



13th March 2020

Talking to your Children about Coronavirus

Dear Parents,

You and your children will, by now, have heard a great deal about Coronavirus – some true and some perhaps just speculation, or not true at all! This virus is new – so even the experts cannot answer all of the questions. So how do you talk to your children about it?

- To begin with, only talk to your children about Coronavirus when you are feeling very calm yourself.
- Create an atmosphere of calm concern in your home. There is a problem and children become more nervous when we are obviously trying to hide something from them – but the experts are working on it, all around the world, and we are getting advice about what to do.
- Then, take your lead from your children. If they ask questions, answer them as best you can, in a calm and reassuring voice. It is ok if you do not know the answers. You can always tell your children that you will try to find out.
- Do not give children more information than they ask for, particularly if it will frighten them. Give them enough information to satisfy their curiosity and allay their fears. Not giving enough information or pretending that there is nothing wrong could cause your children to create all kinds of scary and catastrophic stories in their minds. Too much information, on the other hand, could overwhelm them.
- If your children do not ask questions, and particularly if you feel that they are trying to hide anxiety, then you can ask them some questions – *Have the children at school been talking about coronavirus? What have they been saying? What did you hear about it? What do you know about coronavirus already?* You can then clarify any confusion in what your children know or think they know about the virus and you can provide the information they are looking for – with language and information to match their ages.

- ❖ For example – *Coronavirus is a virus or a type of germ that can make people sick, just like the flu. Some people with coronavirus might only get a mild cough. Other people could get a bad cough that makes it hard to breathe and they could get a fever too. Usually, children who catch it do not really get very sick at all.*
- ❖ *We can pass the virus to each other by coughing or sneezing. When we cough or sneeze, we can release little droplets that carry the virus to other people. That is why it is important to cover our mouths when we cough or sneeze.*
- ❖ *Most people who catch coronavirus get better. Some people will need to go to hospital because of the virus. So far, only a small number of the people who have caught the virus have died. And, right now, all over the world, doctors are working really hard to find a cure.*
- Teenagers will probably know more about the virus than younger children. In fact, through their science lessons at school, they might even know more than you. However, they might still have some misconceptions that need clarification. They might also be more aware of *at-risk* members in the family and will need reassurance about that too.

We all feel less anxious when we think there is something we can do about a problem. Get your children involved in putting together a care plan for themselves and their family and friends.

- ✓ We can make sure to wash our hands before eating; when we are leaving the house; when we come back home again; before we go to bed etc. Use plenty of warm water and soap. Make lots of suds. To do a really good job, we can keep scrubbing our hands while we sing the Happy Birthday song – twice. Then rinse and pat dry.
- ✓ We can use hand sanitizers too to keep our hands clean.
- ✓ We can follow the rules about covering our mouths and noses with a tissue when we sneeze or cough. We can then put the tissue in the bin and wash our hands. If we cannot get a tissue quickly enough – then we can sneeze or cough into our elbow.
- ✓ We can try to remember not to touch our faces – especially our mouths, noses and eyes – because that is where the virus can hide.
- ✓ We can follow the rules about keeping safe distance from other people.

- ✓ We can keep ourselves healthy and build up our immune system (our internal army that fights bugs) – by getting enough sleep; taking exercise and eating a good, balanced diet – including lots of fruit and vegetables (yes, I know – *yuck* for many children – but essential!).
- ✓ We can make sure not to share any cups, spoons or drinking bottles.
- ✓ Teenagers and young adults will know that they are not likely to be badly affected if they catch coronavirus. However, they can decide to do the best they can not to pass the virus to other people who might not be so resilient. This will give them an opportunity to show that they are mature and responsible.

You will find more information about talking to children and teenagers about coronavirus on line. Check out the Harvard Health Publishing website, for example. You can also check the HSE website and the World Health Organization website. But, please be careful not to consult dubious or scare-mongering websites. It is best to visit official government websites and medical-school websites.

Please stay safe.



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