

# Parents = the Difference

**\*\*News Flash — Number 8\*\***

We just keep coping and coping and coping. The pandemic has been a test of relationships, coping skills, and core values. However, teachers are telling me the children are settling into the virtual classroom. It makes sense if you think about the first day of remote teaching as a first day of school. In September, it takes our 4 year-olds about six to eight weeks to adjust to school. Here we are beginning our 8th week of remote learning! The teachers are seeing improvement. Now just because the remote classroom behavior is evening out, doesn't mean home life is smooth sailing. You may continue to see behaviors that are confusing or annoying. Adjustment takes time. Even if stress isn't obvious, it doesn't mean your child isn't experiencing it. At the moment, EVERYTHING is beyond their control, and when that happens kids cope in the only way they know. Hopefully the article below will shine some light on their experience.

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## Children Under Stress

As parents you are coping. Some of you well, some not as well, but generally you are getting up each morning and plowing through the day. You are insuring your child is fed, dressed and attends most classroom meetings. You can do this because your brain is fully developed and have developed many ways of coping with stress.

Your child's brain is still developing and will continue to do so until the age of 25-26, hence their ability to cope is limited. They experience the pandemic and all of its repercussions differently. Every child is unique, but from a developmental point of view, they all experience events through their 4-year-old lens.

As adults, we take in the information around us and have the ability to understand what is real. Upon hearing an outrageous claim—*'hairdryers are effective at killing the virus'*—you have the sense to step back and question what you heard. Young children don't do that. They tend to believe everything they hear and have poor 'reality testing.' They employ magical thinking which is why Santa and the Tooth Fairy are believable.

As adults we have a sense of judgment. We use our judgment to make sound decisions. We weigh the pros and cons of an issue before deciding on the best course of action. Our little ones do not have a developed sense of available options. They act first—and maybe think later. This is why the grown ups make decisions.

As grown ups we have the ability to control or delay many of our wants and feelings. We hard work all week and wait for our weekend fun and paycheck. We've learned to manage different levels of frustration, anxiety and unpleasant feelings. No so for young children. They have low frustration tolerance (become upset easily when things don't go their way) and have difficulty delaying gratification (waiting for what they want).

When children get stressed out, they have a variety of ways of coping based on their life experiences and brain development. Here are four common ways young children cope with stress.

1. **Regression:** the child returns to an earlier developmental stage. Children who are completely toilet trained suddenly have accidents again. They become clingy and whiny or return to thumb sucking.
2. **Denial:** not believing or accepting what they can't control or understand. *"I didn't wet my pants."* *"I don't care. I'm going to the playground today."*
3. **Somatic manifestation:** stress becomes physical and the body reacts. For children headaches, stomachaches or fatigue can occur.
4. **Acting the Opposite:** reacting or proclaiming the opposite of how the child feels. This is at the root of superhero play and bragging about "big muscles". Children are small, helpless and weak so they pretend to be otherwise to protect themselves. Exaggerated claims are to convince themselves or others the opposite is true.

In case you recognize any of the above in yourself, these same methods of coping are also used by adults. All of these coping strategies—regression, denial, somatic manifestation, acting the opposite of how you feel—are unconscious, not used with intent or with knowledge. They are ways of protecting themselves during times of stress and uncertainty. Just as you feel stressed and uncertain of what tomorrow will bring, so does your child. Recognizing common coping mechanisms will help you understand and meet your child's emotional needs. What we all need right now from those who love us is understanding and support.





## Memories are made at home

"Child - "How old are you, Grandpa?"

Grandpa - "I'm 81, dear."

Child - "So does that mean you were alive during the Coronavirus?"

Grandpa - "Yes, I was."

Child - "Wow. That must have been horrible, Grandpa. We were learning about that at school this week.

They told us about how all the schools had closed. And moms and dads couldn't go to work so didn't have as much money to do nice things.

They said that you weren't allowed to go and visit your friends and family and couldn't go out anywhere.

They told us that the shops and stores ran out of lots of things so you didn't have much bread, and flour, and toilet rolls.

They said that summer holidays were cancelled. And they told us about all those thousands of people that got very sick and who died.

They explained how hard all the doctors and nurses and all essential workers worked, and that lots of them died, too.

That must have been so horrible, grandpa!"

Grandpa - "Well, that is all correct.

And I know that because I read about it when I was older.

But to tell you the truth I remember it differently...

I remember playing on the floor for hours with my Mom and Dad.

I remember having meals together every night and baking with my Mom.

I remember making forts and learning how to do hand stands and back flips. I remember having quality time with my family.

I remember Mom's favorite words becoming 'Hey, I've got an idea...'

Rather than 'Maybe later or tomorrow I'm a bit busy'.

I remember having movie night three or four times a week instead of just one.

It was a horrible time for lots of people you are right.

But I remember it differently."

Remember how our children will remember these times.

Be in control of the memories they are creating right now, so that through all the awful headlines and emotional stories for so many that they will come to read in future years, they can remember the happy times."

- Author unknown

## Kids sadness about Covid-19 may look like:

### Anger

"This stupid mute button doesn't work!"

### Resisting the 'new order'

"I'm not going to morning meeting or the read aloud!"

### Numbing Out

"Just two more iPad games!"

### Tiredness

"I don't want to go for a walk. I'm too tired!"

### Displaced frustration

"I don't want spaghetti for dinner. I want chicken nuggets!"

### Boredom

"I'm bored" = code for "I'm sad."

## When do them kids, go back to school?

