

How Medical Play with Your Kids Can Help Them Process COVID-19



Play is a safe and fun way to approach scary or unknown topics. It engages multiple parts of the brain and body simultaneously, allowing deeper learning. In the safe space of play, children can learn about and face their fears because they know it's not real. Help your child cope with COVID by supporting their medical play!

Mentally Prepare to Play.

You carry your own feelings related to coronavirus. So, start by getting yourself ready.

- Remind yourself to put your feelings to the side to focus on your kids' feelings.
- Be ready for any play scenarios your children may create. Scenarios may involve sickness and even death. Mentally prepare yourself for this.
- Know your limits. Give yourself permission to "time out" if the play gets too intense.
- Remind yourself that you are not there to "fix" it for your children, only to follow the play.

Get Creative with Roles and "Medical Supplies."

Let your children take the lead in playtime – starting with choosing roles. Parents, pets, stuffed animals, and dolls all make great patients. If you have a play medical kit, great. If not, you could use a real first aid kit- or improvise. If you have any band aids, gauze, ice packs, thermometers, medicine droppers, face masks or anything of the sort, use them in your play.

Feel Free to "Invent" Medical Toys using Items You Have Around the House.

- A medallion on a chain makes a great stethoscope.
- Kitchen gadgets such as cookie cutters or whisks make for fun "medical tools"
- Other toys such as cars rolled over one's body, paint brushes brushing a hand, sound or light-up toys to "take readings" can all be used as medical toys.
- An old purse, briefcase, backpack or pillowcase can serve as a medical bag

Offer Comforting Physical Interaction.

Eye contact, smiling, laughter, soothing touch, close proximity, hugs, kisses, a soothing voice, and slow movements are all examples of physical interactions that naturally calm the nervous system while playing. Kids can never get too much of these!

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Validate your Children during Playtime.

Narrate what your children are doing by repeating their words or noticing their play choices.. It can be so tempting to ask questions, add to the plot, move to a happy ending, or help your child make faster choices. When you get these urges, stop and move to simple reflection. For example:

Child: I am the doctor; time to take your temperature.

Parent: You're the doctor. Thank you for taking my temperature.

Accept What your Children Say - and Help them Find Solutions.

Play is not about accuracy or realism. This is not the time to correct your children. You can always revisit something later. This requires patience and restraint. When a child is struggling, a nudge towards the solution can be more beneficial. For example:

Child: We are all out of medicine! We will all get sick!

Parent: This is terrible. I wonder if there is something we can do?

If your child is stuck, you can offer, "I wonder if the hospital can make medicine? Any ideas on how to do that, doctor?"

Offer Realistic Assurance When Needed.

Kids often imagine things much worse or bigger than reality. Either during your play or after you can offer your child a realistic picture. For example:

Child: You have the virus!!! That means you will be sick for a year!

Parent: This is terrible, I'm sick with the virus. I must have a VERY bad case of the virus because most people get well in a couple of weeks.

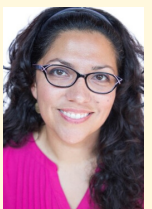
(Notice the play was not changed, but facts were added.)

After Playtime – Discuss Concerns That Arose.

Kids may have questions hours or days later that came from the play. During the playtime, just play. Later, during a quiet moment, you may want to ask your children about issues or concerns that arose.



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