

## TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19

As the COVID-19 outbreak spreads across the world, children will experience it, whether directly or indirectly. They might have knowledge of the illness or experience the impact of the pandemic through reactions of others. Before speaking with a child, take time to process your own emotional response. How you respond to the situation will serve as an example to children around you, and your actions will resonate more than your words.

- Regardless of the age, remember to speak calmly, be patient, responsive, and sensitive.
- Be careful not to make promises you can't keep.
- Avoid negative comments or blaming, and instead offer reassuring comments.
- Reinforce regular routines as soon as possible—familiar structure is comforting.
- Provide reassurance that you are doing everything you can to keep them safe.
- Give age appropriate clear explanations of what is happening, but avoid details that may add to fear.
- If you cannot answer a question, say so, and do your best to learn the facts.
- Provide opportunities to voice their fears and concerns, but avoid trying to force them to talk.
- Model and encourage hygiene practices, including regular handwashing and sanitizing household items.



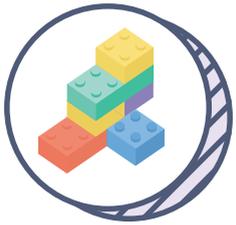
### PRESCHOOL CHILDREN (Approximately Age 3-6)

#### Common Reactions

- Temporarily resorting back to younger behaviors (thumb sucking, potty training, crawling, limited speech)
- Generalized fearfulness
- Confusion about the danger, and becoming overwhelmed
- Heightened emotions
- Sleep disruption
- Increased need to be comforted

#### Ways to Support

- Sit with the child at eye level as you speak in a low tone and in a reassuring manner.
- Model and help them put their feelings into words (“Do you feel sad? I do too.”).
- Create opportunities to express feelings through play (i.e. drawing, toys, clay, etc.)
- If you leave, reassure the child you will be back. Tell them a realistic time in words they understand, and be back ontime.



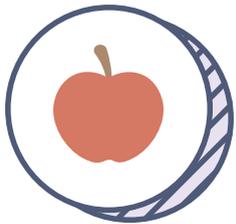
### SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (Approximately Age 7-12)

#### Common Reactions

- More aware of the event but may be confused
- Some may feel a sense of responsibility
- May experience intense fear, particularly at unexpected reminders.
- May engage in retelling or acting out information over and over.
- Concerns about parent/caregiver safety
- Closely watching parent/adult reactions
- Physical complaints

#### Ways to Support

- Offer support and help him/her focus on specific manageable feelings, thoughts, and goals.
- Be aware of media exposure about the event
- Increase time and physical comfort as needed
- Images stick with children more than words. If a child sees a disturbing photo, offer photos of others helping in response to the pandemic



### ADOLESCENTS (Age 13-18)

#### Common Reactions

- Detachment, shame and guilt
- Self-consciousness about their fears and vulnerability
- Radical changes in mood
- Acting out behaviorally
- Abrupt changes in social interactions or extracurricular activities
- Intense reactions to stressors—greater access to wider sources, with vulnerability to getting misinformation
- Protective stance for family members and the community

#### Ways to Support

- Clarify any misinformation.
- Emphasize the wide range of **common feelings** and share your own.  
“I was feeling the same thing—scared, angry, helpless. Most teens...and adults...feel like this when a tragedy happens, even if they look calm on the outside.”
- Perform acts of kindness together, like delivering food or supplies to neighbors in need

