SEED Study to Explore Early Development

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Managing Stress and Building Resilience in Families with Young Children

Parents of young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other developmental concerns face unique challenges that can cause high levels of stress. Some factors that add stress to family life include coping with a new diagnosis, managing challenging behaviors, and complex therapy schedules. Raising children during the COVID-19 pandemic is also likely to be a source of stress for most families. Research shows that taking steps to build family resilience can help reduce the stress caused by these challenges and improve the quality of family life.

Resilience is the ability to adapt to stress and life changes. We gain resilience by developing good coping skills. Increasing resilience, or improving good coping skills, may be very useful during the current COVID-19 pandemic, which is an added source of stress. Good coping skills can include connecting with family and friends through video or phone calls, emails, or texts; taking some time for yourself each day to relax or do something enjoyable; taking time for family fun; or planning ahead for coming changes when you can. We will take a closer look at two of these good coping skills: scheduling family fun and planning for new events or routines.

Scheduling Fun Family Activities

Parenting can be a hard job, and it is important to take time for the fun aspects of raising a child. Consider your child's favorite activities. Ask your child what he or she likes to do. How can you join in and play along? You can set one evening each week for your child to decide what the family will do together. Remember that your child can show you their preferences even without speaking. You can give your child a few choices of things you know they enjoy. If you have more than one child, assign a certain day to dedicate to each child's favorite things to do so they can take turns choosing the activity. Daily schedules become hectic, and all too often, fun activities are postponed in favor of essential day-to-day tasks. Scheduling time for family fun is a great way to build resilience and better cope with stress. Here are a few resources you may find helpful:

Helping Children Cope:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/for-parents.html

Daily Activities and Going Out:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/going-out.html

Students: Care for yourself one small way each day:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/mental-health/Students-Care-for-Yourself.pdf

Support for Teens and Young Adults:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/stress-coping/young-adults.html

Planning for New Experiences

Family stress tends to increase during times of change, and the COVID-19 pandemic has caused many changes. Children may have had to leave an Early Intervention program, switch from in-person school to virtual school, or do something new, like wear a mask when seeing their friends or to go to the store. When multiple changes happen close together, the need for good coping skills becomes more important. It can be helpful to plan for new experiences before they occur to gain confidence and feel more in control during those times. Learning more about new things or changes that are coming will help you plan for how your family will work them into new routines and still feel in control. When parents and children feel a sense of control, it decreases stress and improves family resilience.

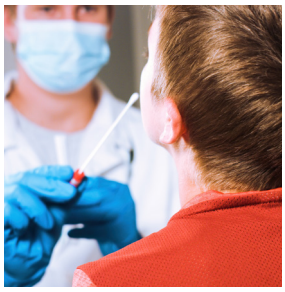
Two likely sources of new stress for parents and children are getting a COVID-19 test and getting a COVID-19 vaccine. Knowing more about what to expect and how to prepare can help with decision-making and can increase feelings of control for parents and children. Here is some information that may help you and your child feel more in control about these two topics.

CS 320717-A

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities

Helping Your Child Prepare for a COVID-19 Test

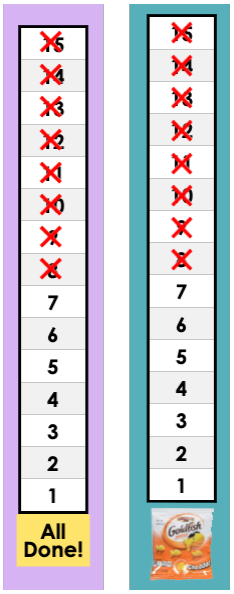
Adapted From: https://teacch.com/resources/teacch-tips/17_covid_testing_prep/



There are different ways of collecting a specimen to test for COVID-19. Most often, a swab is inserted into the nose and swirled around for a few seconds. Sometimes a throat swab is inserted into the mouth and swirled around the upper throat for a few seconds; other times, a saliva (spit) sample is collected.

To help your child be ready for a COVID-19 test, try this approach:

1. Gather information to present to your child ahead of the test appointment. Ask your provider what to expect. Will we stay in our car or go into the building? Will we have a long wait for our turn or not? Will the person who does the test be wearing anything unusual that my child might not have seen before (a face shield or a special suit over their clothes)? What type of test is this—nasal swab or saliva sample or something else? How far will the swab be put into my child's nose? How long will the swab be in my child's nose?
2. Plan to be honest with your child. The nasal swab to test for COVID-19 is uncomfortable and may feel like water rushing up their nose. You can tell your child it might sting a little or it might be a little uncomfortable. Tell your child this test is important to make sure their body is healthy.
3. Arrange the information that you gather into a list or a story with pictures. Try to match the list or story to your child's ability to understand. If your child reads, use a combination of words and pictures to show them the process. If they do not read, use pictures with a few words or a video.
4. Read the list or story several times before the day of the test. This will help your child have a better understanding of what is going to happen. Keep the list or story with you in the car to read once again when you get to the testing site. You might check off items on the list or review the story as your child goes through the testing process.
5. Decide on a distraction activity to use while your child is having their nose swabbed. This could be a favorite activity like watching a video. It could also be a calming activity like squeezing a ball or rubbing their hands on something soft like a favorite blanket or stuffed animal. Or it could be a counting activity, specific song or song series that will last at least as long as the swabbing.
   a. Having an idea of how long something uncomfortable will last and when it will be finished helps reduce anxiety.
   b. For some children, a verbal and visual countdown is helpful, as you can adjust the pace of the counting to the pace of the swabbing. Show the visual countdown of how long the swab will be in their nose and show the passage of time by crossing off (or removing) the numbers as you verbally count down. The last item can be the words "all done," or you might have the word (or picture) of a treat that your child will get when the swabbing is finished. Be sure to ask your healthcare provider how long it will take them to get a sample. You can make a paper countdown like one of these:



Other resources about COVID-19: Talking with children about COVID-19

Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines

COVID-19 vaccination is an essential tool to stop the pandemic. COVID-19 vaccines help protect people who are vaccinated from getting sick or severely ill with COVID-19. None of the COVID-19 vaccines can make you sick with COVID-19.

It's important for you, as a parent or caregiver, to get vaccinated, especially if you or your children have health conditions that may put you or your family at higher risk for getting COVID-19 or becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. Siblings age 16 or over are also eligible to get vaccinated. Once you are fully vaccinated for COVID-19, you may be able to start doing things that you stopped doing because of the pandemic. For example, you can gather indoors without masks with small groups of friends or family who are fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 vaccines teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. It typically takes two weeks after vaccination for the body to build protection (immunity) against the virus that causes COVID-19. Experts are learning more about variants of the virus and how long protection from COVID-19 vaccination lasts. After you've been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, you should keep taking precautions—like wearing a mask, staying 6 feet apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces—in public places until we know more.

Some vaccines, like the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, require two doses for the best protection. Johnson & Johnson's Janssen Vaccine requires only one dose.

None of the currently authorized and recommended COVID-19 vaccines should be given to children younger than age 12.

COVID-19 vaccines are being evaluated in clinical trials in children and adolescents.

Tens of millions of people in the United States have already received a COVID-19 vaccine. The federal government is making these vaccines available for everyone at no cost.

Talk to your doctor if you have questions about getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

Other COVID-19 Vaccine Resources:

For additional information about vaccinations and how to protect yourself and others:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html

For a better understanding of the benefits of getting a COVID-19 vaccine:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html

For a better understanding of how COVID-19 vaccines work:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/how-they-work.html

For additional facts about COVID-19 vaccines:

https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-vaccine/art-20484859

COVID-19 Vaccines 101: FAQ

https://www.webmd.com/vaccines/covid-19-vaccine/news/20201216/covid-19-vaccines-101-faq

3 Things Parents Should Know About the COVID-19 Vaccines and Children:

https://healthtalk.unchealthcare.org/3-things-parents-should-know-about-the-covid-19-vaccines-and-children/?_ga=2.43275429.185299988.1610480815-703959718.1610132296

Autism and COVID-19 Vaccines FAQ:

https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/COVID%20webinar%20FAQ_1-29-21NEW.pdf

World Health Organization (WHO) videos about SARS-CoV-2, vaccines, and variants:

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/media-resources/science-in-5/episode-2

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/media-resources/science-in-5/episode-17---covid-19---vaccine-approvals

https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/media-resources/science-in-5/episode-20---covid-19---variants-vaccines

How Do I Find a COVID-19 Vaccine?
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/How-Do-I-Get-a-COVID-19-Vaccine.html

SEED & COVID-19 Update

In 2021, all SEED 3 sites are following up with families to collect information on the impact of COVID-19 on services, behaviors, and health during 2020 to help inform public health strategies for young children (aged 3-9 years) and their families, especially during public health emergencies.

Highlights of SEED Progress

SEED has grown!

The Study to Explore Early Development is one of the largest studies in the United States of children with autism. At the completion of SEED, we have information on over 6,000 children and their families.

Please visit: SEED | Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) | CDC for more information about the SEED study.