

Discovery COVID-19 Podcast Series

Transcript: Candice Cowen

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	Speaker	Dialogue	
00:00	VO Intro	You're listening to the Discovery COVID-19 Podcast. Our expert guests help you understand Coronavirus Disease 2019 and how you can manage your health, wellbeing, and financial Security during this time.	00:16
00:17	Candice Cowen	Nobody knows if or when life will return to normal after the coronavirus pandemic but as the weeks of stay-at-home orders and school closures continue nationwide, parents are questioning whether isolation measures and physical distancing are doing lasting damage to their kids' emotional development. In this podcast we'll be looking at children's mental health during lockdown, we'll be looking at the positives and negatives of remote learning and during this time, what we can do to help them.	00:45
00:45	Candice Cowen	The coronavirus pandemic and its measures to contain its spread are disrupting nearly every aspect of children's lives. It's affecting their health, their development, their learning, behaviour, their family's economic security, [in a] lot of cases, their protection from violence and abuse. A large majority of the world's children are living under some form of pandemic related limits on movement. Here in South Africa, we've got lockdown and about 1.5 billion children across the globe are not at school. This is especially tragic for the poorest children in developing countries such as South Africa who rely on school feeding programs for their only consistent daily meal. Although these initiatives are necessary to prevent the spread of coronavirus, there is a general consensus that they may be causing more widespread mental health effects such as anxiety, depression and loneliness amongst younger children and adults alike. What children are faced with currently, is really the world is entering a long-lasting recession. Jobs are being lost, families are losing precious sources of income and children's sense of security and safety and normalcy will be challenged like never before.	01:54
01:54	Candice Cowen	Many children and young people are also contending with family separations, they're having to care for the sick relatives and even the death of loved ones. Younger children are at great risk as high levels of stress in isolation can affect brain development. What I'm experiencing as a psychologist in practice is that children are verbalising their worries about being isolated from friends and family and even catching and dying from the virus. Parents are verbalising that they're confused about how to address their children's fears or how to explain extreme containment measures like social distancing. Many people are starting to ask important questions such as "Will this generation grow up to be fearful of touching or standing too close to one another? Will they know how to make friends or know how to interact in groups?" And "how will it affect academics and	03:11

		<p>job prospects?" These concerns are all valid, but not all doom and gloom. Children are largely resilient and do have a bounce back factor. Sometimes more so than adults do. Yes, there are short-term and potentially long-term consequences of what they're currently being exposed to but if we educate ourselves and become aware of what normal functioning is from a developmental perspective, or what we can expect at certain ages emotionally and behaviourally it can assist in helping us intervene and support kids in an appropriate manner</p>	
03:13	Candice Cowen	<p>Let's take a look at what developmental psychology says about the wellbeing of younger and middle-aged children. All children thrive when all their needs are met. That means when they feel safe and protected, when their family and community connections are stable and nurturing and when their basic needs are met. Daily structure is important to everyone but particularly to children in their psychological and emotional development. The consistency of schedules, the predictable rules and consequences and set expectations, teach children how to behave and develop self-discipline and impulse control. But importantly, it gives them that sense safety and control. The main function, really, during this time in a child's life is exploration of the environment. They do this in order to start categorising information in their brains as a way to make sense of the world and things that happen around them. So, children are watching, children learn from adults. And, since they'll often be at home together now, they will observe not only what adults say in the home but how they also implement structure and ensure consistency and deal with their own emotions. It's important to consider the developmental age of a child when communicating with them about how they feel or sharing information with them. Younger children rely on adults around them to show them how to be in the world and their brains are like little sponges and absorb large amounts of information. School plays an important role here and the socialisation, and socialisation is key in helping these developmental processes. Yes, same age peer interaction is crucial, but nursery schools and primary schools have been closed since the 18 March, with no clear plan of when they'll be returning. The stresses that children are facing are challenging, to say the least. There is a sense of isolation, a sense of loss, a sense of uncertainty. They aren't seeing their friends or their teachers every day, they aren't having face to face learning or playtime. They aren't being able to take part in sport or organised extra murals, and they're having to adjust to a completely new way of learning.</p>	05:17
05:17	Candice Cowen	<p>Parents are likely to experience significant stress during this time as well. Consideration for what parents are managing in terms of their own anxiety and stress while at the same also having to model for their children is greatly acknowledged. It's really not easy. Yes, there's challenges of having to be home-schooled and to be faced with a lockdown and those need to be acknowledged and supported as best we can, but there are also benefits of lockdown and children being at home at this time. Some of these benefits would be, you know</p>	06:56

		<p>children see, view spending time with, at home with their parents as a benefit. It... children have opportunities to have access to their parents in different ways during this time, which gives them a sense of connection. Having to experience boredom which leads to creativity and imagination. Children are having to come up with ways to fill their days. This isn't a bad thing and being on lockdown allows children to experience this unique and essential developmental process. At times, when kids' days are so full and there's very limited time to be bored, we actually do take away from creativity and imagination. There's also an opportunity for independence gaining. Children are having to manage their own days and schooling if their parents are working, which also allows children to use this time to be assigned age-appropriate responsibilities. This develops their sense of self-worth and confidence. Children's sense of awareness is also being brought on by what they are being exposed to, it's an opportunity for them to learn about the world, about physical health, about illnesses, about personal hygiene and safety, finances and emotions which are all important for developmental growth.</p>	
06:56	Candice Cowen	<p>So, how do you as an adult or a parent support your children during this time? Remember, recreating the school environment is really tricky but there are things you can do to make the experience relatively rewarding and stress free. Here are some:</p> <p>Set a routine, if possible, have children dress and have breakfast at certain times in the weekdays. This will help them adjust when school actually reopens.</p> <p>Identify a set time of day when you can help your children with projects and other times where they can do it by themselves. Often parents are now having to rely on flexible routines and daily structure so that they can accommodate both working and helping kids with projects.</p> <p>TO avoid children losing too many academic skills that they don't practice, including things like reading, writing, and maths, make sure that these are most important daily sessions and sit down and practice with them. Give them daily responsibilities and offer support for those that they can't do alone. And empathise with their situation. Normalise that the way that they feel is okay. Yes, frustration, sadness, loneliness, boredom, and anxiety are all part of the process and lastly, for yourself as a parent to give yourself a break and not to be too harsh on yourself. Remember that children are resilient and do bounce back and they will bounce back from the current situation</p>	08:14
08:16	VO Outro	This podcast was brought to you by Discovery. Stay informed, stay healthy.	08:22