6 Tips for Talking to Your Kids About Coronavirus

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Coronavirus is a respiratory disease (COVID-19) that has been detected in dozens of countries, including in the United States. As it's spread around the world, you will likely find yourself wondering how to best talk to your children about this outbreak, especially since it's highly probable your child has heard about it. In some cases, schools have sent home messages to prepare for school closures, or they may already have announced a closure.

Your little one may also be seeing people wearing masks in public or stocking their shopping carts with masks, hand sanitizers, nonperishables, and other cleaning products. Even though it is crucial to keep your children informed for their physical and emotional/mental health, how, when, and how much information provided to our kids is just as important.

Here are six tips to help your children cope with the stress surrounding the coronavirus:

1. **Before having any conversation, check your own thoughts and feelings**. If you are very nervous or scared, this is not the time to talk to your children. Take time to calm your fears and organize your plan of action. If you have a compromised immune system or other medical condition that makes you more vulnerable, you can share with your child that this might change your daily routine but you're doing this to protect yourself.

2. **Be honest about your feelings, but reassuring.** If you cannot manage your anxiety, it is okay to let your child know, "I am a little anxious/worried about this, but I also know that we will do everything we can to keep the family safe." This helps your child understand the context behind the emotions they are picking up from you and to not take it personally. Also, it teaches your child that you can have "big emotions" about something and they are manageable. Your child will understand that regardless of what is happening in the world, you will protect them.

3. **Ask open-ended questions.** This will help you understand what your child already knows, assess their level of understanding, answer any questions they may have (even if your answer is "I don't know yet"), and clear up any misunderstandings. Keep your conversation short and use words your child will understand. It is best to talk about this during the day, not right before bedtime, to avoid nightmares.

4. **Limit their access to news.** Constant exposure to a scary news story can make your children more stressed. Do your best to limit their direct exposure to news of the outbreak, especially if it's not affecting their daily routine.

5. **Answer their concerns with facts whenever possible.** Avoid giving your opinions or fears. For example, letting your child know that, "Scientists around the world are working to find a vaccine" and that, "Our government and doctors are preparing to keep everyone safe" can help them understand why schools have sent out precautions about potential school closures.

6. **Teach and practice effective hygiene, especially handwashing.** This can empower your kids to take care of their health. Emphasizing eating healthy foods to obtain vitamins and keep your body strong is another way to teach your child how to care for their health and support their immune system.

References

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3. World Health Organization. How to wash hands with water.