

Hidden Sparks Provides Guidance For Parents Looking To Help Their Children Cope With Pandemic-Related Anxiety (/index.php/local/26-community-corner/3549-hidden-sparks-provides-guidance-for-parents-looking-to-help-their-children-cope-with-pandemic-related-anxiety)

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With children's emotions and routines becoming a daily victim of the tumult caused by the pandemic, Hidden Sparks, which helps teachers and schools educate struggling learners, has provided six tips for parents to support their children experiencing anxiety during this time.

Hidden Sparks spent the summer months focusing on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) techniques with teachers across the country to help them prepare for welcoming students back after months spent Zooming at home. Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration Dean and Hidden Sparks Co-Educational Director, Rona Novick, PhD., has developed these tips for parents looking to help their children cope during the pandemic:

Offer reassurance. Always begin by offering validation and showing you understand and accept children's feelings. This can be as simple as repeating back their concerns to them with something like, "I see you are really upset." As tempting as it is to say, "There's no need to worry," you will not wash away worries by negating them, and your child may feel unheard and misunderstood.

Focus their energies. For younger children, distraction can be helpful. For older children, distraction may work, but they can also find it helpful to think of things they can do to make a difference. Try encouraging them to focus their efforts on projects that can allow them to have a meaningful impact in these trying times. Some examples can be writing Thank You cards to frontline workers, making signs, sewing masks, etc. This helps transition from passive worrying to active helping.

Highlight the positive, the efforts we are all making. It's vital that our children don't feel like our society is powerless in fighting the virus, so reassure them with comments like, "There are doctors working on cures, government offices trying to make sure that everyone can stay safe and get the help they need...and you do your part every time you wear a mask, etc."

Monitor media intake. So much on the news these days can trigger additional anxiety. Keep track of how much and what media exposure your child has and provide opportunities for discussion about what they see and hear to help them process the information and to support their understanding of the situation.

Be mindful of the conversations that you have in front of your children. One of the greatest determinants of your child's reaction to the current situation is what your reactions are in their presence – whether you are aware they are watching or not. Keep track of your own reactions to changes or disruptions. Children will take their cue from you if they see and hear a hopeful tone.

Live healthy. Your child will gain from common lifestyle adjustments that promote general anxiety management. Make sure they are keeping a routine, getting enough sleep, eating healthfully, and engaging in regular physical activity, as all three fuel the basic biology that helps reduce anxiety.

"As parents, we play a critical role in modeling a hopeful, calm, 'we'll get through this together' stance. To the extent that we can maintain and model healthy routines and conversations, our children will be the stronger for it. It is also always a good time, and especially now, to show an active interest in something that is important to them, whether a hobby, book, or movie, talk about it or even watch it together, to engage together in activities that they find uplifting and nurture your bond," said Hidden Sparks Executive Director Debbie Niderberg.

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