Children and Families during COVID-19 Pandemic

Psychoanalytic Perspectives and Therapeutic Responses

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Psychoanalytic Perspectives and Therapeutic Responses

4. Psychological Repercussions of Global Disaster
4. Traumatic Responses in Children and Families
4. Psychological Interventions: Principles and Practice
4. Recommended Resources
Nature of COVID-19 Global Disaster

Catastrophic Psychological and Physical Consequences

- Exacerbation of pre-existing vulnerabilities
- Massive Disruption of daily life and structure
- Quarantine
- Splitting up of families
- Suspension of work and school
- Shortage of basic supplies
- Massive Economic impact
Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Community Disaster: Dangers & Opportunities

- Psychological dangers in reaction to pandemic

  AND

- Potential opportunities to transform developmental crises
Massive Impact on Children and Families

Children embedded within family and societal structure

- Children --> Siblings/Parents/Grandparents/Caregivers
- "There's no such thing as a baby" (Winnicott. D.)
- Pre-existing vulnerability of child and family
- Activation of transgenerational and cultural trauma
- Developmentally specific responses
- Resources and resilience of individual and group
Multicenter survey: 1,563 medical staff at Nanfang Hospital, Southern Medical University (Guangzhou, China)

- 50.7% with depression (score of >5 in Patient Health Questionnaire-9)
- 44.7% with anxiety (score of >5 in Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7)
- 36.1% with insomnia (score of >8 in Insomnia Severity Index)
- 73.4% with stress-related symptoms (score of >9 in Impact of Events Scale-Revised)
Traumatic responses in children

- Catastrophic events beyond child's regulatory capacity
- Immediate or delayed responses
- Impacted by age, development, responses of parent, caregiver, community
Common Traumatic responses in children

• intense feelings of fear, vulnerability, death anxiety
• frequent crying, sleep disruption & nightmares; separation anxiety & clinginess, repetitive play
• withdrawal, irritability and aggressive outbursts
## Preschool Children

Common responses and ways to help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP</th>
<th>REACTIONS</th>
<th>HOW TO HELP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRESCHOOL</td>
<td>Fear of being alone, bad dreams</td>
<td>Patience and tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech difficulties</td>
<td>Provide reassurance (verbal and physical)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting</td>
<td>Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change in appetite</td>
<td>Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors</td>
<td>Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maintain regular family routines</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid media exposure</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, March 2020
# School-Age Children (ages 6-12)

## Common responses and ways to help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL-AGE (ages 6-12)</th>
<th>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior</td>
<td>Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinging, nightmares</td>
<td>Regular exercise and stretching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep/appetite disturbance</td>
<td>Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)</td>
<td>Participate in structured household chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest</td>
<td>Set gentle but firm limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition for parents’ attention</td>
<td>Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school</td>
<td>Encourage expression through play and conversation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, March 2020
## Adolescent (ages 13-18)

### Common responses and ways to help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Responses</th>
<th>Ways to Help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)</td>
<td>Patience, tolerance, and reassurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep/appetite disturbance</td>
<td>Encourage continuation of routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy</td>
<td>Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring health promotion behaviors</td>
<td>Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolating from peers and loved ones</td>
<td>Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about stigma and injustices</td>
<td>Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding/cutting school</td>
<td>Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Psychological Risks with Quarantine

- Unstructured time: risk of emotional dysregulation
- Disruption of routines: ill-health due to poor sleep, exercise ...
- Social isolation from peers and teachers: affective/anxiety disturbances
- Aggravation of pre-existing family conflicts, interpersonal tensions
Helping Homebound Children

- Fortify the family structure
- Foster open communication
- Connect to support networks
Fortify Family Structure

- Adults to model and encourage healthy self-care
- Restore a secure holding environment
- Foster child's sense of agency & locus of control
Foster open communication I

Holding and Containment

- Create environment of safety/security which child internalizes
- Value child's need to know and inquiry
- Correct myths and misconceptions regarding stigma
- Highlight personal responsibility (agency & altruism)
- Limit and discuss media reports
Foster open communication II

Holding and Containment

- Preserve trustworthy relationship and respond honestly
- Use developmentally appropriate language
- Recognize children's sensitivity to personalize
- Reassure about medical help but avoid unrealistic promises

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, 2020
COVID-19: General Information

Example of communication

- new strain of a family of viruses discovered in the 1960s
- Coronaviruses named after "crown" or corona of sugary proteins
- Usually lead to mild illness with cough and runny nose
- Speculation that COVID-19 emerged from animals (likely bats)
COVID-19 in Children

Example of communication

- Very low number of reported COVID-19 cases
- Only less than 1% of confirmed cases were children
- Children with pre-existing illnesses may have different risk
- No reported deaths in children
- May play role in COVID-19 transmission
Giving Children Psychological "H.A.N.D.S"

Honestly communicate
Actively cope
Network with peers and adults
Developmentally Specific Way

Kliman, G., "A Guided Workbook for Children's Mental Health", The Children's Psychological Health Center
Connect to support networks

- Technology to maintain healthy social connections to friends & family
- Explore access to child's medical team
- Maintain education with distance learning opportunities
- Access online therapy services if available
- Provide urgent on-site care if acute safety risk
Therapeutic Approach I

- Adopt a non-judgmental supportive stance
- Prioritize focus on safety
- Create and preserve trusting relationship
- Prepare for child's misinformation, and correct misunderstandings
Therapeutic Approach II

- Listen for unconscious and symbolic meanings
- Provide many opportunities for child's expression of feelings [non-directive play, drawings, conversation]
- Inspire hope: global efforts to find preventive and treatment approaches

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2020
Resources

National Health Commission of China

• "Notification of principles for emergency psychological crisis intervention for the COVID-19 epidemic" (January 26, 2020)
• "Notice on establishing psychological assistance hotlines for the epidemic" (February 2, 2020)
• "Guidelines for psychological assistance hotlines during the COVID-19 epidemic (February 7, 2020)

Chinese Association for Mental Health

• "Guidelines for public psychological self-help and counselling of 2019-nCoV pneumonia"

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References and Resources


6. Advice for Parents of Young Children during the epidemic, by D. Osofsky, PhD &aHarold J. Osofsky. M.D., Ph.D.