

COVID-19: ODD, ADHD and STRESS

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All people can experience difficulties coping with stress. Children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are no exception. Some become anxious, some become active, some become sad, and some become aggressive (and everything in between). It is important to remember their specific struggles and strengths to help them learn and cope better.

Maintain a normal daily routine

During times of stress, maintaining as normal of a daily routine as possible often helps minimize the impact of stress. This can be especially important for children with ADHD or ODD, who may especially need structure, routine, and predictability.

Daily Routine:

- Morning routine-wake up time, morning jobs to accomplish, and the morning meal. A good time to connect with your child and plan for the day.
- Online schooling-if possible, maintain the same daily schedule that the child would have at school. Begin and end largely on time. Children with ADHD may have more struggles staying focused; they may need more breaks than other children, more opportunities for movement, and longer tasks broken into smaller chunks for them.
- Noon meal-this is a time for a break, nourishment, and reconnection between parent and child. Some physical activity could also be beneficial. If your child has a midday recess at school, so should you at home. The same goes with naps.
- Online schooling-continue with the child's usual afternoon schedule. Online school dismissal can mirror the child's usual day at school. Bonus idea: Since this is online schooling, no homework! Hooray!!
- Afternoon-activities, play, and exercise. This is a good time for sports (as appropriate), online peer activities, and family fun such as games. One could also scatter periods of play and exercise throughout the day as needed (especially if the child usually has recess).
- Evening meal-nourishment and reconnection between parent and child. A good time to review and reflect on the day.
- Evening Activities-whatever may be usual for your child in your household. Watch TV, play board games, read, hobbies, enjoy each other's company. Consider setting up family fun time and time for each family member to "do your own thing", with hobbies and activities.
- Bedtime-time to wind down and get ready for sleep. Another good time to review and reflect on the events of the day and anticipate tomorrow.

Things to consider:

- Go to bed on time- Sleep and sleep schedules are important for health, outlook on life, and good self-control. This can be especially important for children/teens with ADHD. When we start getting less sleep than we need, we can have declines in focus/attention, impulse control, memory, and thinking speed.
- Mind what you eat- Maintain a good healthy diet. Be sure to offer nutritious and healthy foods. Poor nutrition can exacerbate behavior problems.
- Do not just sit there- Make sure that everyone gets adequate physical activity and exercise. Physical activity is necessary for health and well-being. It can especially be helpful before an activity that requires attention or focus.
- Listen up-Maintain all household rules regarding behavior and demeanor. Children with ADHD and ODD will especially need this consistency and predictability. If something was wrong or against the rules before the stressor, then it is also wrong and against the rules when we have the stressor.

Examples of active coping skills:

- Diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and other relaxation skills
- Mindfulness skills: Meditation, body scan, self-compassion, and others

For teens:

- Learn the Diaphragmatic Breathing Technique <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgTL5G1iblo>
- Relaxation (Johns Hopkins): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=intVpw4LhMY>
- Guided Imagery (Johns Hopkins): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35ch88kmlls>
- Relaxation Downloads: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/downloads.html>

For Younger children:

- Breathe Think Do with Sesame Street (Android & Apple app stores)
- Sesame Street Common and Colbie Caillat - "Belly Breathe" with Elmo
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZbzDOpyIA>

