

REASSURING CHILDREN

Managing Anxiety: Coronavirus Fears & Concerns

Kids today are as exposed to the news cycle as adults are, but they have less life experience to interpret what they're seeing and hearing. Your job isn't to shelter them from the news; it's to help them understand and process it. Children of all ages want reassurance that their family will be safe.

Talk about it

Monitor and talk about what they see on the news.

Be aware of what your children are exposed to (including via digital devices) and set limits. Watch the news with them and discuss it afterwards. Talk with teens about the importance of getting information from reputable sources and share examples, such as CDC.

Encourage your children to talk to you about their thoughts and feelings.

Let them express fears, thoughts and worries. Be supportive and sympathetic, but avoid overreacting. Be ready for hard questions: "Will I get sick?" "What if it happened to you or Dad?"

Give direct, age appropriate answers. Children need facts to process what's going on and understand what it means. Be honest but sensitive in how you answer. Keep including messages of reassurance: "We're going to do everything we can to stay healthy."

Offer only as much information as they request.

Sometimes our own discomfort can push us to keep talking and we end up on shaky ground. Listen to what they're asking and answer that question. Period. It's okay to say you don't have all the answers.

Reduce anxiety, build up resilience

Reassure with words. When you talk, point out that the risk to any one person is low. Talk about safety precautions that the government, your community, doctors, and your own family are taking to stay safe.

Reassure with actions. Maintain family routines, particularly around meals, bedtimes, and scheduled activities. Give lots of hugs. Express your love outloud. Make time to do things together, such as riding bikes, taking a walk, reading together, or playing board games as a family. Structure and normalcy feel safe.

Don't expect your child to take care of *your* fears.

For example, don't keep your child home from school because you are anxious about being apart from them. Find help to cope with your own fears.

You know your child's personality and behavior patterns. If you see changes that concern you, and they go on for more than a couple of weeks, contact a mental health professional. Your EAP can help.

Common stress reactions in children

- › Sleep problems
- › Changes in bowel or bladder habits
- › Change in appetite – eating more/less than usual
- › Downward change in grades or behavior at school
- › Talking about a variety of physical complaints
- › Moodiness, irritability, fighting
- › Inattentiveness, inability to concentrate
- › Withdrawing, not talking
- › Being overly emotional for no clear reason
- › Fear of losing/separating from caregivers

Together, all the way.®



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