

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

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Managing the information as well as the stress of the coronavirus are key to good health and well-being. Here are some general brief tips to keep in mind when tackling the topic with children. Of course, by interacting, there is the added benefit of keeping an eye on their mental health and well-being and tackling that together.

For parents and caregivers

- **Be mindful and manage your fears:** Fear can be contagious so above all, parents need to monitor and manage their own worry especially in front of and with their children. Calm can be contagious, so spread calm.
- **Be a role model:** Show and tell what you do to manage worry and stay healthy.
- **Be appropriately informed:** Go to trusted sources, seek people that are reliable, manage your own information overload and misinformation.
- **Be aware of your needs:** Pay attention to your feelings and reactions and monitor. Use personal resources and strategies, access seek support. If your own stress reactions are too much, get help.
- **Be kind and generous with yourself:** The situation is new and stressful for everyone. Have appropriate expectations for yourself and your family. Be forgiving of yourself.

Talking to children

- **Be in the know:** Know what your kids are watching and hearing then correct, monitor, limit, review together as necessary. Monitor child's media use and information so you can address concerns directly to help separate fact from fiction.
- **Be open and available:** Encourage questions. You want your children to see you as a reliable, caring resource so they feel comfortable coming to you. Have more than one conversation over time.
- **Be a good listener:** Find out what your children know and answer their questions rather than assume what they need to know. Parents should listen to children's specific worries and address those e.g. is it worry about visiting grandma or having enough supplies.
- **Be honest and age appropriate:** Tailor the information to your child's age and style. The younger the child, the more prone to fantasies, and need for less words. The older the child, the more susceptible to rumors and getting outside information so use more discussion.
- **Be supportive:** Validate feelings but also help with expression of them and coping with them. If a child is already a worrier, help with identifying strategies and managing runaway thoughts.
- **Be up to date:** Know and review your safety plans. Dust off and go over your own family health plans. Normalize actions; put things in the context of overall good health and safety e.g. wearing seat belts, looking before you cross the street, eating well and sleeping.
- **Be inclusive:** Involve children in plans for activities, safety, and cleanliness. Present it as good year round habits, this being a good time for reminders and extra attention. Knowing what to do leads to feeling empowered rather than helpless.
- **Be reassuring:** Use structure and routine to provide predictability as well as distraction.
- **Be connected:** Stay in touch with support systems (family and friends) to manage any isolation and get respite and refresh your state of mind by reaching out to friends, family, faith, community.
- **Be focused on the here and now:** Talk about your family, your plan, your situation, the next few days in the immediate future so as not to get overwhelmed by the unknown.
- **Be comforting:** Play, read, create, and give (and get) hugs when healthy.
- **Be hopeful:** Share and look for stories about the good, help others.

TEENS AND PARENTS: TIPS FOR CONNECTING

- **Think about life skills for the future:** Talk about what you wish you knew at their age, or ask them to write a letter to their future self. Tackle some life skills e.g. doing laundry, money management, cooking, baking, as well as self-care such as yoga, meditation, nutrition, and fitness – all with nifty apps and online options.
- **Bridge the gap:** It goes both ways. Think about what you can learn from your teen! Think about bridging the technology generation gap; learn the games and apps they use, or have them help you set up tools for your chores such as financial management or other online project management systems. That way you are both improving your life skills
- **Think ahead:** Colleges and other institutions have put courses on line. Pick one/some to do together. Then in real time you can talk about time management, research, writing papers - skills they will need later in life
- **Pick a shared project:** Learn a language, explore careers via online research, take a virtual tour of a museum or park, research new causes and cultures.