

Helping Hand

Volume 22, Issue 3

Stopping Germs at Home, Work and School

The main way that illnesses like colds and flu are spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This is called “droplet spread.”

This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and are deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Sometimes germs also can be spread when people touch respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk and then touch their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks.

The “Happy Birthday” song helps keep your hands clean?

Not exactly. Yet we recommend that when you wash your hands – with soap and warm water – that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. That’s about the same time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice!

Alcohol-based hand wipes and gel sanitizers work, too

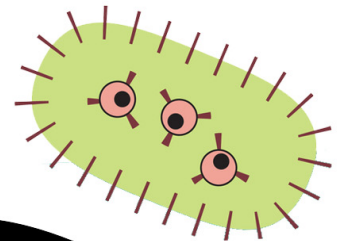
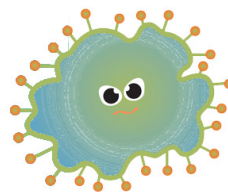
When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn’t need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

Germs and children

Remind children to practice healthy habits, because germs spread easily between children, especially at school and daycare.

STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

- Cover your mouth and nose
- Clean your hands often
- Remind your children to practice healthy habits, too
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away. Cover your cough or sneeze with your hand if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands – every time you cough or sneeze.



Learn from Your Child's Teacher

You know how your child behaves at home, but do you really know what he or she is like at school? Find out if your child is ready to learn while at school and whether his or her behaviors change in the classroom. A child's mental health is an important factor in his or her ability to do well in school. Your child's teacher should be your ally, and can help you decide if your child may need help in this area.

Here are a few questions that teachers and parents can discuss together. Does my child:

- Seem angry most of the time? Cry a lot? Overreact to things?
- Destroy school property or do things that are life threatening?
- Harm other children on the playground?
- Break rules over and over again?
- Often complain about headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems—especially when it's time to take a test or participate in classroom social activities?
- Seem obsessed about how he or she looks?
- Appear sad or anxious much of the time? Show unusual concern about grades or tests?
- Struggle to sit still or focus his or her attention? Make decisions?
- Respect your authority as a teacher?
- Seem to have lost interest in things usually enjoyed, such as sports, music, or other school activities? Has he or she suddenly started avoiding friends?

If you or your child's teacher answer "yes" to any of these questions, and the problem seems persistent or severe, then you need to find out if a mental health problem is contributing to this behavior. A good place to start is with the school's student assistance resources or school counselor. Also consider contacting your health insurance carrier and your child's pediatrician for covered and qualified referrals.

Five Ways to Prevent Kids from Bullying

We focus a great deal — and rightly so — on the victims of bullying. But adults can focus on the bullies, too, by helping the bullying child face the reality of his or her behavior and taking responsibility for it. In his book, *How to Talk to Your Kids about School Violence*, Ken Druck, PhD, provides a list of five ways adults can intervene with a young person who is bullying.

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1. **Get the facts.** If the child won't tell you about his or her behavior, talk to other parents, teachers and possibly the victim and/or the victim's parents.
2. **The child should apologize to his or her victim and undo any damage to the extent it's possible.** For example, if the child damaged another child's belongings, he or she should replace the damaged items.
3. **Help the young person understand that physical, verbal, written and/or emotional abuse of another person is never acceptable.**
4. **If the young person hangs out with other bullies, separate him or her from that group.** Parents can drive the young person to and from school and involve the young person in constructive after-school activities. In elementary grades, teachers can separate children in the classroom and designate "play buddies" for recess time (to reduce the vulnerability of a lone child). Make an action plan to address those problems, such as going for counseling or taking an anger management or an anti-bullying class.
5. **Let the child talk about the fears and insecurities that might be causing him or her to act like a bully.**

Schools and Stepfamilies

In addition to parents and stepparents, stable school personnel like teachers, counselors, administrators and school nurses can provide positive support, encouragement and consistency for stepchildren in the school environment. Communication with school personnel is the key. Here are some suggestions that will help stepchildren adjust successfully in school:

- **When there is a remarriage, inform the teachers, counselor and administrator right away so that school personnel will monitor school performance for important changes.** Make an appointment with staff and introduce your child's new stepparent, visit the classroom, and tour the school campus.
- **Ask if there are groups for children in stepfamilies.** Many schools have small groups to help children process feelings of loss, frustration, confusion and anger that occur when a biological parent remarries. If your school doesn't have a group for stepchildren, encourage the school counselor to form one and ask if groups may be available offsite (in some communities, such programs are offered by community agencies in partnership with the school).
- **Ask about Parent or Family Education classes for adults.** These classes may help parents and stepparents learn how to adjust to stepfamily life.
- **If there are unique and unusual custody arrangements, provide the school with a copy of the custody agreement.** If there is joint custody, make sure the school sends copies of report cards, newsletters, progress reports and other important documents to both families.
- **Make sure the stepparent's name is on the school registration form with work, cell phone and pager numbers.** This is important for emergencies.
- **When biological parents are unable to meet together for parent/teacher conferences, ask for two separate conferences.** Stepparents are an important support system for stepchildren and will usually gladly assist with homework and other school activities.



- **Join the parent-teacher organization and support school events and policies.** Stepparents who volunteer at school increase understanding and rapport with stepchildren. This is one of the most effective methods of building friendships with stepchildren. All children want to have the adults in their lives cheer them on to success in every school activity.
- **Develop a regular study routine where both parents and stepparents discuss assignments and the school day with children.**
- **Biological and stepparents are encouraged to be pro-active with school personnel.** When school districts are approached in a supportive, helpful manner with information and educational materials about stepfamilies, most will be appreciative of the effort and make constructive changes. It might take time, energy, and persistence but as stepparents and biological parents work together with educators, the partnership will enhance the lives of all children in the school district.

What is a Writing Disorder?

Children with writing disorders have trouble with spelling, punctuation and developing well-organized sentences. Often, children who have writing disorders will also have reading disorders. Even so, children with reading and writing disorders are often highly verbal, intelligent children who do not exhibit any difficulties in understanding or using language.

Kindergarten and even first grade children are encouraged to put their ideas into writing using their own “creative” spelling of words so that they can express themselves spontaneously in writing. Over time, most children use fewer unique spellings and pick up the correct spelling for words that they use. Children with writing disorders, however, do not spontaneously adjust to and remember the correct spelling of many words and don’t learn how to form a complicated sentence.

Signs of a writing disorder

Writing disorders may be identified in the third or fourth grade based on writing with:

- excessive spelling errors
- overuse of pronouns, confusion in the story
- short, bland sentences compared to verbal language
- many grammatical errors
- many punctuation errors
- stories that are short and have abrupt endings

Instruction and encouragement

Children with writing disorders need specific instruction in:

- how to write the correct letter combinations to make sounds in language
- rules of spelling
- use of punctuation
- how to construct an informative sentence

All children, especially those with a writing disorder, need time to engage in creative written expression. A key ingredient in helping children with a writing disorder is receiving positive feedback for communicating their own unique ideas through written expression. Praise for writing stories, poems, letters or any other personal written expression, regardless of mistakes, goes a long way to help children with writing disorder.

