Back to “normal....” or not: how to help your family through COVID transitions

May 2021
We’re so glad to be here!

David Grodberg, MD, MS  
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER  
Former Medical Director of Yale Child Study Center Clinic. Board certified psychiatrist for children and adolescents. Dad of 2.

Alex Boeving Allen, PhD  
HEAD OF THERAPY, VP CARE STRATEGY  

Marina Scott, MS, OTR/L  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY CONSULTANT  
Accomplished pediatric occupational therapist with 19 years of experience in schools, clinics, and teletherapy. Mom of 1.
We’re in an urgent pediatric behavioral health crisis
The crisis was already growing...

1 in 5 children have a diagnosed behavioral health need.¹

80% are not getting sufficient care, if any at all.¹

1 in 5 of parents say their children’s mental health is more important than their own.²

Source: ¹CDC, ²Brightline Covid-19 Behavioral Health Indicator 2020
...and then came COVID-19

3 in 4 parents say COVID has negatively impacted teens being able to interact with their friends.¹

80% of youth are at risk for emotional, attentional, or behavioral difficulties.¹

1 in 5 children living under lockdown are dealing with loneliness, nervousness, and irritability.²

Sources: ¹MHA ²Save the Children
The pandemic has affected mental health in families across the country.
Anxiety & stress
Stress and anxiety impact the whole family

Kids aren’t the only ones having a difficult time — parents & caregivers feel it, too

+ You may not know or realize that your child is experiencing emotional stress in the context of your own stress
+ It’s easy to assume kids aren’t picking up on your stress or stress in the community
+ Hint: they feel it like a barometer
Stress and anxiety impact the whole family: Young children

Younger children are more vulnerable right now

+ Uncertainty
+ Loss of normalcy
+ Limited peer interaction
+ Family member’s physical health
+ Lack of structure
+ Tantrums
Stress and anxiety impact the whole family: **Teens**

This all hits differently for teens...

+ Social pressures and anxiety
+ Changes in schedule
+ Shifts in peer interaction as key for development
+ Anticipation around body image
Core symptoms of anxiety

Fears and phobias
Separation anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, specific phobias

Worries
Generalized anxiety disorder, “what if” questions, friendships, weather, homework

Somatic concerns
Every child is different, but there are more common physical symptoms

Avoidant behaviors
All pediatric anxiety disorders can lead to avoidant behaviors
So how do we deal with all of this uncertainty?

+ Relaxation techniques
+ Supportive statements and actions
+ Adjusting how you might naturally respond — the top 5 ways that parents respond to their child’s anxiety:
  + Reassuring their child
  + Sleeping in their child’s bed
  + Driving their child to school
  + Speaking for their child
  + Avoiding social activities all together
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) 101

Thinking

Doing

Feeling
Practice, practice, practice
How do you approach the transition back to “normal times”?

6 ways you can help your child cope:

+ Set a clear schedule
+ Provide reassurance
+ Make yourself accessible
+ Carry forward what’s been helpful
+ Acknowledge the reality and complexity
+ Identify strengths and how to use them
Disruptive behavior
Many parents are dealing with increased tantrums and outbursts

- It's only human to get frustrated
- 83.7% of preschoolers have tantrums. And that’s during “normal” times!
- What we’re hearing from parents during COVID:
  - Short fuse
  - Intensity of tantrums and anger outbursts are greater
  - Recovery takes longer
  - Less responsive to social supports

Remember: you’re not alone
Why is your child acting out?

There are 4 main reasons why children have tantrums:

- To get something or keep doing something
- To avoid something in particular
- To get attention (positive or negative)
- To express outrage over a minor provocation
ABCs of Behavior

Antecedent  Behavior  Consequence
3 essential ingredients of praise

+ Say it like you mean it
+ Be specific
+ Incorporate nonverbal component
From negative → positive

4 strategies to help with disruptive behavior:

+ Positive and “opposite” behaviors
+ Agree on stopping points
+ Offering choices
+ Clear and specific instructions
Executive function
How will going back to “normal” impact executive functioning?

Some challenges with transitioning back to in-person school:

- Managing the daily schedule
- Keeping kids motivated and engaged
- Planning and prioritizing
- Stress on parents and kids
- Allowing for time to adjust
Tips for promoting executive functioning skills

4 ways you can make progress:

+ Keep things simple and use consistent language
+ Stick to a routine, and let your kids be a part of creating it
+ Acknowledge their feelings and allow for difficult moments or days
+ Get outside! Even a few minutes of fresh air and movement can help
Your general wellness matters, too

Some ways to take care of your own health that will also help your child

+ Take moments away from work and school to give your eyes and mind a rest
+ Have regular, nutritious meals with a variety of foods when possible
+ Get moving — physically distanced neighborhood walks, running wild around the yard, and dance parties are encouraged!
+ Make sure to get enough sleep — a set bedtime each night can be helpful
+ Talk about your feelings
The good news
You can get through this as a family

“Family resilience”: It’s about how your family handles tough stuff, and your ability to bounce back. Here’s some of what that can look like:

+ Communicating and problem-solving as a family
+ Keeping up social connections
+ Maintaining a positive outlook
+ Meaning-making and emotional expression

And remember, you got this!
About Brightline
Uncommon Support For Common Family Challenges

The first comprehensive behavioral health solution specifically designed to support children, teens, and their families, across a range of common challenges.
Q&A

Thank you! Visit hellobrightline.com for more information