



## **COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:**

### **PROVIDERS OF HOSPITALIZED CHILDREN**

**Version 1, 4/28/20**

Many children and adolescents will require inpatient medical care during the COVID-19 crisis, whether for COVID-19 or for other health problems. Unfortunately, many of the activities and outlets utilized to help pediatric patients adjust to the hospital setting are significantly reduced or placed on hold due to physical distancing guidelines and reduced in-hospital staff support. Here are some tips to help providers improve hospital adjustment and reduce anxiety for pediatric inpatients. Helpful resources are also included.

#### **Promote a Healing and Friendly Environment**

- Interact with children in a calm, warm, and supportive way
  - Explain your role and how you will help the child get home
- Wear a picture of yourself smiling so the patients can easily see and recognize you, which is difficult behind your mask
- Encourage children to design a mask that promotes normalcy and familiarity
- Help them make their rooms special
  - Provide them with things to brighten their rooms
  - Encourage families to bring favorite items from home to decorate the hospital room, if appropriate
- Talk with children using age-appropriate language about their health, well-being, and care plans
- Reassure children they are safe and the medical team is there to help them get better and eventually return home
- Be creative and share your talents
  - Make each child a note or a simple drawing to keep up in their room (e.g., “Dr. (your name) cares about you!”)
  - Sing
  - Tell jokes
  - Dance

#### **Prioritize Children’s Emotional Well-Being**

- Emphasize staying connected to the outside world
  - Encourage extended family and friends to send letters or messages of hope

**EMORY**

 **Grady**

 **MOREHOUSE**  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



- Suggest to children that they Face-time and video chat with loved ones who are not able to visit or not allowed to enter the hospital due to visitor restrictions
- Help children recognize and manage their feelings
  - Encourage them to create their own feeling charts
  - Encourage self-expression through writing or artwork (drawing, coloring, painting)
  - Suggest distraction when children feel anxious, sad, mad, or bored (e.g., listen to music, watch funny videos, read a book)
  - Recommend use of apps (e.g., [Helpful Apps for Coping](#)) and YouTube channels to help them participation in relaxation activities (e.g., breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, yoga, etc.)
  - Consult your hospital Certified Child Life Specialist or pediatric behavioral health professionals (e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists) if available – they can provide psychosocial and emotional support to children and adolescents in the medical setting
- Ensure children have access to virtual programming that is enjoyable, easily accessible, and age-appropriate
- Suggest a regular routine
  - Provide caregivers with education about the importance of maintaining routines for children
  - Encourage children and their caregivers to create a schedule that includes set times for meals, schoolwork, fun activities, connecting with other people, relaxation, bedtime, etc.

### **Talk to Children About COVID-19, But Not All the Time**

- Have age-appropriate conversations about COVID-19
  - Review things they can do to take care of themselves (wash their hands, not touch surfaces when outside their room)
  - Answer their questions
  - Address misinformation
  - Emphasize that COVID-19 is not like a normal cold that parent(s) treat at home but a NEW BIG sick or a NEW BIG germ that needs special medical care to help people get better
  - Tell them about all the efforts others are making to help patients stay as safe and healthy as possible



- Pay attention to their feelings
  - Ask children about their feelings about the virus
  - Normalize their fears and sadness
  - Assure them that they are not alone and remind them about the support of their family and care team
- Protect them from being overwhelmed
  - Encourage them to limit how much and what news they hear/listen to
  - Suggest that they think about enjoyable memories or activities they can do right now to help with distraction
  - Let them know you and others who work at the hospital are taking the necessary steps to keep them safe

### **Helpful Resources**

- The National Association of School Psychologists provides further recommendations - [Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting from COVID-19, NASP](#)
- ADAA provides tips for parents communicating with an anxious child or teen about COVID-19 - [How to Talk to Your Anxious Child or Teen About Coronavirus, ADAA, Richa Bhatia, MD](#)
- Livescience offers a kid's guide to understanding the coronavirus that contains school age-appropriate language, pictures to capture your child's attention, and answers to commonly asked questions - <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-kids-guide.html>
- CDC tips for helping children cope with emergencies and developmental norms for children's reactions to an emergency - [Helping Children Cope with Emergencies, CDC](#)
- The Child Life Disaster network provides resources (tip sheets, coping strategies, parenting/family resources and activities) to support children through natural and man-made disasters - [www.clsdisasterrelief.org](http://www.clsdisasterrelief.org)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network provides a healthcare worker and parent toolkit addressing child stress in its' infinite stages - [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)
- If you are feeling overwhelmed by emotion or thinking of harming yourself or others, you may wish to call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text Talk-WithUs to 66746. (TTY 1-800-846-8517)