

A guide for parents on how to speak with their children about concerns regarding the corona virus

Introduction

Not infrequently, we hear of cases where students and their teachers are required to quarantine in the home, following exposure to confirmed cases of the corona virus.

It appears that we will be dealing with this situation for the foreseeable future. It engenders feelings of helplessness, a loss of control, and ongoing uncertainty, and as such is the cause of fears and worries. A direct and open conversation can be calming, gives security and provides a feeling that there is someone who can be relied upon.

As is always the case, but especially now, it's very important to strengthen the connection between parents and their children, and to provide a feeling of safety and security as much as possible. Parents have a responsibility to explain the situation to their children and help them understand what is happening and the coping methods which they can use.

Points to emphasize as part of a conversation:

- 1) Regulating stress: the aim of the conversation is to reduce tension, provide an opportunity for emotional expression, and give messages of hope.
- 2) Strengthening the family unit: it's important to create an atmosphere of partnership, support, and a desire to help and to encourage expressions of solidarity and empathy.
- 3) Encouraging the maintenance of social connections such as taking an interest in friends' health and welfare and offering help and support according to the situation.
- 4) Attention to children who find it particularly hard: it's important to be attentive to individual students or groups who respond to the situation in unusual ways (extreme responses to the situation, withdrawal, not taking part in regular activities).
- 5) Maintaining routine and strengthening hope: while validating the legitimacy of the expression of emotions and fears that accompany the situation, emphasize the importance of keeping a daily routine, providing messages of hope, strength, and coping.

Principles to assist your children in developing resiliency and to best coping with the current period:

- 1) It's important to project your belief in your children's ability to cope, providing a message that empowers them and builds resiliency.
- 2) Information that is communicated to children needs to be simple, clear and continuous. Providing facts and enabling their emotional awareness will help build their coping mechanisms and provide them with a feeling of security.

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- 3) Children are affected by exposure to the news, even when they appear to be busy playing. It's important to direct them to age-appropriate programs, and to restrict their viewing of content relating to the current situation on television and the internet, particularly for younger children.
- 4) Children need routine which provides them with security and a feeling that they are in control. It's important to maintain routine as far as possible and to create an easily understandable daily schedule among the general chaos.
- 5) Fulfilling a role within the family gives a child a feeling of security, ability, and even allows a way out of a feeling of being "frozen" (overwhelmed).
- 6) It's recommended to have a conversation with each child as to what can help them to cope in difficult times and to ask what the child can or wants to do in that context. It's both possible and desirable to direct them towards some form of activity¹ and even to suggest that they take responsibility for a specific task. This serves to strengthen their sense of meaning and feeling of control over the situation.

During difficult situations, it's possible that children will show signs of withdrawal and neediness. It's important for parents to be attentive to behaviors which seem particularly unusual. Should such situations arise, it is recommended to speak with a professional. In cases where parents themselves feel scared and overwhelmed and have difficulty supporting their children, it's important to recommend that they request professional help, to direct them to sources of assistance and ways to reach that help.

¹ Writing a diary, drawing or arts and crafts, games or sport (following the "BASIC Ph" coping model created by Dr. Mooli Lahad and Dr. Ofra Ayalon)