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COVID-19 and Calming Kids' Worries



With the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the news every day, it's natural to feel some fear and anxiety. Children may be concerned or frightened as well. One of the best things parents and caregivers can do is to reassure children that they are safe and provide them with age-appropriate information.

First things first

- Before talking with your children, sort out your own feelings. Discuss your own anxiety and uncertainty with other adults. Kids pick up on attitudes and feelings of trusted adults, so parents need to get support.
- Be sure you have the most current, accurate information available. You can get the latest news and updates on coronavirus on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

Talking to your kids

When talking to children, remember the following:

- Start the conversation by asking your child(ren) what they've heard about coronavirus at school or from friends. Calmly correct any misconceptions or false information. It may be helpful to provide age-appropriate explanations for words such as virus, isolation, quarantine, or contagious.
- Present factual information. Don't assume that kids, especially under age 8 or 9, will really understand what it means. They need you to put the facts into perspective for them.
- Convey realistic confidence in their safety. Parents need to express more certainty with younger children and deal with real ambiguity in older kids.

- Explain that although kids have likely heard that the virus started in China, their peers from the Asian culture or any other culture do not present added risk for having or spreading the illness.
- Let them know that many people are working to keep us all healthy and safe.
- Remind them of good hygiene habits. The best prevention against a virus is proper handwashing.

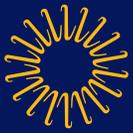
More Tips

Having a conversation with your children about the facts and reassuring them of their safety is critical. There are other things you can do to reduce anxiety and help the family cope during these situations.

- Watch TV with your kids. Keep the amount of exposure within reason. With the extensive news coverage, children will likely be exposed to repeated images in the media.
- Monitor screen time. As with TV time, limit exposure and be prepared to sort fact from fiction.
- Keep to a routine. The usual schedule can help reduce anxiety.
- Use your family traditions, beliefs and religious practices as sources of strength and a way to find comfort.
- A certain amount of anxiety is to be expected.

If your child shows prolonged signs of stress, seek help from your pediatrician or local mental health counselor.

Remember, helping kids feel safe and providing factual information is the goal of the conversation. On our website, BradleyHospital.org, you can find more tips on talking with children about diseases in the news and about traumatic events.



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COVID-19 and Its Impact on Our Daily Lives



Our world has changed drastically from what we knew as “normal.” The Coronavirus Disease 2019, COVID19 in short form, has created a new normal for many of us these days. We all feel the impact of the pandemic, but for parents and caregivers it can be even more difficult.

In the past weeks, we’ve learned new terms like physical distancing, self-quarantine and flattening the curve as ways to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Schools are closed in numerous regions presenting daycare issues for many, and a new homeschooling environment is becoming the norm. Others may be facing different work arrangements, or no work at all. Some may have been in contact with a person who tested positive for the virus and is now refraining from any contact with others for two weeks or longer.

First, parents and other caregivers are facing their own anxiety in this rapidly changing situation. Parents know that the single most important factor in how your child reacts is how you handle these challenging times. As you have these difficult conversations with your child, it is not only what you say, but how you say it. Stay calm, reassuring and age-appropriately honest with them about the disease and the new normal that it has created.

Tips for Families

It is natural for parents to be stressed and uncertain about the future. Here are some tips to help support families during this crisis.

Routines. Having a routine is good for you. Even if work and school schedules have changed, it doesn’t mean your day can’t have a sense of normalcy to it. Get up at the same time in the mornings and get ready for your day as you normally would. Create a schedule for the family of school or work time. You may want to include chores, homework, play activities, screen time, and bedtime. Consider adding some family game time or family exercise. A well-paced and thoughtful routine can be reassuring and comforting to children at any age.

Be Informed. Be sure to stay up to date about the latest on the outbreak, as well as additional recommendations from local public health authorities. Websites like the Rhode Island Department of Health and the CDC are excellent sources.

Stay connected. Physical distancing is crucial right now in order to reduce the spread. But that doesn’t mean we need to lose contact with family and friends. We are so fortunate that we live in such a connected world. Technology affords us a way to contact educators, classmates and colleagues.

Remember, your children likely miss their school peers; friends and neighbors are just a phone call or social media post away. This may be a time to relax family limits on phone and screen time, maybe just a little!

Limit exposure. While technology gives us a way to stay connected, it can also be overwhelming. Be sure you minimize your exposure to media outlets and avoid sites that may promote fear or panic. Some websites are notorious for providing false or distorted information. Remind your child that everything they see on television or social media may not be the truth or the whole truth.

Keep talking. Your children will naturally have questions, and by staying up to date on the information, you can keep open lines of communication and answer their questions frankly and honestly as appropriate for their age level.

Consider contributing to the community. Many find that the best way to feel better themselves is to focus on the needs of others. As a family you may want to discuss ways that you or your child can contribute to the community. For example, children may want to send notes of support to their peers or thanks to first responders or healthcare personnel.

Find support. Remember, these are trying times and we all need to stay aware of our own physical and mental health. Stay close to personal sources of strength such as loved ones, family traditions and beliefs.

Signs you need additional support

Here are some signs that may indicate that it is time for you to reach out for additional support for yourself or a loved one.

- expressing excessive anger, anxiety, worry or sadness
- significant changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- hyper-vigilance to their health or body
- feeling helpless
- difficulty concentrating or attending
- talking about or hurting self or others

Ask for help. Help is only a phone call away.

- For support for a child or adolescent Rhode Island resident, contact your primary care physician or Kids’ Link RI emotional crisis hotline at 1-855-543-5465
- For adult Rhode Island residents, contact your primary care physician or BH Link at bhlink.org or 401-414-LINK (5465)

We understand that these are trying and uncertain times, but together, we will all get through this.