

KEEPING CALM AND PROVIDING SUPPORTIVE PARENTING DURING THE CORONAVIRUS

Here are a few tips for parents to consider with regards to keeping their children physically and mentally secure.

- Your school-aged child will likely have heard about the coronavirus. It is best to get ahead of the game by talking about things that might be scary before a scarier version comes from a peer or media. Start off by asking them if they have heard of coronavirus, and what they have heard or know about it. When they ask questions about the virus or their social isolation, take the time to explain what is going on, how the virus spreads and how they can prevent it by staying at home, as well as how they can keep themselves and others safe. Encourage them to ask questions and express their worries or feelings of loneliness or anxiety. Take your cues from your child's questions as to how long this conversation should continue. Don't over explain. Avoid encouraging them to think about worst case scenarios. Offer reassurance that your family is safe and healthy.
- Some older children may want to find ways to be helpful. This might include calling elderly relatives, earning some money to send to a charity, or helping take care of younger brothers and sisters. This helps them feel a sense of control.
- If your children are home due to school closures, set up basic expectations. Just like your child's teachers do, post a daily schedule that everyone can see. Predictable routines help children feel safe, reduce their stress, and prevent power struggles.
- Your schedule or routine should include predictable times for various activities. For school age children, some schools will provide structured learning assignments to work on during the school closures. Help your child work out a schedule to complete these assignments. In addition to time spent on academic activities, be sure to include time for unstructured play, physical activity, meals, and for older children social interaction in safe ways (an outside walk with a friend or a Facetime or texting conversation). Stick to this routine Monday through Friday. Don't frame this time out of school as a summer holiday, rather a time to learn something new they normally don't have time for. Remember children thrive on stability and routine.
- Don't change your child's bedtime routine because there is no school. Lack of sleep will increase children's anxiety.
- Carefully think about your screen time rules and how much time you want your children to be on screens. Work with your child to find interesting documentaries or educational programs to watch. Download library books or audiobooks related to their interests. Look for games that have educational value including activities like coding or planning and building a city. Try to keep your children engaged in learning activities and excited about the opportunity to learn something new.
- During this time, having play dates in your home should be avoided. Evidence indicates that although children are unlikely to get sick, they are carriers of the virus and can easily pass it on to adults around them.
- Outdoor activities where there isn't much shared equipment or physical contact such as riding bikes should be fine. Err on the side of caution and do take these recommendations seriously.

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- Ask children to help around the house by giving them a daily chore or special job challenge. Depending on your household, this can be framed as a way to help the family during a challenging time, or as a way for your child to make some extra money.
- While you can put together a big interesting list of daily activities for your children, one of the most important things is to make time in the schedule for time *playing with you* in an activity of their choosing.
- Use and model stress management strategies yourself and teach them to your children, such as, the “*turtle technique*”. There is a video vignette on a web site that shows you how to use the calm down thermometer with your child to teach how to stay calm and practice how to go into a turtle shell.

<http://www.incredibleyears.com/programs/parent/attentive-curriculum/>

- Help your children take the long view. Talk about things they will do when the virus has subsided and give them a positive image of their future. Praise them for achieving the goals they set for themselves for completing their daily schedule and plans.
- Above all else, be kind and forgiving to yourself. Many parents will be facing seemingly impossible situations. The most important thing you can do is to show love and caring for your child and to provide reassurance that you and your family will get through this somehow. Your child will be okay if you need to rely on screen time give yourself some personal time for exercise or alone meditating time.
- These are unusual times, and there is not a protocol for this. It is important to try to take care of yourself, so try to find someone to share your worries with, ask for help from anyone who might be able to support you, and hang in there.