

BROADCAST SCRIPT - Talking to Your Kids About COVID-19

News about the coronavirus has spread, from social media to the front page of your local newspaper. The pandemic has many people on edge, including parents, who may be dealing with some anxious children. What's the best advice to give our kids during a time like this? What are some key messages we can give them in hopes of calming their fears?

SOT: Cheryl Crowe, Director, Behavioral Health, OSF HealthCare

“First of all, when parents are talking to children they need to be okay, first. Because we know that anxiety and stress can be communicated interpersonally. And kids are smart. They pay attention to us. They are going to take leads from us. So if they're calm and give good information on what it is – that can make some people sick, we're going to be making some changes. Here's what we're going to do together and let them talk about it.” (:29)

Children may experience heightened anxiety especially if they experience any symptoms that at all sound familiar to those associated with COVID-19. Crowe recommends playing it safe when talking to a child who may not feel his or her best at the time.

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“So if they have a fever or if they are coughing, those are things we're going to pay attention to and get them the care that they need. But the best way to protect them, really, is to spend this time together, maintain that normal routine, and just be there for them if they have any anxieties and they're expressing that. And have good open, honest conversation.” (:25)

For younger children, the message will be different than, for example, you are having a heart-to-heart conversation with your teenager. It's important to keep the message simple and reassure your children any chance you get.

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“Keep it specific to their developmental level. We're going to wash our hands, we're trying to be healthy and we're going to spend some time together and we're going to be home watching movies and playing games. And this is a great opportunity for the older kids to give them a little more information about certainly there are people who are getting sick and that's why these precautions are in place. So their routines may change a little bit but we're going to work through this together.” (:26)

In addition to providing them information that is honest and accurate, this is also a time for teaching. Remind your children to stay away from people who are coughing, sneezing or sick; remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow; and to always wash their hands.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov