

Preparing for the Unexpected



For Elementary
Parents/Caregivers

As children grow, they are making sense of the world around them and discovering how it all relates to themselves.

That part hasn't changed. However, the world is quickly changing, and caring adults are frantically seeking ways to meet the demands of their developing kids in an ever-changing world.

During the elementary phase, kids are developing social-emotional skills that will help them to better relate to their peers and adults, navigate friendships, and regulate their attention and emotions. The frequent roller coaster of emotions we see in preschoolers, such as the intense crying when separating from mom and dad or the striking of their sibling when frustrated, will (thankfully) decrease in the elementary phase. Empathy is developing as elementary schoolers are better able to identify their emotions and the emotions of others.

While elementary schoolers are learning how to recognize stress, they may have a tough time with how to cope with highly stressful events. When faced with a challenging or unexpected event, they may struggle to express their thoughts and emotions in a healthy way—and these struggles may present behaviorally.

Kids will need support to enable them to feel safe and to make sense of the experience.

This worksheet is intended to help you reflect and create a plan ahead of time for how you want to respond if you discover something you never expected. Spend as much time as you need thinking through your responses. They are not for anyone other than you (unless you choose to discuss this with your spouse, co-parent, grandparent, another caregiver or health professional).

In a perfect world, every parent who discovers something they weren't expecting would do so after a good night's sleep, feeling rested, confident, and at peace with themselves and the world around them. That's seldom the case. That's why it's best to create a response plan when you are clear and thoughtful. So, take a few, deep breaths. Find a place where you feel safe and comfortable. If you need to walk away and come back to this at a later time, that's okay, too.

① What do we mean by “the unexpected”?

This is an open-ended idea because our kids are growing up in a world with a vast number of unexpected scenarios. So, in one sense, we can't predict what we can't predict.

However, according to leaders who work with kids, and research provided by U.S. census data, the CDC, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, here are a few scenarios that can be a part of a kid's world that parents frequently fail to anticipate →

Car accidents

Pet loss

Parental separation or divorce

Moving or changing schools

Sudden illness/death in the family

School or community violence

Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

Generalized Anxiety/Phobias

Separation Anxiety

Depression

Cutting/self-harm

Suicidal thoughts

⑥ Name your community.

Every parent has what it takes to navigate challenges with their kids, but none of us can carry the weight alone. If you were to discover something you weren't expecting in your kid's life, who would you be able to call?

Think of someone with whom you feel safe enough to be completely honest about what is happening and what you are feeling.

Every kid who is navigating challenging situations needs their parent's involvement. But a parent may not be the only influence they need. If you were to discover something you weren't expecting, who else in your kid's life could you count on to walk with them through this experience?

Think of someone who shares your values with whom your kid feels safe enough to be completely honest about what is happening.

Your responses to the questions in this resource may be one of the most important things to keep in front of you as a parent. Consider returning to what you have written every year to revise and repeat your response so that you can remember it quickly if you ever need to use it.

Professional Support

If you are concerned about how your child is coping or if you are not coping so well yourself, seek out professional support. Your child's pediatrician or your primary care doctor can assist you with next steps.

Mental Health Emergencies

For mental health emergencies, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. They have trained people that can help you and your child 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

To learn more about the phase your kid is in right now, download the Parent Cue app and check out our phase-specific cues every week with a monthly subscription.



More Resources at ParentCue.org →