

Talking to Children About COVID - 19 (Coronavirus)

A Parent Resource

Pre-K – 12th

(Adapted from ISCA & NASP Handouts)

Dear Parents,

A new type of coronavirus, abbreviated COVID-19, is causing an outbreak of respiratory disease. It was first detected in China and has been declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Concern over this new virus can make children and families anxious. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate prevention information and facts without causing undue alarm. It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react and respond to stressful events.

Some guidelines to build resilience and have reassuring conversations with kids are:

1. **Stay Calm and Reassuring** - If you show anxiety or fear, your child will pick up on this and also feel nervous and afraid. Having calm, panic-free discussions can ease emotions around changes in routine. Check-in on how your child is feeling and acknowledge and address their worries rather than ignore them.
2. **Stick to the Facts** - It is important to have thoughtful conversations regarding the coronavirus to distill anxiety, worry or fear. Consider your child's age, processing and emotions to determine how to frame these conversations to ensure your child understands. If they have additional questions you can look for the answers. Check-in on what your child is thinking and address their worries.
3. **Consider Media Consumption** - We know that children absorb information from the Internet, news and social media. Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Discuss that not everything they hear or see is always accurate and may be based on rumors. Think before sharing. When sharing appropriate information it shows that you trust and value them, which can build their resilience.
4. **Eliminate Stigma** - It is important to be aware of how the coronavirus is explained to your children to avoid any person/group being blamed. Communicate that if someone has a fever or cough does not mean this person has the coronavirus. Also, be aware of any comments that other adults are having around your family. You may have to explain what comments mean if they are different than the values that you have at home.
5. **Boost Coping Strategies** - When anyone has change or uncertainty this can create some level of worry or anxiety. When this occurs, it is important to use positive coping strategies to manage those emotions. Coping strategies can include: positive self-talk, singing, dancing, reading, drawing, music, movies, creating a gratitude list, meditation, yoga, coloring, exercise, baking/cooking, talking to a friend or family member, or other activities that bring joy and positive feelings.
6. **Maintain a Routine to the Extent Possible** - Keep to a regular schedule as this can provide reassurance and promote physical and mental health. Providing a routine creates predictability, which increases their sense of control.

Talking Points

1. Adults at home and school are taking care of your health and safety. If you have concerns, please talk to a trusted adult.
2. Not everyone will get the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease. School and health officials are being especially careful to make sure as few people as possible get sick.
3. It is important that we not jump to conclusions about who may or may not have COVID-19.
4. There are things you can do to stay healthy and avoid spreading the disease:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water (20 seconds).
 - If you don't have soap, use hand sanitizer (60–95% alcohol based).
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Stay home when you are sick.
 - Cover your cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Keep Explanations Age Appropriate

Pre-K-2nd

- Elementary children need brief, simple information that should balance COVID-19 with appropriate reassurance that adults are there to help keep them safe and healthy. Give examples of the steps people take everyday to stop germs and stay healthy, such as hand washing.

3rd - 6th

- Upper elementary children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their school or community. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to prevent germs from spreading (i.e. masks, gloves, & cleanliness).

7th - 12th

- Upper middle school and high school students are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.

You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, do not avoid giving them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health. Be patient, children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you are engaged in your own work.

If you notice your child is still worried or anxious, be assured that this is a normal reaction, and continue conversations and providing care for your child. If you find that additional support is needed, please reach out to the BBS Educational Psychologist through email and she can speak with you about your concerns and potentially refer you to private counseling services.

Regards,

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