How to Talk to Your Child about the Coronavirus

Dear Parents,

With the current news coverage and conversations, it is most likely your child is aware of the Coronavirus. It is also possible that he or she has received mixed and possibly inaccurate information, even from peers. If they are middle or upper school students, they are probably discussing it amongst themselves.

It is a good idea for parents to be proactive by giving simple, age-appropriate information and reassurance. The links below are resources that suggest how to talk to your child about the virus. Additionally, there is a link to an informative, cartoon version for children in older elementary grades and above.

Listed below are salient points from these resources, as well as additional information we included. It is divided by age group for your convenience, although many of the points are appropriate for all ages.

**Elementary School:**

- **Model a calm response.** Make sure you are aware of the non-verbal and verbal messages you are expressing. Children are emotional barometers and will pick up on your anxiety, which can add to their worries.
- **Assess your child’s current knowledge and present information in an age appropriate way.** Keep it simple and avoid too many details.
- **Reassure** your child that everyone is doing everything they can to keep people healthy, and that the adults are here to keep them safe. Let them know that the virus has not really affected children, and when it has, it is similar to the traditional flu.
- **At this age, it’s very important not to allow your child to watch or listen to the news** about the virus as the information will be overwhelming and can contribute to their fears. **We cannot emphasize this enough.**
- **If your child mentions something negative about a group of people or country or region (related to the virus), consider it a teachable moment and calmly talk to your child about it.** Discuss how being unsure or fearful can lead to making judgements about groups of people which can be very harmful.
- **Always promote good hygiene** such as handwashing techniques, coughing/sneezing into one’s elbow, not touching one’s eyes/nose/mouth, and not touching others during cold and flu season. This will help give your child a sense of control.
- **If you are canceling a family trip, be upfront about it.** Empathize with your child’s disappointment and offer other ways to have fun.
- **Contact us.** Contact the counselors, nurses, or administration if you have any concerns, questions, or just need further direction. We are in this together.
**Middle and Upper School:**

- Older students may be watching, listening to, or reading online news about the Coronavirus. Have conversations about **where to find accurate information** and what may be less accurate and more fear-inducing. Use appropriate restrictions depending on the child’s age.
- **Validate their concerns and address their individual anxiety or fears.** Their concerns may go beyond themselves and their immediate family. This could also include extended family members like grandparents and friends that they are worried about. Their concerns can possibly trigger feelings of anxiety or fear left over from past experiences or trauma unrelated to this situation.
- **Be mindful of social media posts.** Be aware of the comments being shared online that could speak negatively about your child or a group of people or country or region. Have serious discussions around these issues with your child. Encourage her/him to let you know if something online makes them uncomfortable.
- **Encourage your child to take breaks** from listening, reading, or talking about the Coronavirus. This type of information can be stressful and should be taken in small doses.
- Make sure that your son/daughter continues his/her **activities as normal as possible.**
- **Continue to reinforce healthy habits.** Make sure your child is getting enough sleep which is imperative for a strong immune system.
- **Continue to reinforce good hygiene.** Make sure to remind your child that cell phones should not be shared and keyboards should be disinfected regularly.
- **Be resilient and try to keep a calm attitude.** Think about how you can talk to your child.
- **As always, please contact us.** The counselors, nurses, or administration are available if you have any concerns, questions, or need further direction.

In partnership,

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**New York Times Parenting: How To Talk To Kids About Coronavirus**

**NASP Online: Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus) - A Parent Resource**

**NPR: Just For Kids - A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus**

**NY Times: Talking to Teens and Tweens About Coronavirus**