

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

Being
Healthy and Safe

READY!

For In-Person Learning
2020-21



Welcome Back to a New School Year

Every school year brings a mix of emotions. The anxiety of sending your child off to school. The worries of making friends and getting through new courses or wondering how they grew up so fast.

The 2019-20 school year started off like all the rest. Students picked out their first day of school outfit, backpacks were ready with name tags, and those first day of school pictures were taken. The 2019-20 school year went on like any other, all the way until March, when everything had to close due to Covid-19. Then we all needed to adjust and change the way we went about our daily lives. We all had to figure out this new way of living.

Six months later, we are ready to start a new school year, a new year that will be different in many ways. Besides our new UPK and Kindergarten students, our students will be in classrooms that look different and will have to get used to how they navigate hallways or where they will eat their lunch or have a music class. Things will be different.

When students come home from that first day of school, they will have things to share. Whatever it is, as a caregiver, it will be essential to be present and ready to listen. As a caregiver, you will have your own emotions as we start the new year. You may have already had questions and wonders.

Use this Caregiver Guide to help navigate conversations before school starts and throughout the coming weeks. Also use the guide as a reminder of the importance of your own self-care. These are challenging times and we all need to be well physically and emotionally.

Talking to Your Child About Coronavirus

From The Children's Health Association

Whether through news reports, social media, school communications or from friends, it's likely your child will hear about the new coronavirus, named Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19. With so much being discovered about this virus, it can be normal for children to have questions or feel anxious about what they're hearing.

Nicholas J. Westers, Psy.D., ABPP, a Children's HealthSM clinical psychologist and Associate Professor at UT Southwestern, recommends that parents be prepared to talk to their child about the situation in age-appropriate ways. "As parents, we want to make sure we provide children with honest information that is appropriate for their age and comprehension level," says Dr. Westers. "Creating a safe space for children to ask questions rather than dismissing their fears is an incredibly important way to help them feel safe and supported."

Dr. Westers recommends the following tips when talking to your child about coronavirus to help decrease anxiety.

1. Check In and Listen

If you think your child may have questions or concerns about the COVID-19, start the conversation by asking what they've heard to gauge their knowledge and understanding of the disease.

Parents can have these conversations around the dinner table or when driving together in the car. Avoid downplaying the seriousness of the situation by saying things like,

"Don't worry about it." Instead, encourage your child to ask questions, even if you don't know all the answers. What's most important is that you listen to your child's concerns, validate their feelings and keep communication open.

"Reassure your child that you are available to talk," recommends Dr. Westers. "Even if you aren't sure how to answer their questions, you can reassure them by saying things like, 'As we find out more information, we'll let you know' or 'If you hear something about this, please ask us.'"

2. Monitor Media Exposure

Help your child create healthy boundaries when it comes to media coverage surrounding COVID-19. If your child is old enough (adolescents and teenagers), watch limited news reports or read the news together to encourage conversation. However, make sure to use reputable news sources and take breaks from the news as well. "There's a difference between being consciously aware and becoming so preoccupied with a topic that we become obsessed," says Dr. Westers.

In addition to limiting the amount of COVID-19 media coverage your child consumes, teach your child about reputable sources of information and how to identify them. Rather than trusting every report shared on social media, encourage your child to turn to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) for updated and accurate information about COVID-19.

3. Encourage Self-Care

Self-care is important for all aspects of life but can be especially helpful when calming anxiety. Self-care can mean different things for each child, but can involve:

- Taking media breaks
- Teaching digital health, such as having "no phone" times and keeping technology out of the bedroom
- Encouraging healthy sleep habits
- Maintaining a routine and consistent schedule
- Finding activities your child can enjoy, even if regular activities are limited or canceled due to social distancing recommendations
- Look to the experts
- Remind your child that many medical health professionals and infectious disease specialists are currently managing COVID-19 as best as they can. Just as the late Mr. Rogers often said to "look for the helpers," it can be reassuring for your child to know that experts who are really good at their jobs are working hard to discover more about this new virus and to keep us safe

4. Remind Children What They Can Control

Certain events may feel out of our control, especially a new virus, so it's important to remind children what they can control. Refer to the CDC for recommendations on everyday precautions to help prevent the spread of disease, such as:

- Practicing proper hand hygiene
- Not touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Staying home when you are not feeling well
- Coughing into your elbow and covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing (throw the tissue into the trash after sneezing)
- Disinfecting surfaces with household cleaning sprays or wipes

Younger children especially may not fully understand COVID-19 or its implications, but you can still use this as an opportunity to teach them about the importance of hand washing and hygiene to stay healthy.

5. Address Misconceptions

- With so much information being shared about COVID-19, your child may be exposed to misconceptions about the disease.
- "We often fear the unknown, and that can perpetuate myths, including about people who are different from us," says Dr. Westers.
- When children hear that the COVID-19 outbreak originated in China, there may be misunderstandings that create stigma around certain people, especially Chinese or other Asian-Americans. Talk to your child to make sure this isn't reinforcing any problematic stereotypes (beliefs) or discriminatory behaviors and use the opportunity to point your child towards reputable sources of information about the virus.

6. Take Care of Yourself As a Parent

- One of the best ways to take care of your child and address their concerns is by ***making it a priority to take care of yourself***, too.
- "An emotionally healthy parent typically makes for a better parent," says Dr. Westers. ***"In fact, we know that children are quite resilient. Sometimes parents can be the ones who have more fears – but it's important to know that children feed off our own anxieties and concerns."***
- Model healthy behaviors by labeling your own emotions and communicating how you handle your stress and anxiety. In addition, make sure that you are also **practicing self-care, including taking much-needed breaks from media**. If you are extremely concerned, consider consulting a mental health professional about ways to take care of yourself so that you can be a better resource for your child.
- In a situation with many unknowns, such as the spread of COVID-19, it is normal to feel worry and anxiety. However, if your child is significantly anxious about COVID-19 or any other topic, and the anxiety persists for more than a couple weeks and interferes with their day-to-day functioning, ***seek help from a mental health professional***.

HELPING CHILDREN COPE with the Impact of Covid-19

From The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

AGE GROUP	REACTIONS	HOW TO HELP
PRESCHOOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear of being alone, bad dreams• Speech difficulties• Loss of bladder/bowel control,• constipation, bed-wetting• Change in appetite• Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patience and tolerance• Provide reassurance (verbal and physical)• Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling• Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements• Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime• Maintain regular family routines• Avoid media exposure
SCHOOL AGE (Ages 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior• Clinging, nightmares• Sleep/appetite disturbance• Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches• Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest• Competition for parents' attention• Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patience, tolerance, and reassurance• Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and Internet• Regular exercise and stretching• Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)• Participate in structured household chores• Set gentle but firm limits• Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being• done in the family and community• Encourage expression through play and conversation• Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines• Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school• Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation

HELPING CHILDREN COPE (continued)

From The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

AGE GROUP	REACTIONS	HOW TO HELP
ADOLESCENT (Ages 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical symptoms (headaches, rashes, etc.)• Sleep/appetite disturbance• Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy • Ignoring health promotion behaviors • Isolating from peers and loved ones • Concerns about stigma and injustices • Avoiding/cutting school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patience, tolerance, and reassurance• Encourage continuation of routines• Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)• Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games• Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors• Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school• Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak

We know we are **READY** for school
when...

Parents

- Because I cannot enter a building, I can identify how/where to pick up my child if contacted by the nurse.
- I can identify how/where to drop-off my child at school in the morning.
- I can identify how/where to pick-up my child at dismissal.
- I can help my child get comfortable with a face covering.
- I can complete the daily health screen in Parent Square.
- I can take time to listen to my child when they get home.
- I can practice my own self-care.

Students

- For younger children, I can say the name of my teacher.
- I can be safe on the school bus by keeping my face covering on at all times.
- I wash my hands often for 20 seconds (long enough to sing “Happy Birthday” twice).
- I have practiced wearing a face covering for extended periods of time.
- I can take off and put on my face covering correctly.
- I can keep a safe distance from other students when my teacher has me take a mask break.
- I know not to touch my eyes, nose, and mouth with my hands.
- I understand I need to do my part to be safe and help everyone be safe at school.

For more information on social and emotional supports, please reach out to your child's school.

PRIMARY SCHOOL: 315-597-3400 Press 6

Tane Robinson, Dean of Students

Vicki Blazey, School Counselor

Karin Giudici, School Psychologist

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL: 315-597-3400 Press 5

Tane Robinson, Dean of Student

Darci Perrotta, School Counselor

Nicole Castronovo, School Psychologist

MIDDLE SCHOOL: 315-597-3400 Press 4

Hayley Chase, School Counselor

Rose Zinkowski, School Counselor

Kim Stewart, School Psychologist

HIGH SCHOOL: 315-597-3400 Press 2

Lindsay Daniel, School Counselor

John Strachan, School Counselor

Jennifer Narum, School Counselor

Katie Crane, School Psychologist

Other Community Resources Available at School:

Wayne Behavioral Health Network

Catholic Charities

Finger Lakes Office of Family Services