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RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS

The links below offer helpful resources and tips for caregivers to support the emotional well-being of the youth in their care as we continue to face challenges associated with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network has created the *Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*:
https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
- Child Trends has recently released *Resources for Supporting Children’s Emotional Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic*:
<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>
- The Children’s Bureau offers a variety of COVID-19 resources:
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/covid-19-resources?utm_campaign=covid19&utm_medium=email&utm_source=covid19031920
- Western Michigan University’s Children’s Trauma Assessment Center is able respond to questions regarding the intersection of COVID-19 and child trauma. Please use the following link, click on “Contact us” and email your question(s):
www.wmich.edu/traumacenter
- Western Michigan University’s Children’s Trauma Assessment Center offers the following information and guidance:
 - Many children in care have experienced significant trauma; it is not uncommon for a time of heightened anxiety and fear about the future to trigger traumatic memories, thought distortions and reactive emotions or behaviors in children.
 - Research indicates that children who have experienced trauma often feel powerless to protect themselves and are unable to believe adults can keep them safe.
 - Children who have experienced trauma may believe that only “bad” things happen to them. This mentality may create recurring internal negative self-talk,

which can quickly lead to intrusive thoughts such as: “I know I am going to get the virus;” “I will infect all of my foster family;” or “I will have to leave my foster/kinship home.”

- Children are not likely to communicate these thoughts as they are difficult to verbalize; instead, behavioral symptoms such as isolation, self-harm, and/or aggression may increase.
- Heightened stress, feelings of isolation, fear, and overwhelm are not uncommon for caregivers to experience during a time like this, particularly when compounded with increased emotional or behavioral challenges from children. It is important to identify and name your thoughts and feelings in order to effectively address them. Your well-being is critical in helping your children.
- It is important in a time of crisis to verbalize genuine feelings, thoughts, and questions as they are normal. Honest dialoguing with family, friends, and caseworkers regarding your questions and concerns allows for self-reflection that can help you manage this crisis while continuing to care for and support the children in your home, who will likely need you to be their "external regulator" now more than ever.
- **The following tips may be helpful for caregivers to consider during this time:**
 - ✓ **Routines build psychological safety:** Create a daily routine for predictability of wake-up time, bedtime, eating times, schoolwork time, playtime, and electronic time. Make the routine visible for children and review the next day’s schedule prior to bedtime.
 - ✓ **Too much news information can emotionally overwhelm and trigger children into fight/flight freeze responses:** Allow only a small amount of news information, depending on the age of the child/children. For older children, no more than 20 minutes of watching or reading the news per day. As you follow the changing news, ask children if they have questions about what they read or heard. “I think you may be wondering... (Am I going to get sick with the virus now? Will you keep me if I get the virus?, etc.)” A book to explain the Coronavirus to children can be found at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>
 - ✓ **Promising children what we cannot control creates distrust:** Promises most often make adults, not children, feel better. Unfortunately, we can’t answer many questions now, such as “when will we go back to school?” “how many people will get sick/die?” “will someone I love get sick?” What can be said are things such as “I don’t know about school

yet,” “we don’t know yet how many people will become sick” or “I am here to care for you. If anyone in our home gets sick, we will make sure they have the best care available to get better.” Answers will vary by age. More information for older children will be necessary, while a small amount of information for younger children will usually suffice.

- ✓ **During times of high stress, everyone, regardless of age, emotionally over-reacts sometimes:** Be forgiving of the children in your care. Be forgiving of yourself. Every minute is a new minute. Verbalize: “I know you are trying your best right now,” “It is hard to think and be calm when we are worried or afraid,” “even I am stressed now; let’s start again,” “let’s help each other be calm so we can think.” Teaching and modeling simple breathing techniques together may help significantly increase regulation. Exercise and activity also helps children and adults regulate.
- ✓ **Communicate with the various systems:** Find out how your caseworkers are going to support you in the future. Ask your caseworker for the most current directives from MDHHS. Tell your caseworker how you are doing and what you need. Communicate that you want to stay in regular communication, even if it can only be by phone. Remind them you need to create predictability to create psychological safety for the child.
- ✓ **Stay connected with other supportive individuals:** Sharing our fears and difficulties with other committed support persons is therapeutic. When people are in pain, connecting with another can physiologically reduce fear and worry, and help them function effectively again.