

Managing Fears and Anxiety around Coronavirus

As information about Coronavirus unfolds, there can be a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions. Below is some helpful information and resources.

Common Reactions: *Please recognize that there can be a wide range of reactions and that over the next few days or weeks you may experience periods of:*

- Anxiety, worry, panic
- Feeling of helplessness
- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating and sleeping
- Anger
- Hyper-vigilance to your health and body

Ways to Manage Fears and Anxieties:

- **Get the facts.** Stay informed with the latest health information and updates - for example, through the dedicated CDC website.
- **Keep things in perspective.** Limit worry and agitation by lessening the time you spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage. Although you'll want to keep informed — especially if you have loved ones in affected countries — remember to take a break from watching the news and focus on the things that are positive in your life and things you have control over.
- **Be mindful of your assumptions about others.** Someone who has a cough or a fever does not necessarily have coronavirus. Self-awareness is important in not stigmatizing others in our community.
- **Stay healthy.** Adopting healthy hygienic habits such as washing your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, frequently, and certainly after sneezing or before/after touching your face or a sick person. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Avoid contact with others who are sick and stay home while sick.
- **Keep connected.** Maintaining social networks can help maintain a sense of normalcy, and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress.
- **Seek additional help.** Individuals who feel an overwhelming worry or anxiety can seek additional professional mental health support.
- **If you're feeling helpless, help someone.** Think about someone who might be struggling more than you and consider if you can do something to help that person.
- **Be aware of negative behaviors that might be a result of your fears.** Fear can lead to an effort to control that can sometimes be destructive - like micromanaging; losing your temper with employees, friends, family; etc. Take a deep breath and look for a less reactive response.

Talking to Kids About the Coronavirus:

Kids worry more when they're kept in the dark

Rachel Ehmke

News of the coronavirus COVID-19 is everywhere, from the front page of all the papers to the playground at school. Many parents are wondering how to bring up the epidemic in a way that will be reassuring and not make kids more worried than they already may be. Here is some advice from the experts at the Child Mind Institute.

- **Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus.** Most children will have already heard about the virus or seen people wearing face masks, so parents shouldn't avoid talking about it. Not talking about something can actually make kids worry *more*. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the emotional tone. "You take on the news and you're the person who filters the news to your kid," explains Janine Domingues, PhD, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. 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.
- **Be developmentally appropriate.** Don't volunteer too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer your child's questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available to your child is what matters.
- **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. You want to be prepared to answer (but not prompt) questions. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.
- **Deal with your own anxiety.** "When you're feeling most anxious or panicked, that isn't the time to talk to your kids about what's happening with the coronavirus," warns Dr. Domingues. 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.
- **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 be less susceptible to it.
- **Focus on what you're doing to stay safe.** An important way to reassure kids is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking. Jamie Howard, PhD, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, notes, "Kids feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe." We know that the coronavirus is transmitted mostly by coughing and touching surfaces. The CDC recommends thoroughly washing your hands as the primary means of staying healthy. So remind kids that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds (or the length of two "Happy Birthday" songs) when they come in from outside, before they eat, and after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom. If kids ask about face masks, explain that the experts at the CDC say they aren't necessary for most people. If kids see people wearing face masks, explain that those people are being extra cautious.
- **Stick to routine.** "We don't like uncertainty, so staying rooted in routines and predictability is going to be helpful right now," advises Dr. Domingues. This is particularly important if your child's school or daycare shuts down. Make sure you are taking care of the basics just like you would during a spring break or summer vacation. Structured days with regular mealtimes and bedtimes are an essential part of keeping kids happy and healthy.
- **Keep talking.** Tell kids that you will continue to keep them updated as you learn more. "Let them know that the lines of communication are going to be open," says Dr. Domingues. "You can say, 'Even though we don't have the answers to everything right now, know that once we know more, mom or dad will let you know, too.'"

Amoskeag Health's

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:

You and your eligible dependents have access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This program is provided as part of our commitment to promoting employee health and wellbeing. It is offered at no charge to the employee and provides a valuable resource for support and information during difficult times, as well as consultation on day-to-day concerns. EAP is an assessment, short-term counseling, and referral service designed to provide you and your family with assistance in managing everyday concerns.

Confidentiality is the hallmark of the program, and is essential to the success of EAP. No one besides the person accessing EAP knows they've used the services. No reports are made except aggregate utilization reports that do not identify individuals. The legal exceptions are the same as those that guide all clinicians: if a member expresses intent to commit child or elder abuse; or expresses plausible suicidal or homicidal intent; or a court order.

Contact EAP

888.293.6948

TDD: 800.327.1833

24 hours a day, seven days a week