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Supporting and discussing with children and adolescents about *COVID -19*

Useful tips for parents

The increasing number of cases of the new type of coronavirus, **COVID-19**, and the global nature of its transmission have caused concern in the international community. Parents, guardians, and other people involved in the care of children and adolescents need to stay well informed about the new type of coronavirus, COVID-19, the rules of hygiene and protection, as well as the key prevention guidelines for its spread. Further, it is also important to be aware of the psychosocial needs of children and adolescents in similar situations and the ways they can be supported within the family context. The following is a summary of key principles for supporting children and adolescents in similar conditions:

- **Keeping up to date through credible and reliable sources**

- We stay informed using valid and reliable sources (e.g., [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int)).
- We know the related symptoms and the necessary actions we need to take on both prevention and response issues.
- We stay up to date with the latest announcements and information, including those of our national and local public health authorities.
- We critically assess information shared on mass media and/or the Internet.
- We make sure that children are not constantly exposed to discussions about the coronavirus; We avoid all discussions at home that blame others for the situation and we avoid stereotyping people and/or countries.

- **Maintaining a calm and positive attitude**

- We set a positive example for everyone by following the necessary/advised protective measures.
- A responsible and calm adult attitude (e.g., we adhere to the hygiene rules and follow the instructions of the experts) can help maintain a positive attitude in children.
- We strive to keep our regular routines and schedule as much as possible, applying the necessary changes when needed and per the instruction of the authorities.

▪ **Prevention and Hygiene rules**



- We explain that it is necessary to follow specific protective and preventive measures in daily hygiene and that the coronavirus may be a reason to establish them (e.g. regular and thorough hand washing). In younger children, we should remind the rules frequently and emphasize their importance by making use of drawing, pictures, videos, etc. and by using playful ways to remind them of the need to adhere to such rules.
- We discuss with children and decide on hygiene rules that we must adopt consistently at home, at school, and in extracurricular activities.
- We guide children in what they should do and to whom they should turn to if they feel unwell at school.

▪ **Self-care**



- We take care of ourselves so that we can take care of our children, by taking a proactive approach towards our health and our own psychological needs.
- We strive to maintain as many daily routines as possible (such as reading, music, etc.) while also balancing a healthy lifestyle (e.g., sleeping enough, eating properly).
- Communicating with others in our family, social and work environment is usually a source of support and can help us to feel more connected and secure.
- We seek help from mental health professionals in case of need.

▪ **Exposure at the media**

- We limit the time children are exposed to the media (posts, pictures, comments), as well as time spent online and social media.
- We talk to our children about the information they have seen in the media and provide valid information about their concerns.
- We carefully monitor any excessive involvement of children with this subject and control the time they spend on it online and on social media.

▪ **Avoid attributing responsibilities/blaming**

- We avoid the general attribution of blame and responsibility to entities and persons, to avoid reducing the feeling of safety and security.
- If a child is ill, care should be taken not to blame themselves for any transmission of the virus.
- In the case of attributing responsibility to a child or an adult who has the virus, we explain why he or she is not responsible for the illness.
- We take care to avoid stigmatizing students who are ill, have traveled or come from other countries depending on the outbreaks of the virus.

▪ **Communication/Collaboration with school**

- Fostering a home-school collaboration is essential to supporting children.
- We stay in contact with the school in case the child expresses strong feelings at home regarding the subject (fear, anger, anxious concern) and we are informed of corresponding reactions/behaviors in the school.
- We are informed about the schools' rules and the measures that have been taken so as to discuss them at home.
- In case of school closure, we explain the necessity of this measure and we stay informed of the possible school re-opening schedule.



- If the child, a family member, or a loved one becomes ill, we work proactively with the school so that our child is not stigmatized by other children and we facilitate the child's safe return to the school environment.
- We seek the help of professionals if the child is experiencing excessive anxiety or fear.

Guidelines for discussion and psychosocial support for children and adolescents

It is important to help children understand the situation, ask questions, formulate concerns, express feelings, and reassure them that parents can provide them with the support they need.

Availability for discussion



- + We are available to discuss and/or just listen to the concerns of our children.
- + We are available if the child wants to speak or communicate with us in any way, avoiding the pressure of expressing himself/ herself.
- + We reassure children by being more available to them.
- + We answer children's questions as many times as needed.

Sense of security



- + Children need to trust us to feel safe.
- + In particular, younger children need to believe that «significant others» can protect them from anything they feel like a threat.
- + We explain the hygiene rules and encourage children to follow them so that they feel they can do something about what is happening and protect themselves as much as possible.
- + We assure that all necessary measures are taken to ensure safety in health.

Understanding the situation



- + We examine what children already know about the situation.
- + We are honest and clear and we do not provide information that we are not sure about.
- + We provide information in an age-appropriate way.

Preschool and early school-age children

- ✚ We provide simple, comprehensive and clear information about the coronavirus.
- ✚ We answer only the questions asked by the children.
- ✚ We ensure that all words and concepts used have been understood.

School-age children

- ✚ We provide simple explanations with no unnecessary details.
- ✚ We respond with honesty and clarity to children's questions as often as necessary without giving false reassurance.
- ✚ We deny rumors and myths and help distinguish what is really happening from what they imagine, or fear that may happen.
- ✚ We use appropriate terms based on the context of official health authorities' guidelines.

Teenagers

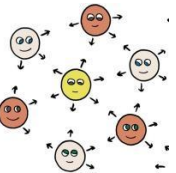
- ✚ We communicate reliable and valid information directly to teenagers or help them find their own evidence-based and scientifically valid sources of information.
- ✚ Exaggerations and inaccuracies need to be identified and clarified.
- ✚ Teenagers want honest, clear, valid and up-to-date information.
- ✚ We discuss the role of the media with teenagers and we help them understand whether information overload is beneficial or not.

Emotional expression and emotional support

- ✚ It is important for children to feel that they can speak up and express unpleasant or negative emotions (worry, fear, anger, guilt). We explain to children that difficult emotions (e.g., anger, fear, sadness) are expected and are considered typical in the present situation.
- ✚ We facilitate the sharing of children's emotions and anxiety, as it helps prevent unreasonable and excessive fears.
- ✚ We encourage children to speak up and express their emotions. It is advisable to place any unreasonable concerns into a realistic context.

Engaging in activities that create emotional discharge

- ✚ We encourage children to engage in fun activities we usually do at home with our family members that can be relaxing.
- ✚ We find time to maintain a few basic routines that make us and our family feel better and emotionally discharged (e.g., reading, watching movies, playing games, sports, music, expression through art, etc.).
- ✚ We encourage the expression of younger children through play.
- ✚ We encourage the participation of children in educational activities (e.g., educational games).
- ✚ Especially for younger children, we make sure they engage in relaxing, low-key activities before bedtime.
- ✚ Together with the children, we do activities that help us feel good, as a family. This can help children feel more comfortable and secure.



Selected Resources

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