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<http://www.centerschoolpsych.psych.uoa.gr/index.php/en/>

Supporting and discussing with our students about COVID -19

Useful tips for teachers and schools

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. The way information is handled regarding the virus and its spread, as well as the announcement of the closedown of classrooms and schools, may raise apprehension among school community members and affect the sense of security in the school environment.

The following is a summary of key principles for supporting children and adolescents in the school/classroom:

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

- We stay informed through valid and reliable sources (e.g., [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/)).
- 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.

- **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.



▪ Providing information, dissemination, and management of basic prevention information to our school students

- We explain that there are 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).
- We guide our students in what they should do and to whom they should turn if they feel unwell.
- Incase our school unit needs to be discontinued, we have to provide information regarding the necessity of this measurement, as well as the possible re-opening dates of the school, per the decisions of the authorities.



▪ Participatory collaboration at the school level

- Based on WHO directions, we follow preventive measures and focus on how they are implemented in the school context (at the classroom and school level).
- We discuss in school and decide on practices and actions, as well as ways of developing and implementing them on issues of prevention and management of the situation, following the official guidelines.
- We form an action group allocating roles in coordination and information (e.g. how to inform the classroom, information material, communication with parents, etc.).
- We encourage the involvement of students in classroom and school actions, regarding knowledge and dissemination of preventive measures.

Guidelines for classroom discussion and psychosocial support for children

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

Availability for discussion

- + We are available to discuss and/or just listen to the concerns of students.
- + 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 the students' questions as many times as needed.

Understanding the situation

- + We are exploring what students already know about the event.
- + We are honest and clear and we do not provide information that we are not sure about.
- + If there are students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the school, it is important to ensure that they have received all necessary information and instructions in their own language.
- + 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 our students to feel that they can speak up and express unpleasant or negative emotions (worry, fear, anger, guilt). We explain to them that difficult emotions (e.g., anger, fear, sadness) are expected and are considered typical in the present situation.
- ✚ We facilitate the sharing of students' emotions and anxiety, as it helps prevent unreasonable and excessive fears.
- ✚ We encourage students to speak up and express their emotions. It is advisable to place any unreasonable concerns into a realistic context.

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.



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 them that all necessary measures are taken to ensure safety in the school community.
- + We discuss and decide on school activities for students for prevention and coping with the virus (e.g. taking specific measures in the classroom and at school, collecting and processing information material, creating forms/posters/sketches, expert speeches, etc.).

Selected Resources

General Secretariat for Civil Protection. (2020). *Koronoios Covid 19 – Xrisimes odhgies*. [Covid Coronavirus 19 - Useful instructions]. Retrieved from <https://www.civilprotection.gr/el/koronoios-covid-19-hrisimes-odigies>

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