

Helping Children Cope

Your children may respond differently to an outbreak, depending on their age. Below are some reactions according to the age group, and the best ways you can respond.

Age Group	Reactions	How to Help
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of being alone, bad dreams • Speech difficulties • Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting • Change in appetite • Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience and tolerance • Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) • Encourage expression through play, story-telling • Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements • Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime • Maintain regular family routines • Avoid media exposure
School-Age (ages 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior • Clinging, nightmares • Sleep/appetite disturbance • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches) • Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest • Competition for parent's attention • Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and internet • Regular exercise and stretching • Engage in educational activities (workbooks, games) • Participate in structured household chores • Set gentle but firm limits • Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community. • Encourage expression through play and conversation • Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard • Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation
Adolescent (ages 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches) • Sleep/appetite disturbance • Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy • Ignoring health promotion behaviors • Isolating from peers and loved ones • Concerns about stigma and injustices • Avoiding/cutting schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Encourage continuation of routines • Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force) • Stay in touch with friends through telephone, internet, video games • Participate in family routines, including chores; supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard • Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak

Source: [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

Carver County Public Health
600 Fourth Street East
Chaska, MN 55318-2102



Phone (952) 361-1329
Fax (952) 361-1360
public-health@co.carver.mn.us
www.co.carver.mn.us

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