

# Collaborating with Caregivers

## Family Handbook

### Dear Families,

We have assembled this booklet in hopes that it can be a resource during these difficult times. Included are helpful phone numbers, family strengthening ideas, ways to support your children, and personal wellness strategies. We hope you will find this useful! **Best Wishes, Collaborating with Caregivers Team: Aparajita “Tuma” Kuriyan, Carlos Santana, Alicia LeGray Evans, Toyin Anderson, & Jerard Johnson.**

### Important Resources

- From the Monroe County Website: If you are experiencing fever, cough or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider. Do not visit your doctor’s office or an emergency room without calling first so staff members can take appropriate precautions. If you do not have a health care provider, contact the Monroe County Dept of Public Health’s COVID-19 hotline/email: (585) 753-5555 or [COVID19@monroecounty.gov](mailto:COVID19@monroecounty.gov)
- General COVID Questions: New York State COVID-19 Hotline at (888) 364-3065.
- COVID-19 Emotional Support Hotline (24 hours) For youth and adults @ (844) 863-9314
- Dial 2-1-1 (Lifeline) for any information, including food, housing & crisis services.
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 (1-800-799-SAFE)
- New York State Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-342-3720
- RCSD District Support Hotline: 585-262-8700
- Behavioral Health Services:
  - UR Med: Pediatric Behavioral Health & Wellness (PBH&W) Outpatient Services- (585) 279-7800; ages birth to 18; patients are being seen via Telehealth.
  - UR Med: Mental Health & Wellness- For adult patients 18+ @ (585) 273-5050
  - Rochester Regional Health: Genesee Mental Health Center (GMHC) For patients; age 5 through adult; 585-922-7770.
  - Liberty Resource Behavioral Health- 585-410-3370 ext. 200 or 201; or go online <https://www.liberty-resources.org>.
  - Catholic Family Center (CFC) - For patients age 5 through adult; (585) 546-7220
  - Villa of Hope Behavioral Health- (585) 328-0834
  - Hillside Family of Services- (585) 256-7500
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline (24 Hours) Free, confidential prevention & crisis resources for people in distress. (800) 273-8255 or online @<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>
- Parenting and Behavioral Health website- <https://childmind.org/>
- Internet services are being offered by Spectrum (844)-488-8395 for free for 60 days to households with students in kindergarten to grade 12 and/or college students who do not already have a broadband subscription and at any service level up to 100 Mbps. Installation fees will be waived for new student households. They may not offer free services if there is a previously unpaid bill.
- Jobs: new job portal has been created to connect essential businesses with job seekers, thanks to a partnership between Greater Rochester Enterprise, Monroe County Executive Adam Bello, RochesterWorks, and the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce. Call 585.258.3500 or learn more at [www.monroecounty.gov/works](http://www.monroecounty.gov/works)
- National Parent Helpline® to get emotional support from a trained Advocate: 1-855- 4A PARENT/1-855-427-2736. Open M-F 1pm-10pm.

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### Dealing with Anxiety and Coronavirus

Adapted from: Common Anxieties, How to Recognize them and 10 Strategies to Address to them, Erin Hunter, Ph.D., University Center for the Child and Family (UCCF) At the Mary A. Rackham Institute

#### What are the biggest concerns kids and parents have right now and what are the best ways to handle unanswered questions?

- Some kid concerns:
  - Will I or my family get sick?
  - Missing friends, activities, and school.
  - Teens: concerns about how this will affect their future (e.g. college).
- Some parent concerns:
  - How can I keep my family and myself healthy? How do I talk with my kids about all this without stressing them out?
  - How can I manage doing “all the things” at home – being a parent, teacher, employee, cook, etc.?
- Best ways to handle unanswered questions:
  - Let your kids and other family members know that you don’t have all the answers right now — and that is okay even if it doesn’t feel okay. We know the things we need to be doing right now (e.g. social distancing, health behaviors), and those things are going to make a big difference. Lots of smart and capable people continue to work on getting answers to these questions and they will help us figure out the next steps.

#### What are signs that kids are experiencing anxiety and fear? Kids who are anxious may:

- Complain of physical symptoms (e.g. stomachache) even if there is no medical cause for these symptoms.
- Have problems falling asleep, staying asleep, or have bad dreams.
- Eat a lot less or a lot more than usual.
- Act hyperactive, be easily distracted, or have difficulty focusing.
- Become more emotional, including crying more easily and whining or becoming clingier as well as being more irritable and grumpy, having more tantrums, and fighting more with siblings.
- Ask the same questions over and over.
- Become non-compliant: not doing what they are told to do, including schoolwork and the current prescribed health behaviors of washing hands and covering coughs and sneezes.
- Withdraw from others and spend more time alone.
- In younger children, anxiety and fear can also surface as problems with bladder and bowel control or speech difficulties that were not there before.
- Teenagers may channel anxiety as concerns for others, including about stigma and injustices during the current pandemic.

#### 10 Strategies to Deal with Anxieties during a Pandemic or Other Uncertain Times

1. **You Don’t Have to Be Perfect:** All systems, including family systems and our own cognitive and coping systems, have extra demands on them right now, which means that we are all going to feel strained and we are all going to make mistakes. This is ok. This is temporary. We need to get through this as best we can. We do not need (nor are we able) to be perfect, even in the best of times. Lower expectations for yourself, your kids, and anyone else in your household.
2. **Make Room for All Feelings:** Let yourself and your family members have whatever feelings are coming up. All feelings are valid (though some behaviors, like hitting, are not okay). Feelings are messages our bodies

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send to us, and it is important to open those messages and read them. Some of your “feeling messages” will let you know about real issues you need to deal with or problem-solve. Other messages might be more like junk mail; spam that you can choose to recycle instead of considering in-depth. But you need to open the “feelings mail” and look at it before you can best decide how to deal with that feeling.

Make a family plan to deal with stress:

1. What is something you can do (to feel better) when you are stressed out?

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2. How will other family members know if you need help managing stress?

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3. What is something we can do together as a family every day to manage our stress levels?  
(Example: Deep breathing exercises, prayer, meditation, clean together while playing music).

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3. **Routines are a Comfort:** It’s helpful for both adults and kids to have some kind of daily schedule. A flexible routine helps us order our day, but allows us to change up certain parts of the day if we need to. Basic parts of a routine to think about are: Eating, Learning, Play, Sleep, Family Time, Exercise, and Clean Up.
4. **Create a Scapegoat:** Consider creating an imaginary “roommate” at your home (e.g. “Messy Martin”) and blame them for difficult things around the home (e.g., Messy Martin left their Legos on the floor; Messy Martin didn’t put away his dishes). This can help family members to bond together as a team to “pick up after Messy Martin” and reduce conflict at home.
5. **Know what You Can and Can’t Control:** Remind yourself of what you can control: e.g., your health behavior, doing things that are meaningful to you, limiting time with news and social media, etc.; and what you can’t control: what others do, how long this will last, the amount of toilet paper available to buy, etc.
6. **Do One Thing at a Time.** Our society has gotten very good at multi-tasking most of the time. Even if you are working from home and have kids at home, try to set a schedule so that when you are working, you can focus on work and when you are with your kids, you can focus on your kids. This will decrease the mental strain of “doing all the things,” and help to decrease the stress level in the home.
7. **Look for the Good & Family Strengths:** Do your best to find the silver linings in the current situation. While this is not a situation we would wish upon anyone, we can still use this time to slow down and figure out what is important and meaningful in our lives, and then work to do more of those things. Staying positive and remembering the strengths of your family helps get families through tough times. Make it part of your family’s day to take turns saying one nice thing about each member of the family.
8. **Don’t Forget to Play:** Playtime is good for kids and adults. Let your kids have free play every day. Allow yourself creative outlets (drawing, painting, singing, dancing), have social time with friends (from a safe social distance and/or through the internet), maybe even get out your kids toys and get a chance to play with them yourself – Legos as are just as much fun now as they were when we were kids.
9. **Reaching out to Others:** How can we keep in touch even if we have to be physically distant from our friends and family? Draw a picture and post it on your window for your neighbors to see. Make a memory book that you will give to a loved-one. Who can you call/text/email to keep in touch?
10. **Be Kind, Compassionate, and Patient:** With yourself as well as others. Fear and anxiety can lead to stigma toward others, because we want to believe that bad things happen to bad people. And that we are different from “those” people, so bad things won’t happen to us. However, this just is not true. Acting out of fear and hate only generates more fear and hate and creates more problems. We all have more in common than we do different. Allowing yourself to see the common threads between yourself and others

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and showing empathy is a way to help you feel more in control of what you can control. Showing empathy is an excellent stress and anxiety reducer and benefits you as much as those around you.

### 5 Activities that Help us Remember Good Things about Ourselves and our Family

- 1) Share a nice memory with the family- you can make this into a game by only telling parts of the memory and having other people guess what you are talking about.
- 2) Charades- one family member acts out their favorite book/activity/movie without talking and the other family members have to guess.
- 3) When you are stuck at home it can help to use your imagination to “travel.” Create a story with your family and get really creative about where you would go and what you would do when you got there.
- 4) Family band- Younger kids will enjoy using things from your kitchen to create a band with your family. Good things to use are metal or plastic spoons and pots, and other items that will not break. Older kids may enjoy creating lyrics and drumming out a beat together.
- 5) Comedy Night- Make up jokes and perform them your family.



**Tips for Independent Play-** Sometimes it is helpful for your children to play independently- if you have to work, or just need a break. Start small (example: play for 10 minutes by yourself) and let them know that you need them to play on their own for a little while. It is very important to notice their efforts afterwards by giving them attention after

independent play and letting them know how much it helped you. Sometimes children play better on their own if they have a goal to work toward. You can ask them to create a story with a stuffed animal that they can perform for you afterwards. Kids love having an enthusiastic audience!

**Safety Reminder:** Now that your children are home with you all the time, they are more likely to be getting into things around the house. Make sure that harmful things such as cleaning products, medicines, firearms, or sharp tools are appropriately stored away.

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