



15 WAYS WE CAN HELP KIDS WHO ARE WORRIED ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

Many of our kids have been hearing about **COVID-19** for weeks at school, from friends, on the news, and at home, and while they might not know how to appropriately express their feelings about the situation, they might be holding on to some pretty strong worries. While schools are closing, kids are out of their comfortable routines, which can contribute to those worries. Here are 15 things we can do to talk to kids about Coronavirus and help them manage these big worries they might be holding on to:

Talk to Kids About Coronavirus

Prevention Strategies:

1. Be Available to Talk

Kids have big questions, and it's okay to answer them. Take cues from your kids and offer clear but concise answers in developmentally appropriate language. Keep the focus on what you are doing to prepare and prevention strategies that are within your control like proper handwashing and avoiding large crowds.

Coronavirus Information Video for Kids

<https://youtu.be/kiVpWZBXLug>

2. Limit News Exposure

Even when it seems like they're not listening, kids pick up on what they hear on TV and radio. Newscasters' tone of voice can be enough to set off alarm bells for kids, and unfamiliar words like pandemic and outbreak can be fear-inducing. Opt for watching or listening to news reports when kids are in bed or choose to read news articles if possible.

3. Stick to Routines and Boundaries

Kids thrive with routines and boundaries, and predictability can be very comforting in anxious times. When some things feel out of control, routines can give kids a sense of security. School-aged kids might be used to seeing a visual schedule in their classrooms, so try using one at all. Write your daily routine on a whiteboard or make a paper schedule together. And make sure you include fun activities in your daily routine! Play board games, play outside, or have silly dance parties.

4. Set & Track Daily Goals

Set small daily goals and track progress so kids can work toward something important to them! Make sure the goals are within their control. Set goals around how much they'll read each day, how many homework sheets they'll complete

each day, or how many kind gestures they'll show toward family members. Track progress on a goal chart so they can have a visual reminder of the progress they're making!

5. Start or Continue Mindful Practices

Mindfulness is an amazing practice for people of all ages. If you don't have a regular mindful practice already built into your family time, try adding it to your routine. This can look like 5-minute morning or bedtime guided meditation or simple mindful mandala coloring. Find a mindful practice that you all enjoy doing together!

Responsive Strategies

6. Practice Controlled Breathing

If your child is showing signs of worry, take a moment to practice controlled breathing. You can simply count breaths for them (inhale 1 2 3 4 5 hold 1 2 3 4 exhale 1 2 3 4 5 6 7) or use tools like a pinwheel or bubbles. Help them slow their breathing and really exhale all of the air to calm their bodies and minds.

7. Try Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Help your child release tension from their body with a progressive muscle relaxation. In this exercise, children gradually tense up their muscles and then release them.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Kids:

<https://youtu.be/cDKyRpW-Yuc>

8. Use Grounding Strategies

Grounding strategies or techniques help kids reorient to the present moment when the worries are too big. These techniques help kids connect with their current environment in the here and now when their minds are imagining potential future scenarios. Try all of these grounding strategies to see which one your kids like best!

Help Kids Manage Worry with These 10 Grounding Exercises

1. 5-4-3-2-1 Senses

This grounding exercise is a great go-to for kids. All they need for this exercise is their senses! Have students practice identifying:

•5 things you see •4 things you hear •3 things you smell •2 things you can touch •1 thing you taste

2. 5-4-3-2-1 Sights

If noticing each sense is tough for your student right now, try an exercise just with sights. Create categories and have students name what they see. Here's an example:

•5 colors I see •4 shapes I see •3 soft things I see •2 people I see •1 book I see

3. A-B-C Around the Room

This exercise will get students connected with that place where they are right now. Have your student look around the room and name something they see that starts with A, then B, then C and so forth. See how far they can get through the alphabet and then check-in to see how they're feeling once they reach the end.

4. Be a Tree

There's nothing more grounded than a tree! Teach your student to feel his or her connection with the ground by imagining him/herself as a tree. This sounds like, "I am firmly planted. I feel my feet rooted to the ground. My back is a strong trunk helping me feel stable in the moment. I feel my toes connecting with the ground. My arms

are my branches. I feel them reach out into the world.” Simply noticing their bodies and feeling their connection with the room helps kids feel grounded!

5. Power Hug

Firm pressure is great for grounding. Help students create an affirming statement to use for this exercise. It could be something like, “I am in control,” or “I am safe in this moment.” Practice placing the left hand on the right shoulder for a tap and then the right hand on the left shoulder for another tap. Then squeeze into a hug and say the affirmation. Tap, tap, squeeze, affirm. Tap, tap, squeeze, affirm. Repeat this as many times as needed!

7. I am Here Hand Trace

For this exercise, you’ll need paper and a pencil, marker, or crayon. Students will trace a hand on the paper. You can take this a few different directions. Students can simply press the hand into the space on the paper and feel the connection between hand and table. Or they can use the space inside the hand to write things they see or describe the room.

8. Reorientation

To re-orient to the moment, just have students name facts about the moment. You can give them a card to keep with them to remind them of facts they can state and practice practice practice! It might sound like:

•My name is... •I am in... •Today is... •The season is... •The weather is... •I am wearing...

9. Stomp Stomp Blow

For an active grounding exercise, have students stomp the left foot, stomp the right foot and then exhale deeply. Continue this pattern of stomp, stomp, blow, stomp, stomp, blow, stomp, stomp, blow. Feel the connection of feet with the floor. Blow away anxious thoughts.

10. Room Search

Pick one broad category and search the room. Name everything in the room that’s green. How many stars can you find in the room? Say the type of shoe everyone in the room is wearing. Count the bricks on one wall.

9. Set a Timer

When it’s hard to let go of worries, set a 3- or 5-minute timer. During those 3 or 5 minutes, tell kids they’re allowed to think about the worry all they want! But when the timer goes off, it’s time to get up, change positions, move to a different room or environment, and think of something else.

10. Exercise Creativity

If you have a child who likes to draw or write, try a creative exercise. Have your child personify their worry by imagining what the worry might look like if it were a real person, creature or thing. Maybe it looks like a big dragon. Maybe it looks like a monster. Or maybe it looks like an annoying mosquito. Then, they can draw a picture or comic or write a story about themselves as a superhero who defeats the worry!

11. Use a Journal or Feelings Tracker

Give your kids a journal to write about feelings or use a feelings tracker daily. Sometimes worries are so big it feels like they define our whole day, but when we keep track of our feelings throughout the day with a visual tool, it’s easier to see that worries are a smaller part of a healthy balance of emotions.

Other Strategies

12. Acknowledge the Worries

It's completely okay to acknowledge our kids' worries rather than ignoring them. Acknowledging worries won't solidify them but it will help your child understand that worry is a protective feeling that alerts us to potential danger. We can help ourselves remember it's just potential danger though and use strategies to keep our worries in check.

Help Kids Understand Anxiety

1 – Smoke Alarm Analogy

Age: All ages

To explain what anxiety is, I use the smoke alarm analogy. Smoke alarms are helpful for alerting us to danger when there's a fire and we need to get out of the building. But sometimes smoke alarms go off even when there isn't a big danger, like when we burn popcorn or toast. It makes the same sound for big emergency fires or little non-emergency fires.

Anxiety does the same thing. Anxiety tells us there's a big danger, even if the situation is not that big. It feels like a big danger because anxiety sends the same signals. The good news is we can learn skills to tame that anxiety emergency alarm (no more burnt toast alarms!).

13. Avoid Participating in Worry Rituals

If your child is demonstrating any type of worry or checking ritual (i.e. washing hands excessively), avoid participating or encouraging these rituals. This sends the message to kids that the rituals are necessary when they see the adult, they're looking to for support doing it too. Remind kids of the everyday strategies and routines you already have in place to prevent or protect against illness, like washing before eating or wiping down shopping carts with disinfectant wipes.

14. Avoid Excessive Reassurance

It's natural to want to reassure our kids! We want them to feel safe and calm. Reassure when needed but avoid offering it too frequently as this can prevent kids from developing their own positive self-talk. Practice things they can say to themselves when they're feeling worried like, "I can control my breathing," or "My family is taking care of me."

15. Be Mindful of Your Own Worries

Again, it's completely reasonable for everyone to have some level of worry. But kids do pick up on our feelings and notice our anxieties, and they will take cues from us. If you're feeling anxious, practice your own mindful or calming activities, call a friend or loved one, practice self-care, or reach out for help. Please parents feel free to contact me through email: Elizabeth.Hernandez@bobhopeschool.org