

HELPING CHILDREN – COVID-19

MENTAL WELLBEING FACT SHEET

April 2020

News of COVID-19 is everywhere. It is being talked about on the front page of the papers, and in the playgrounds. Kids worry more when they are kept in the dark, so it's important that we speak to our children in a way to reassure them, and help them understand what they can do to minimise the impact of this pandemic.

The following tips can help reduce worry before, during, and after this pandemic has impacted our local communities.

Don't be afraid to discuss it! Most children have heard about the virus or even seen more people wearing facemasks. Not talking about it often makes kids worry more. Convey age appropriate facts, free of jargon, and set the emotional tone for how we, and by modelling, our children will manage their responses to this. The goal is to help your children feel informed, and get fact-based information.

Be developmentally appropriate.

Don't volunteer too much information, as it may be overwhelming. Try to answer your child's questions honestly and clearly. It's Ok to say you don't know the answer, being available to them is what's important and reassuring.

Take cues from your child.

Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about coronavirus and also how they feel about what they have heard. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions, but don't necessarily prompt them to ask. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.

Be reassuring.

Children are very egocentric, so hearing about the coronavirus on the news may be enough for them to think they can catch it. It is useful to reassure your child that it is reasonably rare (the flu is more common) and that kids actually seem to have milder symptoms than anyone else.

Focus on what you are doing to stay safe. Kids feel empowered when they know how to keep themselves safe. Teach them how to wash their hands properly – make it fun – get them to rate how well you do it on time, surface covered, and amount of foam created – 20 seconds or two rounds of “happy birthday” or their favourite “tik tok” dance. If they ask about facemasks explain the experts don't think they are necessary for most people, but some people like being super cautious.

Common Reactions to Worry About

Infants to 2-Year-Olds

Infants may become crankier. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

For 3 to 6-Year-Olds

They may have toileting accidents, bed-wetting, tantrums and a hard time sleeping or be frightened about being separated from their parents/caregivers.

For 7 to 10-Year-Olds

Older children may feel sad, mad, or afraid that they will get really unwell. Correct misinformation the child may get from others.

For Preteens and Teenagers

Some preteens and teenagers respond by withdrawing and isolating from friends and events.

For Special Needs Children

Children with physical, emotional, or intellectual limitations may have stronger reactions. They may need additional words of reassurance, more explanations, more comfort and other positive physical contact such as hugs from loved ones.

Keep Talking

Tell your kids that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more.

If their local community or school is impacted or quarantined, talk to them about the importance of sticking to a home routine, and let them know you are prepared to cope with a period of being home together as a family.

Maybe plan to restock your board-games, jigsaws, and reading material so you have some quality time together if this occurs.

If a child's health anxiety response is ongoing, and impacts relationships or level of functioning, please speak to a professional.

Support services include:

**MEMBER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
(Benestar)**

1300 360 364

**CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT SERVICES
(CISS)/PEER SUPPORT**

1800 049 933

CHAPLAINCY AND FAMILY SUPPORT

1800 049 933

KIDS HELPLINE

1800 55 1800

HEADSPACE (12-25 YEARS)

1800 650 890

Additional Resource

The "Hello, I'm a Virus" Book found on the same page as this fact sheet can be useful for having conversations with your children around COVID-19, particularly if you do not know where start.

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