

Child Safety during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has quickly changed our lives, and the resulting uncertainty is stressful for all families. Parents worry about unstable finances, lost jobs and lower income. Everyone is worried about their health and we are all working hard to change behavior to avoid catching the virus.

This means that schools and many childcares are closed, and families are together for long periods of time in a way that is very different from their usual schedules. While family time can be fun and enjoyable, the stress can overcome parents and caregivers, and relationships can become strained.

During this time, children may show signs of increased stress, which can impact the entire family. Research has found that when families are stressed, children are at an increased risk of being abused. Research also shows that just being in the presence of a compassionate, safe adult can help kids calm down. Managing your own stress will help your child manage their stress.

To get support for yourself and your family dial **2-1-1 ext. 6** or text **HMGVT to 898211**. Child development specialists at [Help Me Grow](#) can connect your family to critical resources and help you support your child's development and resiliency, especially now.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, please contact the Vermont Department for Children and Families at 1-800-649-5285. If a child is in immediate danger, call 911 or the local police first.

Tips for Families at Home

The Governor issued a "[Stay Home Stay Safe Executive Order](#)," which means that Vermonters are directed to stay at home and leave only for essential reasons such as: personal safety; groceries, medicine or medical care; exercise and work. Here are some tips and resources for managing the stress.

Outline Daily Routines in Writing

- Create a realistic schedule for yourself and children. Routine and structure are calming during times of stress.
- Identify a goal for each day and then break it down into tasks/steps.
- Include breaks for your family to eat healthy meals and snacks throughout the day.
- Schedule time each day for physical activity. Exercise and fresh air will help all family members to stay healthy.
- Be creative and flexible with your family and yourself to allow for family members' emotional needs.

Prioritize Parent's Stress Management

- Manage your own anxiety. Parents and caregivers need time to themselves, and it is okay to take a break and allow each person in the family to be independent while considering the child's age. For example, give infants and toddlers quiet time in the safety of their crib.
- At some point, every parent will lose their temper. When this happens, take a deep breath, leave the room or the house if you can do so safely, and allow yourself time to calm down. You will be modeling healthy ways to manage strong emotions for your children.
- Pace yourself. It is likely to be a long period of time during which your family is physically distancing from others.
- Prioritize social connections with family and friends by scheduling time to speak with others by phone or online.
- Find ways to reach out to other parents to give and receive support.

Help Children Cope with Stress

- Expect behavioral issues in children and respond gently. Pay positive attention when helping your child deal with an emotion, notice efforts to calm down, however small.
- Expect increased anxiety, worries and fears, nightmares, difficulty separating or sleeping, testing limits, and meltdowns. Validate your child's feelings. Validation can help a child calm down by communicating that you understand and accept what they're feeling. Do not introduce major behavioral plans or consequences at this time—hold stable and focus on building emotional connections.
- Make space for children to ask questions and talk about their concerns. Talk to children in clear, age-appropriate ways about what's going on to help them understand.

Resources for Families

- [Prevent Child Abuse Vermont](#) under the Programs Tab. For support, call the [Parent's Help Line](#) at 1-800-CHILDREN (800-244-5373) or 802-229-5724 or email pcavt@pcavt.org
- [Department of Children and Families](#) Child Safety and Protection
- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) Positive Parenting
- [Vermont Department of Health](#) Coping with COVID-19 Stress
- [The Child Mind Institute](#) Supporting Families During COVID-19
- [Child Trends](#) Ways to Promote Children's Resilience to the COVID-19 Pandemic