

Ask: What do you feel?

What do you need?

As educators, parents, other family members, or caregivers of any kind, we want to help others, including children and adolescents during this time. Do this by noticing what folks need and then, thinking together about how to best meet those needs. Start with yourself. Then, ask others, “What do you feel?” And, “What do you need?” Work together to meet those needs as best you can. That having been said, kids can’t always put their feelings and needs into words. Here are some ideas about what many youth might be feeling and needing right now. As always, if you are concerned about a child or adolescent, seek support, including crisis support or call 911 if there is an emergency, such as a mental health emergency.

Kids: I feel...

- Unsafe or scared of the virus (worse if I’m sick, have health needs, someone’s ill, there’s been a death, I’ve had trauma, or I love a healthcare worker).
- Big feelings (or no feelings if I’m numb). I can’t control the changes in my world, including loss of school, less freedom, and not being with friends or teachers.
- Upset and anxious because folks are stressed; the news is scary (on repeat).
- Unwell due to stress (e.g., headaches and tummy troubles). Since this is a health crisis, these body clues might worry me more when I notice them.
- Mood (e.g., irritability or boredom) and behavior changes (e.g., over or under-reacting to things, clinginess, forgetfulness, as well as possible sleeping or eating concerns).

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Kids: I need...

- To **feel safe** - Be with me, meet my needs, and help me hear *just right* (not *too much*) truthful information about what’s happening, plus how to be healthy. Don’t keep the news on a lot or let me see you get overwhelmed.
- To **be connected** - Connect with me. Listen more than you talk. Understand that I need to connect with friends and teachers. How can you help with that?
- To **get regulated** - Give me routine, help with my feelings, and boundaries. Comfort me in ways that work for me and help me make sense of my reactions. Then, have fun with me, let me play, invite me to create, and have access to hands on, sensory activities, lots of movement, as well as music.
- To **learn** - Answer my questions (not more), clear up misunderstandings, help me learn about things I want to learn about, do familiar school-related activities, and have as much choice and freedom as is safe so I can grow.

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