Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus

News about coronavirus COVID-19 is everywhere. This can be a very scary time for many, especially our children. Here is some advice from the experts at the Child Mind Institute about how to bring up the epidemic in a way that will be reassuring and not make kids more worried than they already may be.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT CORONAVIRUS.
Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. Your goal is to help your children feel informed and get fact-based information that is likely more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from their friends or on the news.

TAKE YOUR CUES FROM YOUR CHILD.
Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about the coronavirus, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies and correct any misinformation they may have heard.

BE REASSURING.
Children are very egocentric, so hearing about the coronavirus on the news may be enough to make them seriously worry that they’ll catch it. It’s helpful to reassure your child about how rare the coronavirus actually is (the flu is much more common) and that kids actually seem to have milder symptoms.

BE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE.
Do your best to not share too much information all at once with your kids because this can be overwhelming. Answer your child’s questions honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available to your child is what matters.

DEAL WITH YOUR OWN ANXIETY.
Many of us are feeling pretty anxious ourselves, but what we want to do is remain calm when we are talking to our children about the virus. If you notice that you are feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before trying to have a conversation or answer your child’s questions.

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU ARE DOING TO STAY SAFE.
An important way to reassure kids is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking. Kids feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe. The CDC recommends thoroughly washing hands as the primary means of staying healthy.

KEEP TALKING.
Tell kids that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. Let them know you don’t have the answers to everything right now, but once you know more, you will be the one to communicate it to them.

STICK TO ROUTINE.
People don’t like uncertainty, so staying rooted in routines and predictability is going to be helpful right now. This is particularly important if your child’s school or daycare shuts down. Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping kids happy and healthy.