

Playtime, deep breaths, and movement can help calm kids' COVID fears

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COVID-19 is widespread in the U.S., and even the nation's youngest kids are feeling the anxiety that comes with facing the ongoing pandemic. From missing school, to hearing about classmates getting

sick—and often catching it themselves—it's harder than ever to shield children from COVID-19 news.

What should parents be saying to their kids to help calm their fears or anxieties? And for kids that are especially anxious about the latest surge, what can caregivers do to ease those feelings?

Rachel Razza is Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies Graduate Director at Syracuse University's Falk College. The primary focus of Dr. Razza's [scholarly work](#) is [children](#)'s self-regulation, a multifaceted construct that encompasses a variety of skills underlying children's ability to monitor cognitive strategies and adapt behavior to fit situational demands.

Professor Razza provides advice for parents and caregivers about how to talk to their kids about COVID-19. The information below can be quoted directly. She is also available for an interview.

Focus on mindfulness

"We know that levels of anxiety in children have been rising and shifting downward in age over the last decade and unfortunately, these trends were exacerbated by the pandemic. In terms of calming anxiety, one recommendation that aligns with research and practice includes mindfulness-based exercises. By nature, mindfulness works to lessen anxiety by helping individuals focus on the present moment rather than worrying about the future, which is where anxiety thrives. The evidence suggests that even [young children](#) can use simple breathwork and movement to help connect with their bodies and acknowledge thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations and respond with kindness and curiosity."

Breath practice can benefit kids and adults

"Although mindfulness may not prevent anxiety altogether, it can help children notice when they may be feeling anxious, and thus may prompt them to try a breath practice and/or start a conversation about their worry. There are also excellent children's books that caregivers can use to help cultivate mindful practices and/or address anxiety and the pandemic with their children in a way that is reassuring and hopeful. An added bonus is that caregivers, who may also be experiencing heightened anxiety, may also benefit from sharing these practices and stories with their children."

Play is powerful

"Another suggestion for helping children's cope with anxiety is play. Play is a powerful medium that can both help children experience a reprieve from anxiety as well as work through their fears in the context of their play. The importance of play for helping children deal with [anxiety](#) and trauma is highlighted by the work of play therapists and child life specialists. Caregivers can cultivate play opportunities at home with open-ended materials, like art supplies or figurines/dolls, where children are free to engage in the process of play and create materials or scenarios that reflect their current thoughts or feelings. A tip for parents is to let their children take the lead in the activity and work to stay present in the play, possibly by reflecting on what they observe or participating alongside their child."

Provided by Syracuse University

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