

In partnership with Cincinnati Children's Hospital, the #3 Children's Hospital in the country, First Student has turned to expert in behavioral psychology, Dr. Allison Blackburn, for some tips on how to help children as they navigate a new reality of social distancing and remote learning. In the our new three-part "Ask the Expert" series, we will address 1) dealing with uncertainty, 2) establishing strong routines, and 3) stress and behavioral changes in your child.

DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY

1

Open and transparent communication

Give facts and answer questions from your child truthfully and accurately.

At the same time, monitor how you are talking about the world news and your own anxieties around your children. It is normal to feel anxious about COVID-19, but we can still use healthy coping skills to ease that anxiety.

2

Reach out

Social distancing is hard and can feel isolating.

If your child is missing an adult from their school (e.g., teacher, school bus driver, or aide), reach out and see if that person can send a video or email with some words of encouragement. Talk to your child about how everyone is practicing "physical distancing" right now, including bus drivers, teachers, and cafeteria staff, but that these measures are temporary and will not last forever.

3

Establish a strong routine

It's important to try to maintain some type of schedule and structure, although it will naturally look different than a typical school day. Try to establish what the "new normal" looks like during the day. Predictability reduces anxiety.

If you find yourself having to pester your child to get the academic work done during the day, try to balance it out with some low demands and positive quality time in the evenings (e.g., game night, family movie night, cooking together, etc. Promote good sleep hygiene, go to bed and wake up around the same time each day, even on the weekends.

4

Give yourself grace

Remember to give yourself grace when strategies do not work exactly how you expect. A first step in coping is understanding. Check out these social stories below for resources in helping your child understand COVID-19:

[Don't Share Your Germs! A Social Story About Staying Healthy](#), Autism Society of NC

[Coronavirus Social Story](#), Easterseals

[Supporting and Reassuring Children Around the World](#), Manuela Molina Cruz (Available in Multiple Languages)

ASK THE EXPERT: DR. ALLISON BLACKBURN

Dr. Blackburn is a Licensed Psychologist, specializing in the assessment and treatment of children with developmental disorders. She partnered with First Student in 2018 to co-develop the FirstServes™ program to enhance the bus riding experience for children with developmental disabilities.

