Dear Parents,

We know that during seasons of uncertainty, when news and information change daily, it is easy to get swept up into the frenzy of worry. We often think that our children are not privy to the same information that we have, as adults, and therefore, assume they will not experience the same anxiety that we might have over a situation. However, children are incredibly perceptive of emotions. And, the fact that they have less access to credible news sources while being highly sensitive to the emotions of the adults around them can create more anxiety among our children.

Speaking directly and honestly to our children can be the best way of helping them navigate this period of unknown with minimal fear and anxiety.

How to talk to your children about Coronavirus:

1. Ask them what they already have heard.

Allow children to share their perceptions and fears. The best way to make sure you root out a potential source of fear is to listen intently and thoroughly. Correct any rumors that are not true. Ask where your child learned this information and if you feel comfortable, inform other parents that their children have misinterpreted information and may be equally fearful.

2. Ask them what they would like to know.

Part of providing age-appropriate information is answering the questions that they ask rather than providing information that may be unnecessary for them at the time. Having separate conversations with children of varying ages will better enable you to provide age-appropriate information.

3. Be aware of and care for your own anxiety prior to answering your child’s questions.

If you are struggling with fear about the current pandemic, make sure you take time to pray and process your own feelings of anxiety prior to discussing the topic with your child. Your calm demeanor will be the best way to calm your child.

4. Provide age-appropriate information.

Keep information clear, concise and concrete. Speculating and giving information that changes can heighten a child’s fears.

- Most people who contract COVID-19 have mild, flu-like symptoms and are expected to make a full recovery. If your child asks specifically if he or she might die, reassure your child that a very small percentage of people who get sick from COVID-19 die.
- If you do not know an answer, say, “That’s a great question. Let’s find the answer.” Then seek information from authoritative sources, such as the World Health Organization and the CDC website.
5. **Provide a plan.**

Fear and anxiety increase when we feel out of control. Giving children concrete steps to follow to protect themselves from all germs can help a child feel empowered.
- Wash your hands before eating or touching your face and eyes.
- Wash your hands after touching doorknobs and handrails, as well as using public spaces.
- Take vitamins, eat healthy meals and get good sleep.
- Develop a normal routine during our time away from school to provide structure and maintain healthy habits.

6. **Turn off the TV.**

Having too much information on a topic can be just as distressing as having too little. Balance what information you and your children take in with lighthearted activities. Recognize that the information shared by the news networks can be scary. Children under the age of 10 do not need to be watching the news.

7. **Be aware that your children may worry that you will die.**

Reassure children that you are taking precautions and taking good care of yourself. You expect to live a very long time.

8. **Talk to your children about talking to their friends**

Levity and laughter can be an excellent way to ease tension. However, please help your child realize that joking about the virus may confuse and induce anxiety in others. Rumors also fly quickly during times of uncertainty, and we do not want to pass on information without verification that it is accurate and truthful.

9. **Pray for protection.**

Remember that God’s sovereignty is preeminent. We pray for the wisdom of the medical community to find sufficient containment procedures and cures. We pray for the healing of those who have become sick and the protection of those who have been exposed. We also remember that the Lord will protect us and care for us even if we get sick. He works all things for good.

Emily Bush recently heard from a friend who is a missionary in Japan that due to the suspension of corporate worship, services and sermons are being videocast. Non-believers who have been too intimidated to attend a worship service for the first time have been much more comfortable visiting a friend’s apartment to watch the service. The Lord uses everything to advance his Kingdom.
We hope this information is helpful as you talk with your children in the coming weeks. We have included links below for additional information. If you have any specific questions, please let us know how we can be helpful. Please feel free to email us if you or your child would like to speak to us directly. We will be happy to set up phone conversations or video chats while school is suspended.

Blessings,

Emily Bush (LS Counselor)
Shawn Ledebur (MS Counselor)
Tenley Gummelt (US Counselor)

Helpful Resources:

ISCA - Parent and Teacher Resources
Child Mind Institute - How To Talk To Your Children
CDC - Talking With Your Children
Common Sense Media - Help Your Family De-Stress