

Creating Supportive Environments



CENTER FOR
RESILIENCE + WELL-BEING


When Scary Things Happen

When scary things happen or our lives are turned upside down, it can be challenging to feel grounded and know how to best support ourselves and our children. The way we structure our environments, no matter where we might be (whether home or displaced), can help create supportive emotional climates- ensuring that children feel emotionally safe and secure and create opportunities for connection with our children and other family members. Our focus is on creating a consistent emotional environment amidst major physical environment changes. These structures can also help families regain a sense of control, predictability, consistency, and connection even when so much is out of our control. This resource offers guidance about things you can do to help your family navigate challenges.

ROUTINES



Routines create predictability, reliability and support a sense of security. Routines offer opportunities for connection, reduce challenging behaviors, and help children with transition. Regular routines are often disrupted in times of stress or crisis.


 Think flexibly about any routine you can either restore or begin to help support your child and family.

Examples: Doing your best to maintain a similar structure to your day, for example keep wake-up and bedtime routines the same even in different locations (reading together, tucking in), eating together daily, continue outside activities (e.g. school, sports) to the extent possible.

RHYTHM



Attention to the rhythm of the day and the rhythm of the child helps us consider a balance of activity, social connection, and rest throughout the day and supports emotion regulation, coping and well-being. To the extent possible, build in time for rest and activity, quiet time and social connection that follows your own natural rhythm and your family's. Sometimes we don't notice how many transitions we make throughout one day and across a week. Reducing the number of transitions or creating more space during transitions, can make a big difference for ourselves and our children's energy and regulation.

 Think creatively about how you might restore some sense of natural rhythm to your family's days. Take a moment to check in about your energy level and mood throughout the day. Ask yourself would it help to rest? Get activated? Connect with someone. Be alone?

Examples: Keep similar bedtime and wake-up times, build in moments of quiet time or active time for yourself, spend a few moments of connection time with your child in the morning; engage in social activities, quiet time, watch a favorite t.v. show, spend time outdoors, time for exercise or movement inside or outside, create a little more space to smooth transitions

RITUALS



Rituals are any behaviors that have significance and are repeated throughout our personal, family, and community or cultural lives. Rituals support our experience of emotions, as individuals and as communities and like routines, rituals create predictable environments that support a sense of security, connection and belonging and can support well-being.

 Is there a ritual your family can create (or do if already established) to mark that you all are together and safe?

Examples: singing a particular song, a mealtime start saying, gratitude, prayer or blessing, saying the same thing to your child when they wake up each morning or tuck-in ritual when they go to sleep, a regular prayer or another daily spiritual practice your family connects with.





ASK HELPFUL QUESTIONS



Ask helpful questions to learn more about the young person's thoughts, feelings, perspective, and needs. The goal is to gain an understanding of the young person's experience and NOT one of "fact finding," or learning about specific details of a situation. The questions we ask should be open-ended and focused on their experience, emotion and perspective. ("What was that like for you?," "How are you feeling?," "What are you thinking/wondering about?," "Do you have any questions or worries?").



Helpful questions encourage open sharing and help you learn more about a youth's feelings and needs.

GO SLOW, PAUSE, AND BE COMFORTABLE WITH SILENCE



Young people need a little time to respond after adults ask them questions. This is valuable time for processing emotions and coordinating thinking, especially as it relates to complex emotional situations. Make sure your body language conveys patience, openness and care.



When you pause and allow time, you communicate "I have time for you," and "you are important".

LABEL EMOTIONS



Just as it is helpful for us as adults to label emotions, it is also helpful for youth to label how they are feeling. Sometimes they need support to do this. You can help youth to label emotions by reflecting back any feeling words they say, naming feelings you notice, and taking a guess at what they are feeling. When you do this, check in with the young person to see if you got it right.



Labeling emotions supports emotion awareness and regulation.

VALIDATE AND NORMALIZE



Step into their shoes and let the youth know that you understand what they are feeling and it makes sense to feel or think that way. You might say, "that makes sense," "I get it," "I understand," "other people feel that way too," and "you are not alone".



Validating and normalizing helps youth feel understood and trust their own perspectives and feelings.

REDUCE MEDIA EXPOSURE



Be aware of how much you are checking the media when you are with youth and be aware of how much they are tracking the event in the media to monitor and reduce. Remember, that while it is part of our culture to be consistently connected to media, if youth see that you are checking your phone or the television constantly, they may be more likely to do the same, and increase their anxiety and nerves.



Information in small, developmentally appropriate chunks is best for youth and the adults who support them.

