



Tips for Talking to Young Children

- **Assess.** Gently explore whether your young child has any knowledge about Coronavirus. If not, examine how much information you would like to share without introducing unnecessary worry.
- **Be in the moment.** Tell your child what the plan is for now – i.e. “We are staying in our house for a little while and I’m not sure when we will get to go outside. While we are here, we are going to have a different schedule and have fun together at home!”
- **Avoid talking too far in the future.** Present information in an honest way, i.e. “I don’t know yet when school will reopen, but I am talking to your teacher and I’ll let you know as soon as I hear. She is home too and we are all on a little break while they get the school clean and everyone stays healthy.”
- **Use simple language.** For example, “We all get viruses all the time, this is just a new one so we are all trying to figure out how it works and how we can keep people safe and take care of people who are sick. We can do our part by staying home and making sure we stay healthy.”
- **Reflect their emotions.** You can say something like “Your face looks like you’re worried and I’m wondering if there is anything on your mind,” or “I understand why you might be sad about that.” Try to resist the urge to move young children away from difficult emotions, even though it is natural to want them to be happy. It helps children to know that we can sit with them through hard moments, and that it’s normal and OK to feel ALL feelings.
- **Involve your child.** Ask your children for ways they think they can stay healthy. Washing hands, taking off their shoes, cleaning their toys, blowing their nose, etc. are all ideas that you can generate WITH your child and emphasize.

Additional Tips for Talking to Older Children

- **Ask.** Our children are exposed to information in MANY ways, some beyond our knowledge, and it is important to help address the information they've heard or read. Ask older children directly about what they know about Coronavirus and what they think is going on around them.
- **Don't be afraid to listen to difficult feelings.** Helping your children name hard feelings is especially important for older children. By expressing these feelings, and fighting against them with evidence and a plan (i.e. “It is scary to think that we could get sick without knowing it. But we are doing everything that we can do, and so far that has been working. If you have other ideas, I’m here to listen.”)

- **Use an outlet.** When older children don't want to have head-on conversations, encourage them to creatively express emotions through writing, music, dance, physical activity or drawing.
- **Share your experiences.** Provided you have control over your OWN anxiety, it can be helpful to model for your children how you are coping with the same feelings of fear, uncertainty and loss of control. Modeling our own coping strategies and sharing our difficult emotions with our children makes our relationships stronger and helps them to feel heard and understood in profound ways.

Tips for Self Care

- **Accept the anxiety.** Feeling out of control in uncertain times can make us all anxious. In this unique time, it would benefit us all to accept that there is no way to read/talk/work yourself to certainty and that we must embrace the unknown and accept it. By resisting the urge to fight against it, you can find some peace with the current circumstances and avoid the spin cycle of anxiety.
- **Save your worry for what you can solve.** Differentiate between Productive Worry: where you can do something to solve it (like getting groceries and supplies) and Unproductive Worry: where there is no immediate action to take and unanswerable questions are trapped in your head. Try not to get sidetracked with Unproductive Worry whenever possible.
- **Bring your anxiety out from your head.** Anxious thoughts are your bodies attempt to control a primal reaction to fear and threat. Remember that if you can find other ways to release the underlying emotions, you can assist the thoughts in moving through. You cannot THINK your way out of persistent worry – no matter how hard you try.
 - **A few ways to try:**
 - **Meditation.** Take “counting breaths,” use meditation apps, or try a gratitude practice.
 - **Make your anxiety a friend.** Name it, assign it a color or number 1-10 and make it tangible so that you can address it externally. Welcome it, expect it, and make room for it. This will help you feel prepared to experience these feelings, instead of feeling surprised or attacked by them.
 - **Act it out.** Use exercise to release tension, built up fears or worry. Act out what it feels like to be inside your body (i.e. out of control, hyper, scared). Running, jumping, boxing, etc. can help to externalize thoughts and feelings more effectively.
 - **Show compassion to yourself.** Forgive hard moments, over reactions, outbursts and breakdowns. Accept them, value them and move on. This is a marathon and not a sprint. The stakes are different in crisis.
- **View challenge as a chance to grow and adapt.** Remember that stress is also good for you and we can rise to occasions in a way that helps us further our resilience and grit. Look for ways in which you have risen to the occasion, whether as a teacher for your child or in playing a new role in your household.

Change can be painful, but is necessary for growth. We have all adapted and deserve praise for our flexibility in the face of crisis.

- **Remember other hard times.** Focus on other challenges you have had and how you have overcome them. Recall a difficult time in your life, how insurmountable the challenge or situation seemed, and the reality of how you survived it.
- **Don't forget the basics.** Sleep and eat regularly. Take a shower. Change out of pajamas. Going through the motions of normal life helps us all to regulate ourselves.
- **Set a goal for yourself each day.** Help yourself to accomplish just one thing that you set out to do each day and offer yourself praise for achieving it.

Tips for Managing a Schedule

- **Communicate.** Parenting does not happen in a vacuum. Though things may be organized in your head (fingers crossed), there is another important human who has no idea what you are thinking. Communicate plans clearly with your child. Young children can benefit from a written schedule or picture chart, but older children still need clear conversations around expectations and responsibilities before the day begins.
- **Set a routine, not a regimen.** Let your feelings - and your child's reactions - be a guide. While children love routines, enforcing them too strictly can cause anxiety and stress for both parents and children. Make the day appropriate for your household. Consider who is there, what other opportunities your children have for activity or interaction, what mental and physical space you have that day and how you and your child are feeling. Don't be afraid to deviate when it's appropriate (i.e. when grandma calls on FaceTime in the middle of a math lesson or when an important friend is texting). Show your child that you are responsive to how you BOTH are feeling and use structure to assist, not dictate, your day.
- **Embrace the new "normal."** Accept that there may not be a normal routine based on circumstance. Allow yourself to make a new normal with whatever you have. Children need to know what to expect, but they are able to accept new information and make it consistent through practice.
- **Avoid threats.** Forcing or bribing your children into compliance causes more angst than reward. Try making a contract, even with very young children, where you both agree on what the day will hold. You can compromise around play, screen-time, meals and homework. By letting our children make choices and be involved in the plan it is more likely that children will comply. AND, by honoring their requests and desires, you model mutual respect and sensitivity.
- **Plan your time.** Just because you are home, it does not mean that you'll be available. Communicate with any other adults in the home AND with your children about when and how you can help them throughout the day. Using visual cues for younger children – such as a timer or sign on the door – can help them to understand how long you'll be away and keep them focused. If you can't physically leave but are distracted, try a funny hat or sunglasses as a way to signal when you are really "there" or need to be "away."

- **Enlist their labor.** Things are stressful in many households. Using schedules or routines in another place in which you can help to promote your child's autonomy. While chores may not have been your thing before, this crisis is creating a perfect environment in which to ask more of our children. Use this as an opportunity to discuss family responsibilities and assign new tasks to children young and old. Have your child think of a few things they CAN and would LIKE to do. Every effort counts and will help promote the "all hands on deck" mentality that helps build communities and relationships.