

How to talk to your kids about the Coronavirus

With ongoing, extensive news coverage on the Coronavirus and people talking about it from the grocery store line up to the playground, children may develop fears about their own health and risk. It is important for parents to talk to their children about the Coronavirus in an age appropriate way and provide effective strategies to give their children some control around something that is unknown and constantly evolving. Below are some strategies on how to have this conversation with your kids in a way that is reassuring and age appropriate.

Have the conversation!

It is important for parents to have a conversation with their children about the Coronavirus – don't be afraid. Not having a discussion is putting your children at a disadvantage. Your children have probably heard chatter about the virus – from news sources, TV, the internet or their peers. Not talking about something that your child is aware of can create more worry. Providing our kids with age appropriate information that is factual helps them fill in the blanks, answer their questions and manage their fears. How do you talk to your kids about the Coronavirus?

- Children as young as 4 can benefit from the conversation.
- Be honest and provide simple and factual information.
- Be concise – you do not need to go into too much detail – kids will get lost if they hear too much jargon.
- Use the actual words, vocabulary and language that your child may hear.
- Practice before you have the discussion. This will help you speak with confidence.
- Focus on sharing the information that we do know:
 - This is a new virus that started in China
 - The virus acts like a cold or flu
 - The virus is spread by coming into contact with someone who is sick with the Coronavirus
 - Hand washing is the number one way to stop the spread of the virus

It is OK if you can't answer all the questions

Your kids may have some difficult questions and you might not know the answers. This is okay, some of the world's smartest scientists and clinicians are still learning about the virus. Make your kids aware of this!

A way to address a question you don't know the answer to is:

That is a really good question. I don't know the answer. Let's try to find it out together (i.e. Newspapers, library, books, internet).

Some children may ask the same question over and over. This can be a coping mechanism. Children ask the same question as they are looking for consistency in your answer and so your consistent response is reassuring.

Empower Your Kids

The World Health Organization has stated that the most effective way to stop the transmission of the Coronavirus is to engage in proper hand washing practices and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Share this information with your kids. This can provide them with some control and give them something tangible to do which is meaningful for children. It can be beneficial to engage your children by asking for their ideas and strategies to help remind your family to maintain these best practices. Create a hand washing reminder sign that is visible when everyone walks in the door. Have your child pick out the soap that they like to use. Get them involved in coming up with ideas to prevent themselves from touching their face or putting their hands in their mouth (such as busying their hand with a fidget toy). Hand washing is not a new phenomenon, it is something that we promote daily with our kids. Remind your kids that they are an expert in this – have them lead you and show you how it is done.

Model Positive Behaviour

Parents are their kids best teachers. Our children are constantly observing us and learning from our responses and reactions to a situation. Be aware of how you are managing the anxiety and uncertainty around The Coronavirus. It is okay to show worry but make sure you also provide a positive example of how you manage your worries – talk to a friend, find out information, focus on what you can do to stay safe. Make sure you are practicing and modeling proper hand hygiene and healthy habits – monkey see, monkey do!

Keep the Conversation Going

The information around the Coronavirus is constantly updating and evolving. Tell your kids that you will continue to keep them updated when you learn more. This will help ensure that your kids are receiving factual information and that their fears are being addressed and managed.

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