school, as well as with friends, for clues about how he is coping. Encourage him to express feelings through art, writing, or imaginative play.
- Be aware that older children may be poor judges of how exposure to media coverage of a crisis affects them. Like adults, adolescents may feel pulled to learn as much as possible about a challenging event, and you may not want to discourage their curiosity. However, too much exposure to media tends to make adults and children feel worse, and teenagers may not yet have learned that this is the case. Simply keeping the television or computer off may not be helpful advice for many families, but talking with your child about the importance of limiting time exposed to news, and helping her find other ways to spend time supports a useful skill as she becomes an independent consumer.

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- Look for positive, realistic messages that resonate with your family values. Although this may not be possible in the early stages of a crisis, doing so over time helps families adjust to challenges with resilience. Some families focus on the importance of gratitude, on appreciating the many helpers in any difficult situation, on the importance of being responsible and aware of surroundings in certain situations, or even on finding ways to help others. Others emphasize the importance of asking for help when it's needed, and asking again if help isn't offered right away. Be cautious about creating a narrative that connects many disasters around the world into a frightening pattern that a child would not have arrived at herself.
- Find ways to engage with your community after a crisis. Children, like adults, often find that being an active helper is one of the most powerful ways to regain a sense of control and optimism. Guide your child toward age-appropriate ways to become involved in your community. Some examples might be raising money for a cause related to the crisis, writing letters to people affected directly, or, for older youth, learning about advocacy roles within a variety of organizations.

Magic of the Family Meal

(Adapted from: "Home for Dinner" by Anne K. Fishel, Ph.D.)

How to bring teens to the table:

- Agree that the dinner table is off limits to discussing conflicts.
- Make the table a device-free zone.
- If scheduling conflicts interfere with dinner or mealtime, plan to meet with your family after dinner, say for dessert. Snack time or dessert time still works as shared family mealtime.
- Offer to make your teens' favorite meal or even a meal they are willing to try. Better yet, have your teen be involved with food prep.
- Create a weekly ritual where your kids' friends or extended family members are invited for dinner.
- Initiate conversations that relate to all of you. This will help kids of all ages, especially if the topic is of interest to all.
- Ask your teen to select music that you all can listen to during mealtime.
- Tell a story about something that you struggled with during the day and invite the children to help solve the problem or the dilemma.
- Speak about your own experiences from the day. Maybe share an experience that was challenging.

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- Share a joke you heard at school or work today.
- Buy or borrow from the library cookbooks from places that your family has traveled to or places that you are interested in visiting.

Tips to help with picky eaters:

- Make mealtime pleasant.
- Turn off the television and other distractions.
- Maintain a dinner routine (regular schedule, routine conversations).
- Schedule meals and snacks.
- Allow children to have a say and help prepare food.
- Model healthy eating.

What to avoid:

- Avoid forcing your child to eat.
- Avoid nagging.
- Avoid bargaining/making deals.

Videos

- “Self-Esteem: How to Feel Awesome about Being You” by RocketKids
<https://youtu.be/M6H0w03GJrQ>
- “Differences Between Life Challenges and Trauma” with Dr. Paula Rauch at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dV6fmFoPqog>
- “Professional Help when Children Need It” with Dr. Paula Rauch
https://youtu.be/SO5Tb_CE6RM
- Parenting in a Community Crisis: Lessons from the Boston Marathon” by Massachusetts General Hospital’s Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time (PACT) Program
<https://youtu.be/lgeJIRB6Rfs>

MCEC[®] Resources

- *SchoolQuest*[™] is an interactive tool, specially designed to support highly mobile military-connected parents & students:
<https://schoolquest.militarychild.org>
- The MCEC[®] podcast series covers an array of informative and important topics with guests from all walks of life. Visit [Podbean](#), [Google Playstore](#), or [iTunes](#)

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MCEC[®] Parent Support Resources

- Find other MCEC[®] Parent Programs [webinars](https://www.militarychild.org/webinars) related to this topic on our official website [militarychild.org](https://www.militarychild.org)
- Contact your local Parent Program team for workshops offered in your community: <https://www.militarychild.org/programs/parent-to-parent>
- If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to: Parents@MilitaryChild.org

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