

FS1958 (Revised February 2025)

Children and Illness:

Helping Adolescents

Ages 9 to 13 Years Old



Common Reactions of Adolescents

- Fears and anxiety about being sick, concern about being alone or what might happen next
- Irritability toward siblings, peers or parents who may be preoccupied by their own stressors
- Sadness about missed events, friends, loss, isolation; may withdraw
- Sleep or physical problems related to illness, stress
- Repetitive thoughts, questions about illness, discussions and concerns
- Need for help from parents and other adults



What to Say and Do

- ✓ Encourage adolescents who are feeling ill or concerned about illness to talk about their feelings while you listen carefully. Ask open-ended questions so they can direct the conversation and you can assess their thoughts and feelings.
- ✓ Acknowledge your children's health concerns for themselves and others.
- ✓ Reassure your adolescents about their health and safety. Explain what you, as a parent, and other adults will do to provide wellness measures or healthcare support.
- ✓ Talk about the adolescent's need to follow health guidelines for hand washing, surface sanitizing, sneezing and coughing hygiene, keeping a distance in public and staying away from group activities. Also, discuss following public health guidelines for other actions if those are in place.
- ✓ If a family member or loved one is ill, encourage helping with tasks. Discuss and divide family work. Do chores new to the child together the first time to provide assistance, tools and expectations. Entertaining younger siblings if parents are ill at home allows the adolescent to practice caring for children without all of the responsibility.
- ✓ Reduce exposure to extensive media coverage during an illness outbreak. Answer questions directly as they arise.
- ✓ Ask your children what they know about an illness or illness outbreak and how they know it. They are likely to see or seek out both good information and misinformation on social media. Spend time, as needed, to compare what each person has heard or read and use an internet fact-finder to verify facts about any illness and safe practices.
- ✓ Read books or watch movies together that involve people dealing with challenges, such as illness. Ask children what they think about the characters and their actions.
- ✓ Contact grandparents or older friends or relatives who have lived through challenging illness or health concerns. Ask them to share their stories of resilience with your children. How did they manage and survive? What was different after their illness or health concern?
- ✓ Allow children to participate in opportunities such as researching needs, making donations, providing services or doing other appropriate activities from home to help others during illness.

Show adolescents an example of self-control and positive coping in the face of illness or change. An example of a positive attitude, maturity and caring will help children as they choose their responses to illness, an illness outbreak or a pandemic.

For the complete publication, go to:

www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/kids-family/talking-to-children-about-pandemics

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