

# 4 Questions To Gauge Your Kid's Mental Health During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Small tweaks to what and how you ask can give you a true sense of how your child is actually coping — beyond "yes," "no" and fine."

By Catherine Pearson

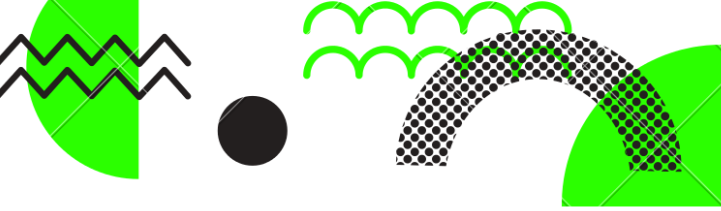
Kids have been through a lot since the COVID-19 pandemic began: school closures, massive changes to how they socialize and unrelenting uncertainty about what comes next. Fortunately, mental health experts are quick to note, children are, on the whole, resilient. But there are plenty who are struggling. In one study, 60% of teens said they're feeling lonely and 50% said they're feeling anxious. Up to one-third of parents say they've noticed their children's mental health get worse since March. There are many ways parents and caregivers can help children cope with the pandemic and everything it has brought about. One of the simplest is just to ask. But those conversations can be difficult, particularly if they're new for your family or if your child isn't particularly talkative. Here are four simple, expert-recommended questions to get you started.

1.

"Parents have to keep in mind that kids aren't necessarily thinking about everything that is happening right now in the exact same way they're thinking about it," explained Jill Emanuele, clinical director of the Child Mind Institute's Mood Disorders Center. "It's really important to start with general, open questions." So just ask your child what they think or feel about what is happening right now. Maybe don't even mention the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of what this kind of broad question — and others like it — does well is help give you a sense of what your child thinks he or she knows about what's happening in the world around them. If they've picked up false information, this can be a good way to talk to them about it. You can also be honest with them about what you don't know.

2.

Some kids might respond really openly to big, open-ended questions. Others might not have much to say at all. For those children in particular, it can be helpful to use their friends — or maybe even characters from a TV show they like — to back into the conversation, said Isaiah Pickens, a clinical psychologist and the CEO of iOpening Enterprises. "You can say, 'How do you think your friends feel about the coronavirus?'" he suggested. Another variation of this tactic can be to gather your family — whatever your family looks like — and say something like, "Hey, let's have a group conversation. How are we all doing with this right now?" "If you frame it as a family conversation, the 'heat' is not all on the kid," said Emanuele. The bottom line is that some kids aren't big talkers. That's OK, but it doesn't mean you should totally give up. Try and sneak it in however you can, Emanuele said — maybe not daily, or even weekly, but definitely try. She also noted that if your child used to be really responsive to conversations and now they are much more reserved, that's something to pay attention to.



# READING



3.

While open-ended questions are valuable — and you certainly don't want to fall into the trap of projecting your fears and feelings on your child — it can be helpful to lead with yourself, both experts said. It helps normalize the fact that people are coping with a lot of different feelings right now. Just keep it age and developmentally appropriate. When you start by identifying how you're feeling, it can really help to have a lot of adjectives at your disposal, particularly if your child is younger and is just learning how to identify and put words to what they are feeling, Pickens said. "What's making you feel worried/nervous/excited/embarrassed to talk about?" he offered as an example.

You want to make room for your child to open up to you about different experiences and emotions, and to use a variety of language so you can help them translate what they are experiencing internally.

4.

Another way to get a sense of how well your child is coping right now is to ask them about what they're enjoying. You're really getting at: How is my child coping? Pickens explained. You could ask: "What's giving you energy?" he said. "What's making you happy?" Those types of questions are also a good barometer of your child's current mental and emotional well-being, and whether they are in any kind of distress. Parents should be on the lookout for sustained changes in their behavior, including diminished enthusiasm for activities and things they once loved. "Any change in behavior or routine that's not like your child and that seems like it is becoming a pattern is a red flag," Emanuele said.

adapted from: huffpost.com

**Match the headings with the proper parts of the article:**

- a) What do you think about what's happening right now?
- b) What's got you excited right now? What are you really loving?
- c) I'm feeling [try a bunch of different adjectives here]. How about you?
- d) How do you think your friends are dealing with everything?

**Discuss the questions with other students.**

