

Wellness Wednesday



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How To Make Your Children Feel Safe During Difficult Times

Experts share advice for helping kids deal with fear in the aftermath of events like the killing of George Floyd.

When harrowing events like acts of police brutality dominate the national conversation, adults aren't the only ones with emotional reactions.

Kids tend to pick up on the fact that something is going on, whether they catch glimpses of the news, overhear conversations between their parents or simply sense tension in the people around them. For many children, this can breed fear.

Some children might already fear for their physical safety and feel triggered. Others don't, but images of violence in the news can create a sense of confusion and fear.



"We as a country have been through a lot in the first half of 2020," said Achea Redd, a mental health advocate and author of the book "Be Free. Be You."

"First, we have the death of a huge icon, Kobe Bryant, and his very young daughter Gigi, then we have COVID-19, which caused financial insecurity in many of the households in America as well as allowing for school, sports, virtually anything but quarantine, to be shut down," Redd explained. "Now, within a two-month time span, because of technology, we are seeing reality recorded in real time with the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, etc. Point is, all of that is a huge amount of change that took place all at once."

It's natural for children to be afraid in times of upheaval, so their caregivers should show love and support as they help them navigate tough topics.

As people across the nation protest racism and police brutality, HuffPost asked Redd and other experts and parents to share their guidance for helping kids feel safe during difficult times.

Read on for their advice, which includes general guidance as well as tips geared toward children of different racial identities.

Limit their news exposure.

Most protests following George Floyd's death have been peaceful, but many news broadcasts have focused on images of car fires, broken windows and acts of aggression against protesters. Video footage of Floyd's death at the hands of police has also circulated across airwaves and social media. These images are upsetting and unhelpful to young children.

"Minimizing children viewing acts of violence on television is always a good idea," said Roseann Capanna-Hodge, a pediatric mental health expert. "Children do not have the emotional maturity to understand what they are viewing, and this can cause not only emotional responses but can lead to aggressive behaviors."

Nefertiti Austin, the author of "Motherhood So White: A Memoir of Race, Gender and Parenting in America," echoed this sentiment. She said she believes it's important to restrict the violence children see on TV to protect them emotionally.

"I was watching the news this week, and my 7-year-old kept asking, 'Why is the police car on fire? How did that happen? Why is it happening?'" she recalled. "I knew I had to turn the TV off because it was upsetting to her. Kids are taking this into their little souls, and we need to limit that."

Don't be afraid to address it.

Just because you've turned off the news doesn't mean the matter ends there. It's imperative to talk to children about what they have seen or heard, or they may fill in the blanks themselves and come to frightening or inaccurate conclusions.

Kids often fear what they don't understand, but they are very capable of processing difficult topics. They just need to receive the information in a developmentally appropriate way (i.e. not through images of violence on the news). Parents should know their own children's sensitivities and how to present the issues of racism and police brutality in a manner that is educational and helpful, just as they do with other topics.

"Many parents I've talked to, especially white parents, will ask me, 'Isn't talking about race supporting racism? And isn't it true that talking to my child about race could harm them and bring my own burdens onto them?'" said Howard Stevenson, a professor of urban education at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. "My reaction to this is that we often try to explain to very young children how to protect themselves should emergencies or crises arise. And so we will have scary conversations with them, but we do so in order to protect them."

Most parents talk to their young children about what to do in the event of a fire and tell them not to take candy from strangers to prevent kidnapping, which are both frightening notions, said Stevenson. But kids can handle difficult topics when parents are there to guide them with love and support.

"After having these conversations, children are most likely not going to be having nightmares of strangers offering candy and trying to kidnap them or that their house will suddenly burn up in flames," he noted.

"But so many of these parents are more fearful that talking about race could damage their children's childhood. There's no evidence for this. Having a conversation with children at different developmental stages will not harm children or their childhood, any more than giving the message before the plane takes off about [what to do] in case of an emergency will somehow cause the plane to crash."

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- HOWARD STEVENSON, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Have open, age-appropriate discussions.

"The best way for parents to help children feel safe is to open up conversations and create that safe space for their children and teens to feel comfortable to ask questions," said Capanna-Hodge. "Find out what your kid is thinking, talk, and reassure" your child when discussing issues related to safety or violence, she suggested.

Parents should be honest and use developmentally appropriate wording when talking about issues like racism, police brutality and safety with kids. For very young children, it may be best to avoid words like "killed" or "murdered" and just say that a man named George Floyd was hurt and treated unfairly by the police.

It's helpful to speak in terms of fairness and unfairness to convey that this is a systemic issue, rather than a matter of "a few bad apples." Parents should also emphasize that there are many "helpers" — people who have been working to combat injustice in their communities. Art, books and play are powerful tools as well.

"Parents can make their children feel safe by showering them with positive words and thoughtful parenting practices that can empower their children," said Jennifer Keitt, a human behavioral consultant and author of "#StrongKids." She suggested reading children's books about race and diversity, expanding playgroups to include children of different races, and normalizing conversations about race and differences in everyday life.

These conversations also offer the opportunity to teach emotional intelligence. Parents talk about how it makes them feel sad and mad to see people hurting other people and other acts of injustice. They can encourage their children to understand and express their feelings of worry, and then work to soothe their fears.

"Acknowledge that sometimes when people are angry or hurt, they lash out," Austin said of imagery that shows non-peaceful protest. "That doesn't mean those people are bad. No one's coming to get you. People are responding to systemic racism. Rioting is the language of the unheard. They're reacting, and that doesn't mean they're bad."

Help children of color feel empowered.

"Black parents can continue to make their children feel safe by empowering them with knowledge and information about growing up in a racially divisive country," said Keitt. "For hundreds of years, Black parents have had to try and make their children feel safe in an extremely unsafe situation. Black parents can continue to use the power of their family relationships, the love and support of their communities, churches and extended family members to bolster the esteem and confidence of their children."

Redd noted that Black parents have long been forced to have "the talk" with their children to teach them how to survive encounters with police officers.

"Knowledge is power, so the more you are prepared, the better it will be in the long run," Redd explained. "Modeling the behavior is good, too. So for example, have role play where mom or dad is the cop and the kids are getting stopped. You can then run through with them how to stay calm and remain safe in that situation. It sounds a lot scarier than it is, but it is very necessary to combat what is happening now. I would say these drills should start between 10-13."

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Redd added that this guidance can also apply to non-Black people of color whose children also need to prepare to navigate a racially hostile world.

Another way parents of Black children can help them feel a sense of control (which promotes feelings of safety) is by highlighting things they can do to fight injustice in their communities and help people who have been doing this work for years.

"It's OK for them to know that more work needs to be done and that we as a family and community are going to do our part to ensure our friends are considered, thought about and supported," said Austin. She added that children can support fellow kids who may be experiencing fear by talking to them about it so that they feel less alone.

Educate white children on the issues.

White children's worries right now don't center around being the next victim of police brutality, but they are likely picking up on the gravity of this moment and need guidance to develop understanding, rather than uncertainty and fear. This serves to help them feel safe and foster a society in which children of color feel safe.

"One of the many important pieces to this eliminating racism puzzle is education. I have a 4th and 8th grader, and it is abundantly clear that we can not depend on the school to educate our kids on the history as it truly happened in the past," Redd explained.



"That's why I am so adamant about asking parents to not only talk about the issues we are facing right now, but also addressing the why and how we got here in the first place," she said. "Education on past history in America and not just in February should include the Black Americans that fought and built this country just as it includes our founding fathers."

Austin advised white parents to seek out resources written by people of color, particularly Black mothers, to develop greater empathy.

"We do this day in and out, checking our children's temperatures emotionally," she said. "We love them so much, and we just want to keep them safe, as any parent wants to keep their child safe."

There are many books and other resources to help parents explain systemic racism to white children. These conversations aren't always simple, but raising anti-racist children is a life-long commitment that parents must make to help effect change.

"Can you imagine this new generation coming up with white Americans who understand that Black Americans helped build this country and the Black Americans understand that this country is theirs, too, and them actually being treated as such?" Redd asked. "It would be life-changing and would solve a lot of problems that we are having right now because if one doesn't know their history, they are bound to repeat it."

Encourage kids to be upstanders.

Another way to make your child feel more in control in the face of injustice is to encourage them to be an “upstander” — someone who recognizes when something is wrong and takes action.

“Kids often feel very powerless,” Austin said. “Teach what it means to be an upstander and how you can feel [safe] by being an upstander rather than a bystander.”

Stevenson advocates the CLCBE method — “a racial mindfulness approach called ‘Calculate, Locate, Communicate, Breathe, and Exhale’” — to teach kids how to deal with racism or stand up for friends experiencing it. It involves understanding and identifying emotions in times of duress to make good decisions.



In addition to standing up for their peers, children can support other kids experiencing fear by talking to them about it so that they feel less alone, said Austin.

“You can say, ‘Some of your friends may feel afraid, too. Check on your friends. Ask how they’re doing,’” she suggested. “This will make the friend feel safer and the person initiating feel like they have some agency.”

Fundamentally, actions to help children feel safe should also promote actual safety in their communities.

“Making our children ‘feel’ safe is not the same as changing policy and hearts and minds of people so that they will actually BE safe,” said Keitt. “My hope is that America will become a place where we stop trying to feel change and actually become the change we wish to see in our country.”



MARGHERITA PIZZA



236 Calories | *PREP TIME: 30 mins* | *COOK TIME: 15mins* | *TOTAL TIME: 45 mins*
YIELD: 4 Servings | *COURSE: Snack, Lunch, Dinner* | *CUISINE: American, Italian*

INGREDIENTS

Dough

1 cup all purpose or white whole wheat flour*,
(5 oz) plus more for dusting
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup 0% Stonyfield Greek yogurt

Sauce

1/3 cup canned san marzano tomatoes,
crushed by hand
1 small garlic clove, minced
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
pinch dried oregano
fresh black pepper to taste
4 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced thin
Fresh basil, torn for topping
Extra virgin olive oil, optional for drizzling

Easy Margherita Pizza made from scratch with my yeast-free, thin crust pizza dough topped with a simple raw tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella cheese and basil.

TIP:

Use San Marzano canned tomatoes for the pizza sauce, which are my personal favorite. They are sweeter and less acidic than most other canned tomatoes. The sauce is seasoned with just fresh garlic, salt, pepper, and oregano.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 2 slices, Calories: 236 kcal, Carbohydrates: 27 g,
Protein: 15 g, Fat: 6.5 g, Saturated Fat: 3.5 g, Cholesterol:
23.5 mg, Sodium: 636 mg, Fiber: 1 g, Sugar: 3.5 g

Source: Skinnytaste.com



INSTRUCTIONS



How to make:

In a medium bowl combine the flour, baking powder and salt and whisk well. Add the yogurt and mix with a fork or spatula until well combined, it will look like small crumbles.

Lightly dust flour on a work surface and remove dough from the bowl, knead the dough a few times until dough is tacky, but not sticky, about 20 turns (it should not leave dough on your hand when you pull away).

Preheat oven to 450F. I like to use a pizza stone, and preheat the stone in the oven as well. If using a round pizza pan or sheet pan, spray with oil.

Sprinkle a work surface and rolling pin with a little flour and roll the dough out into a large thin round or oval (or you can make 2 smaller pies).

Lay the dough out onto the oiled nonstick pizza dish or sheet pan.

Spread the sauce over the crust. Top with cheese and place the pan on the pizza stone, bake 10 to 12 minutes or until the cheese is bubbly and the crust is cooked through.

Transfer to a cutting board, top with basil and drizzle with olive oil, if desired.

Slice the pie into 8 slices.

FEATURED EXERCISE

Grab your dumbbells – let's get to work! ✓

Side Lunge to Curtsy

Holding a dumbbell in your right hand, side lunge to the left, bringing your right hand to your left foot. Lower your butt as much as possible. Keep your toes pointed forward and your left knee bent to no more than 90 degrees.

Push off gently with your left foot, and come into a curtsy position with your left leg crossing behind your right as you press your weight overhead. Keep your hips square and your curtsy tight. Both feet should be pointed forward.

This completes one rep.



Source: <https://www.popsugar.com/fitness/photo-gallery/46032745/image/46033571/Side-Lunge-Curtsy>

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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