

Helping Children Cope with Changes Resulting From COVID-19 – Part 2

(Sourced from the National Association of School Psychologists – NASP - which is the world's largest organization of school psychologists and represents more than 25,000 school psychologists throughout the United States and an additional 25 countries worldwide.)

MONITOR TELEVISION VIEWING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Parents/guardians should monitor television, internet, and social media viewing—both for themselves and their children. Watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase fear and anxiety. Developmentally inappropriate information, or information designed for adults, can also cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.

Dispel rumors and inaccurate information. Explain to your child that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may include rumors and inaccurate information. Older children, in particular, may be accessing a great deal of information online and from friends that contains inaccuracies. Talk to your child about factual disease information.

Provide alternatives. Engage your child in games or other exciting activities instead.

TAKE TIME TO TALK

Let your children's questions guide you. Answer their questions truthfully, but don't offer unnecessary details or facts. Don't avoid giving them the information that experts indicate as crucial to your children's well-being. Often, children and youth do not talk about their concerns because they are confused or don't want to worry loved ones. Younger children absorb scary information in waves. They ask questions, listen, play, and then repeat the cycle. Children always feel empowered if they can control some aspects of their life. A sense of control reduces fear.

BE HONEST AND ACCURATE

Correct misinformation. Children often imagine situations worse than reality; therefore, offering developmentally appropriate facts can reduce fears.

Explain simple safety steps. Tell your child this disease spreads between people who are in close contact with one another, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when one touches infected objects or surfaces. Stay up-to-date on the facts.

KEEP EXPLANATIONS AGE-APPROPRIATE

Early elementary school children. Provide brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances 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 make 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. This age group often is more vocal in asking questions about whether they indeed are safe and what will happen if COVID-19 spreads in their area. They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy. Discuss the efforts national, state, and community leaders are doing to prevent germs from spreading.

Upper middle and high school students. Issues can be discussed in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Engage them in decision-making about family plans, scheduling, and helping with chores at home.

For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!

This series will be continued in forthcoming parts