

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK



Helping Your Family Cope With COVID-19

As we struggle to contain the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), daily life has fundamentally changed for many families. While fire and EMS personnel continue to serve their communities on the frontlines, many family members remain confined at home without their typical daily structure and activities.

For more information about common emotional reactions to the current virus outbreak, see [COVID-19 Behavioral Health Considerations](#).

If your spouse or children are having a difficult time coping during this time, your family is not alone. While family members may understand the inherent risks of your job, the threat of exposure to COVID-19 may trigger unique fears for your partner and children. To help support your family during this time, consider these suggestions.

Support Your Partner

Whether worried about your health or consumed by the news cycle while managing kids at home, your partner may be coping with a high level of stress during this time. Try to communicate with your partner at whatever frequency you normally would. Encourage your partner to adopt the following coping strategies, especially while you are on shift or away from home:

- Find one source of **trustworthy health information** and stick with it, thus limiting exposure to misinformation and rumors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the local health department can provide the most timely and accurate information. Resources specific to IAFF members are available at www.iaff.org/coronavirus.
- **Set limits** on exposure to news, radio and social media, especially for kids and teens. Consider turning off push notifications from these sources. Limit checking news reports to only once or twice a day for 15 minutes.
- Find a way to **stay connected** to other family and friends who are part of the family's normal routine. Communicating over the phone, video chat or text can go a long way in reducing family members' feelings of isolation.

- Have some go-to activities that provide a short-term **distraction**. Activities may include getting a start on spring cleaning or catching up on a favorite television show. For partners home with kids, a family board game, crafts or a cooking project are good ways to get everyone involved.
- For older kids, consider age-appropriate programming while the parent takes a 30-minute break in the next room. Parents will benefit from finding a **relaxing activity** to calm the body and the mind. Music, a quick bath or meditation are simple, free activities that can be done at home when parents need a break.
- Try to **limit engagement** with any extended family members or friends who trigger anxiety for your family members.
- Get moving. Strive for 30 minutes of **physical activity** every day. Exercise not only helps improve mood but can boost the immune system as well. While kids should avoid gathering in parks, a bike ride or a family walk is okay. Younger kids may also follow along with their parent during an exercise or dance video.