

TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

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We've all heard healthcare providers tell us how to keep the coronavirus at bay. Wash your hands frequently and don't touch your face. If you have any symptoms of the virus, consult a doctor and stay away from other people. These are helpful for managing the physical aspects of what has now been declared a pandemic. As a parent, how can you help your kids cope with the fear and worry that the statistics and predictions on the nightly news might stir up? Here are some tips for talking to kids about the coronavirus.

KEEP CALM AND COMMUNICATE

First, remain calm. Children tend to model their parents' emotions and if you communicate in a calm manner, that will likely help reduce your kids' fear. If you, like many adults, are someone who struggles with anxiety, talk about that with another adult or a counselor, not with your children. It's ok to tell kids that it's normal to feel a little fear but you don't want to transfer your anxiety to them. Also, remember that many kids will be completely unaware of the coronavirus outbreak because they're so young and don't have older siblings. Talk to them only if they bring up the subject or you know that they've been exposed to information and are confused or scared. This is a case where "ignorance is bliss."

PROVIDE REASSURANCE

Assure them that they're safe and that you know what to do if someone in your family becomes ill. List 3-5 steps that you'll take if someone in your family begins to show symptoms of the virus. Remember that children of all ages may become fearful or overly worried, so be sure to have age appropriate discussions with each of your children. Sometimes, adolescents and teenagers can be more fearful and worried than younger children.

STICK TO THE FACTS

Discuss factual information related to your local community. Whenever there is an unexpected problem that impacts a lot of people, there is a lot of misinformation floating around. Look for information from Health Professionals and local or national healthcare resources that have reputations for providing evidence-based and accurate information. When talking with your kids about coronavirus, talk openly about the risks and remedies that exist where you live. Avoid giving a lot of information about national and global concerns.

Explain that you're trying to be cautious and wise, not acting out of fear. This situation offers a great opportunity for you to explain that it's always best to *be proactive rather than reactive*. Your actions now are intended to *prevent future problems*, not necessarily to cope with current problems. If your family has successfully weathered a serious weather event, a flu outbreak, or another unexpected event in the past, remind your children that you were able to do that because you were well prepared.

Stick to your established routines and schedules as much as possible. Change is hard for many kids. The more you can minimize changes, the better. Children tend to feel more secure when they know what is coming in their daily schedules.

USE THIS TIME FOR FAMILY FUN

If you decide to isolate as a family, have fun spending time together. Emphasize the opportunity to slow down, hang out, and enjoy each other's company. Remember, you're taking steps to prevent getting the virus, not hiding in fear. Also, encourage your kids to engage in physical activities and creative experiences, both known to be helpful for easing anxiety.

Resist the urge to check the news every 5 minutes. So much of what you read and hear in the news one day will be found to be untrue a day later. Pick a ½ hour period each day to stay informed and report only what is age appropriate to your children.

GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL

Pray with your children. Emphasize that you're trusting God for His guidance. If your kids are old enough to read and understand scripture, read and discuss Psalms 91:1-3 (ICB) together:

Those who go to God Most High for safety

will be protected by God All-Powerful.

I will say to the Lord, "You are my place of safety and protection.

You are my God, and I trust you."

God will save you from hidden traps

and from deadly diseases.

CONCLUSION

Talking with your kids about coronavirus will help them to cope with the fear and anxiety that news of such a disease can bring. Continue to keep your family prepared. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Trust that no matter what happens, God is in control.