

5 Ways to Help Kids/Teens Manage Anxiety About the Coronavirus

1. Normalize Anxiety- This can be a stressful time for all of us as this is a situation none of us have encountered. All feelings about this are valid. Accept that it's normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, scared or angry during an outbreak. Try to rely on facts not fears to reassure you and your child that they can keep themselves safe and healthy.

2. Offer Perspective- Right now, the health risk from coronavirus is very low for most Americans. And there's a lot you can do to lower your risk even further: Keep your hands clean and away from your face, avoid anyone who might be coughing or sneezing and protect your immune system by getting enough sleep and eating healthy.

3. Shift the Spotlight- During difficult times, research suggests that kids/teenagers feel better when they turn their attention to supporting others. Knowing this, we can remind them that we wash our hands and follow other health recommendations not only to protect ourselves, but to help others. Take the opportunity to talk to your kids about the challenges faced by people in need and different ways to support others within their community.

4. Encourage Distraction-When we fixate on danger anxiety grows, and when we turn our attention elsewhere, it shrinks. Those who are feeling highly anxious about Covid-19 should be encouraged to take a break from seeking, or even accidentally encountering, information about the virus. For example, we might ask our kids/teenagers to consider scaling back how often they check their phones and limit screen time. Similarly, we might encourage finding distractions, such as chatting with friends, and getting outside, if possible, to limit exposure to these news outlets.

5. Manage Your Own Anxiety-Young people look to adults for cues about how nervous or relaxed they should be when encountering something new. Wittingly or not, parents are sometimes fearful in a way that puts their children on edge. Before trying to support a fretful child, tense adults should take steps to calm their own nerves. To do so, they can use the same strategies outlined above. Modeling a level-headed response is the best way to keep anxiety from getting the better of our kids/teens as we all find our way through this new and uncertain challenge.

***Please seek outside support if you or your child is having anxiety that is too much for you to manage. A list of counselors specializing in anxiety has been attached.**