

Concern over COVID-19 (Coronavirus) can make children and families anxious. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate information and facts without causing undue alarm.

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents should reassure children that adults are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. Children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and instruction about how to keep themselves healthy. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

### **Specific Guidelines**

- Remain calm and reassuring – children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions; remind them that you and the adults at their school are there to keep them safe and healthy.
- Make yourself available and let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.
- Monitor television viewing and social media. Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety.
- Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.
- Be honest and accurate. In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality.

### **Take Time to Talk**

You know your children best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. However, don't avoid giving them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring your children's health. Be patient; children do not always talk about their concerns readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do housework. It is very typical for younger children to ask a few questions, return to playing, then come back to ask more questions.

When sharing information, it is important make sure to provide facts without promoting a high level of stress, remind children that adults are working to address this concern, and give children actions they can take to protect themselves. Information is rapidly changing about this new virus—to have the most correct information stay informed by accessing

### **Keep Explanations Age Appropriate**

- Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should balance COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that their schools and homes are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick. Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands. Use language such as “adults are working hard to keep you safe.”
- Upper elementary and early middle school 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.
- 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.

*Information adapted from the National Association of School Psychologist (NASP). For additional information, please see the NASP's website at: [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)*