

# Talking to Children About COVID-19

With the recent outbreak of the CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19), children's normal routines have been dramatically disrupted, causing uncertainty and stress on families.



Parents may struggle with talking to their children and need guidance on how to provide the support their children need. Children need reassurance by their families that they are safe. Whether they see images on television or hear people talking, children may feel scared that something bad is going to happen. This is best addressed by talking with them about their feelings and providing information about ways to prevent the disease, such as washing their hands and social distancing.

## Create a safe and reassuring atmosphere

- Establish a regular routine for meals, schoolwork, and relaxation activities. Children find comfort in what is familiar
- Provide opportunities for them to go outdoors, go for a walk, or get some exercise
- Children may be fearful that such things could impact them or their families. Provide reassurance that you will keep them as safe as possible

## Children need you to tell the truth

- Answer their questions with honesty
- Explain the situation using words and ideas they understand
- Don't overwhelm them with details, unless they ask for specific information
- It's okay to let children know that you too are feeling anxious

## How to manage TV, the internet and social media

- Monitor younger children's TV and online viewing. Make sure they don't watch shows or visit sites with frightening information
- For older children or adolescents, watching TV or online news, should also be limited and monitored. Be sure to talk about what they see and hear
- Ask questions like, "What do you think about what is happening? Are you scared? Do you feel anxious or worried?"

## Help them cope with their feelings

- When children are aware that something has happened, let them know they can talk to you about their feelings. A good way to start is by asking them about what they have heard
- If it is hard for your children to talk about their feelings, encourage them to express themselves by drawing pictures or telling stories about their feelings
- Encourage your children to broaden their social network of family and friends by using video technology to stay in touch such as FaceTime or Skype
- Focus on the positive. Provide examples of people who are helping others during this emergency

## Look for signs of anxiety or fear

- Loss of appetite, stomachaches, headaches or nightmares
- Constantly talking about scary ideas or feelings
- Increased fighting with parents or siblings
- Fear of leaving parents, or returning to school
- Persistent signs of stress or agitation
- If your child shows these signs for a long period of time, we encourage you to contact a mental health professional

**VOICES SUPPORT** Phone: 203-966-3911; Email: [VoicesSupport@voicesofsept11.org](mailto:VoicesSupport@voicesofsept11.org)

**MISSION** From 9/11 to today, VOICES helps families and communities heal after tragedy. VOICES assists communities in preparing for and recovering from traumatic events, and provides long-term support and resources that promote mental health care and wellness, for victims' families, responders and survivors.

Information courtesy of VOICES, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (SAMHSA), American Psychological Association, (APA) and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).