PSYCHIATRY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
MONTEFIORE MEDICAL CENTER

CHILD ANXIETY
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

For Montefiore Frontline Providers
and Associates

Recognizing and Responding to your Child’s Anxiety

- For kids who do not verbalize feeling anxious, their anxiety may manifest through physical symptoms, for example, stomach aches or headaches.

- Parents can start by validating their child’s experience and reframing it in a more helpful way. Rather than tell kids they are fine, tell them that what they are feeling is anxiety and explain what that means.

- Normalizing anxiety for a child can be helpful as well. For example, saying “a lot of people are feeling scared right now,” “it is okay to feel afraid sometimes,” or “sometimes I get worried too” can help your child acknowledge or recognize how they feel.

Coping Skills to Teach your Child

- **Deep breathing**: Drawing in air by expanding the belly can help your child relax and reduce heart rate, blood pressure and stress hormones.

- **Mindfulness**: Helping your child focus on what’s around them, what they see and hear, can help pull your child away from the anxiety and ground them in the present moment. Doing activities together (playing a game) that can bring their attention into the present moment is another way to practice.

- **Coping statements**: Teach your child to talk back to their worries - “Even though I’m scared, I can handle it.” “I’m stronger than my worries.”

- **Coping ahead**: Teach your child that when you have to do something that makes you nervous, it helps to plan in advance how to help yourself in the moment. If you can push through it, it will get easier!

- **Acceptance**: Help your child acknowledge discomfort without fighting it. Ignoring, judging, or avoiding the anxiety will likely make it grow bigger and more powerful. Teach them that everyone feels anxious at times, and that it is okay to feel anxious. You can feel anxious, and do things that are important to you anyway.

Parents Can Also...

- Set up a reward system to reward your child when they push through their anxiety. Rewards can be small things you know your child will enjoy, such as snacks, quality time with a parent, or household privileges.

- Make empathize and encourage statements - “I know that this is really hard for you, and I know you can do it.”

- Praise and compliment your child when you see your child push through their anxiety. Tell them when you see them coping well with stressors or actively using coping skills.

- Try not to let your child avoid what is making them anxious. Avoidance actually reinforces the anxiety. Instead, gently encourage your child to face their fears (use empathize and encourage).

- Ask your open-ended questions - “How are you feeling about...?” (rather than, “Are you worried about...?”), to avoid suggesting that you expect them to be worried.