

TEXAS PHYSICIANS SAY:

YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS MATTER



Physicians Caring for Texans

texmed.org



Texas Pediatric Society

The Texas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
INCORPORATED IN TEXAS

txpeds.org

During the COVID-19 pandemic, families have experienced a variety of difficult and stressful situations. For children, school closures, virtual learning, change in routine, and social isolation have taken a physical and mental toll on their emotional wellbeing.

To help you and your child navigate these uncertain times, physicians with the Texas Medical Association School Reopening Workgroup and the Texas Pediatric Society want you to recognize the signs of stress in your child, and actions you can take to help them.

1 LOOK FOR SIGNS

Children show stress in different ways. Here are some behaviors to look for:

- Anxiety or Nervousness
- More Withdrawn
- Easily Frustrated
- Anger/Irritability
- Change in Usual Sleeping Patterns
- Outbursts
- Mood Swings
- Sadness
- Drug or Alcohol Use
- Trouble Focusing

2 SEEK HELP

The following people can help you cope and help your child if you're concerned.

- Your Child's Doctor or Your Doctor
- School Counselor, Teacher, or Coach
- Community Support Services
- Trusted Family Member or Friend
- Your Clergy/Religious Leaders

3 TAKE ACTION

If you choose to see your child's physician, they will check their mind and body for any physical illness. They may talk to you about how medication can address the way your child feels. They also may recommend therapy or counseling to help your child deal with his/her emotions.

If you choose to see a therapist, it's important to be persistent in scheduling the initial appointment and to choose someone who makes you and your child feel comfortable.

Here are some questions to ask when seeking a therapist:

- Are they accepting new patients?
- Do they take your insurance or provide sliding scale payments?
- When is the next appointment?
- Do they have options to meet over video chat as well as in person?
- What steps can you take while waiting for an appointment?

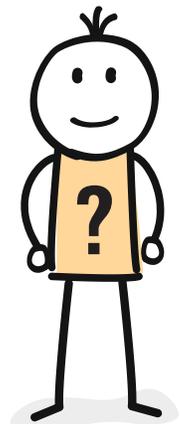
When you choose therapy or counseling for your child, you may be involved by:

- Meeting with the therapist along with your child
- Learning new skills to support your child
- Create a new plan or routine at home

4 IDENTIFY FEELINGS AND TAKE STEPS

A child's feelings and behavior may indicate they are under stress. The table to the right can help you recognize your child's emotions, let them know that that it is acceptable to acknowledge those feelings, and then suggest steps they can take to help them cope positively and effectively.

As a parent or caregivers, you also may be experiencing an unusual amount of stress. It's important to acknowledge and address your own feelings so that you can be best prepared to help your child.



HOW DO YOU FEEL?

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

HAPPY, CALM, CONTENT

Smiling, Laughing, Engaged

Help someone else
Notice and enjoy your positive mood
Engage in an enjoyable activity

SAD, NEGATIVE, LONELY

Crying, Withdrawn, Disengaged

Set a positive goal for the day
Call a friend or relative
Journal about your feelings

ANXIOUS, WORRIED, UNSETTLED

Pacing, Avoiding, Cling

Talk to a family member/friend
Pay attention to each of your 5 senses
Focus on what you can control

FRUSTRATED, ANNOYED, IRRITABLE

Arguing, Refusing, Shutting down

Meditate/pray
Listen to favorite music
Take a fast-paced walk

ANGRY, FURIOUS, EXPLOSIVE

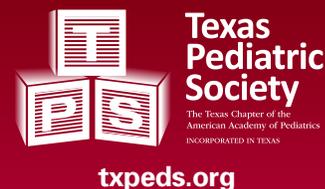
Yelling, Stomping, Meltdown

Vigorous physical exercise
Breathe deep breaths
Take a warm shower or bath

Some feelings may be more concerning than others. **If your child talks about harming themselves or others, do not ignore it and contact a health care professional immediately.** The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can assist and can be reached 24 hours a day, seven days a week at (800) 273-8255.

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Racial stress can make mental health worse for children and adolescents. How to talk about it and get help:

- <https://www.apa.org/res/parent-resources/racial-stress>
- <https://discoveries.childrenshospital.org/racism-child-health/>
- <https://www.childrens.com/health-wellness/how-to-talk-to-children-about-racism>

Families whose children are questioning or talking about their gender identity or sexual orientation and undergoing significant stress can contact:

- <https://pflag.org/hotlines>
- <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/sexual-orientation.html?WT.ac=hottopic>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (www.aacap.org):
[Family](#) and [Youth](#) Resources
- MGH Clay Center (www.mghclaycenter.org)
- Campaign to Change Direction (changedirection.org)
- Crisis hotlines and resources (American Psychological Association)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (www.nami.org)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (www.nctsn.org)

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