



Informing children about and protecting them against Corona virus

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a. Protecting children

- i. Provide children with a safe space – a 'holding environment'.
- ii. Stay calm and in control of the situation. Your behaviour, your views, and your body language will largely determine their reactions ... the younger the child, the more important it is to keep this in mind.
- iii. Structure days at home: establish and maintain a routine. For example, depending on their age, get the children up at a regular time, say, 07:00-08:00. See that they dress properly (NOT remain in their pajamas), comb their hair, brush their teeth (whatever their normal custom is), and have breakfast; arrange time for play/hobbies/study. Give them lunch and then let them rest or play in the garden. Give them dinner followed by, for example, TV viewing. Get them to bed at, say, 20:00-23:00 ... this will all depend on your CURRENT routine and will differ from family to family.
- iv. Give them basic, factual information about COVID-19, namely wash hands for 20 seconds; do not touch face (eyes, mouth, nose), ears, or hair; maintain social distance from other people. Teach them how to cough/sneeze: use a tissue to cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze; throw the used tissue into the trash can. Why and how to disinfect. Not to hug or extend a hand to others but, instead, to use e.g. elbow-bumps or simply say 'hello'.
- v. Do not flood them with information. However, say that nobody is immune to the virus and that we all stand a chance of contracting it. Add that younger children are less likely than older people to get very ill. Also, tell them that it is normal to feel concerned about parents, themselves, what the future holds, and so on.
- vi. Contact other parents and establish a support/discussion group to exchange ideas and learn from one another. If necessary, consult a psychologist.
- vii. Use the period of confinement to strengthen family bonds.

b. Discuss the basics of compassion and emphasise the importance of being compassionate and acting in an emotional-socially intelligent manner. This includes:

- i. expressing oneself in an appropriate manner (verbally and non-verbally).
- ii. managing one's stress: seeing and accepting the situation as it really is. Adapting one's existing views on matters in the light of changing circumstances, for example accepting the gravity of situation while believing that the government, parents, and they themselves are in control of what is happening. Remaining positive, staying calm, reflecting on what is happening, clarifying questions, and counting to 100 before overreacting (acting on the spur of moment).
- iii. Emphasise the importance of social responsibility: We ALL have to sacrifice individual 'rights' and 'privileges' in the interests of the community at large; the 'common good'. That is why we have to stay at home, maintain social distance, and so on.

c. A simple hint: "If you see a person without a smile, give them yours" (Dolly Parton). This seems like a great idea in these challenging times.

d. Control the 'controllables': do only what you can do, and do the basic things right.

e. Explain the phases of grief (what is happening currently is traumatic/grievous). Of course, parents need to consider the developmental level of their children. Helping very young children will differ substantially from helping children in, say, Grade 12.

- i. Explain that feelings of denial are perfectly normal (feeling that this is not 'really happening to me) as are feelings of helplessness, irritability, and frustration.
- ii. Explain the futility of 'blind' anger (this is not fair, why is this happening to me? I don't deserve this ...).
- iii. Discuss the matter of bargaining: "God, please help me. I will never again be selfish or deny my responsibilities; I will count my blessings if only You will let this go away and help my parents, friends, and me survive..."
- iv. Discuss the aspect of depression: feeling despondent, that life is not worth living, that nothing is worthwhile any longer.

- v. Emphasise the importance of acceptance – not to be confused with feeling "okay". This means that you accept the situation as it is and work with parents and others to manage the situation.

f. **Concluding comments**

- i. We all have already survived so many crises in life ...
- ii. We will work our way through coronavirus crisis, too.
- iii. Turn our current feelings of 'despair', hopelessness, fear, etc., into hope and social contributions.
- iv. And become better people as a result.

All the very best.

References

Neimeyer, R. A. (2012). From stage follower to stage manager: Contemporary directions in bereavement care. In K. J. Doka & A. S. Tucci (Eds.), *Beyond Kübler Ross: New perspectives on death, dying and grief* (pp. 129-150). Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America.

Winnicott, D. W. (1964). **The child, the family and the outside world**. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.

Useful websites

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus-resource-center>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/coronavirus-questions-answers.html?WT.ac=p-ra>